PAINTINGS AND THE NUANCED GAZE: STUDIES IN THE APPLICATION, COMPLICATION, AND LIMITATIONS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC GAZE THEORY

by

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A DISSERTATION IN

FINE ARTS

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Texas Tech University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Chairperson of the Committee

Accepted

Interim Dean of the Graduate School

May, 2001
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for the help they provided at all stages of my investigation: Dr. Brian Steele and Dr. Phoebe Lloyd of the School of Art, Dr. Daniel O. Nathan of the Department of Philosophy, and Dr. Gwen Sorell of the Women's Studies Department, all at Texas Tech University; and Dr. Glen Brown of the Department of Art at Kansas State University. As my committee chair, Dr. Steele deserves particular thanks for the endless patience, challenging questions, and editorial suggestions that made his counsel invaluable throughout my investigation. Special thanks are also due to my sister, Sherry Christman, and my parents, William and Frances Jennings, whose constant support and encouragement made the writing of this dissertation possible.
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This study investigates how well Lacanian psychoanalytic Gaze theory integrates with traditional art historical approaches, and evaluates the interpretive potential of this combined method when applied to western figurative paintings. Gaze theory’s flexibility and adaptability are explored in three diverse situations and the meanings it uncovers are compared to those produced through iconography and iconology. Finally, the integration of Gaze theory, historical context, and iconography creates a “nuanced Gaze” capable of embracing the individuality of artist, audience, and subject, while encompassing the evidence offered by the painting as a unique object.

Chapter II focuses upon Titian’s Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio (ca. 1568-1571), which depicts a man and woman from a legendary Roman story; Chapter III considers John Singleton Copley’s double portrait Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (1773); and Chapter IV examines Mary Cassatt’s quasi-portrait of a solitary introspective woman, Study of a Woman with a Fan (Miss Mary Ellison) (ca. 1878), viewing the painting against a contextual screen built by first considering several Cassatt works in which Mary Ellison appears anonymously in a theater loge. Among the issues considered within these three chapters are the role of narrative, gendered subject-object relationships, public and private space, and both social and artistic desire.

Employing the nuanced Gaze as a method for interpretation exposes the painted image, not as a seamless representation, but rather as a crafted surface whose inconsistencies mark traces of desire. The nuanced Gaze also illuminates how an individual composition combines with historical context to reveal the gendered and social positioning and interaction of internal and external “viewers,” a cast of gazing characters that includes the painted subject(s), the artist, and the work’s original audience. For each of the artworks studied in this investigation, the meanings discovered through the application of a nuanced Gaze theory are richer and more complex than those produced by iconography or unmodified Gaze theory alone. This result indicates that the nuanced Gaze does form an effective tool for interpreting western figurative paintings.
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Since paintings are both visible objects crafted to be seen and visual objects whose construction is predicated upon the act of looking, the availability of a theory that explores the dynamics of visual experience should enrich more traditional historical, cultural, and formal investigative approaches. Lacanian-based Gaze theory might answer this need, for it seeks to frame an active process of looking and so appears particularly appropriate for the interpretation of Western figurative paintings. However, neither the method of Gaze\textsuperscript{1} theory nor its interpretive potential has been explored fully within the context of traditional art historical methods.

This dissertation examines the potential Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the Gaze holds as a method for the interpretation of paintings. Meanings produced through the application of Gaze theory will be evaluated by comparing them with, and integrating them into, interpretations produced through the application of a traditional visually and textually grounded iconographic method. It is hoped that Gaze theory will maintain consistency with the carefully wrought insights provided by these traditional approaches, even as it illuminates a range of possible meanings previously inaccessible. Assessment of Gaze theory’s interpretive effectiveness will include exploring its ability: (1) to mesh with the culturally grounded interpretations produced through the traditional art historical method of iconography as developed by Erwin Panofsky; (2) to incorporate a consideration of the paintedness of the painting as revealed through visual analysis of composition and paint handling; and (3) to illuminate questions of the viewing and viewed subject as revealed through cultural factors such as the gendered positioning of female and male, both as external viewer and as represented object.

In its discussion of theory and methodology, Chapter I will explicate the two primary methods of investigation: iconography/iconology as developed by Erwin Panofsky, and theories of the Gaze as developed by Jacques Lacan. In view of its status as a traditional art historical tool, “iconography” will be reviewed only briefly before beginning an exploration into the “Gaze.” Since the effectiveness of Lacanian Gaze
theory as a method for the interpretation of paintings forms the primary focus of this
dissertation, most of Chapter I concerns the theories of Lacan. The chapter begins with a
short overview of the divided Lacanian subject and continues with a more thorough
discussion of the scopic field and its Gaze. The groundwork in Chapter I is intended to
provide a background that facilitates the application of Gaze theory in succeeding
chapters. This study is concerned with the Gaze only in its application as a method for
the interpretation of European and American Western figurative paintings. Given the
limited range of this exploration, no attempt is made to critique of Lacan, contextualize
his ideas, or delve into the Lacanian reformulation of Freudian psychoanalytic theory.
Discrepancies between Lacan’s theories and both the premises of ego psychologists and
the findings of clinical researchers, in the areas such as visual perception, cognition,
language acquisition, and ego formation, also will not be addressed.

In Chapters II, III, and IV, an evaluation of Gaze theory’s effectiveness will be
developed through the interpretation of three “test case” paintings. The selected works
provide chronological and cultural variety while maintaining a basic cohesiveness in
painting type. All are beautifully crafted European and American easel paintings, contain
“realistic” figural subject matter, and date from the Renaissance through the late
nineteenth century. The works under consideration are:

1. Titian’s Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio, 1568-1571, in the collection
   of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge;
2. John Singleton Copley’s Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris), 1773,
   in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia;
3. Mary Cassatt’s Study of a Woman with a Fan (Miss Mary Ellison), ca. 1878,
   in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Basic changes in painting as a discipline influenced the decision to stop the
selection range at about 1900. Each of Chapters II, III, and IV forms an independent
investigation and evaluates Gaze theory’s effectiveness in the work under consideration.
Although three artworks do not exhaust the possibilities, they should allow for an initial
assessment of the effectiveness of Gaze theory when used to interpret figurative

x
paintings. Chapter V will conclude the investigation with an integration of individual findings and a discussion of the benefits and limitations of Gaze theory and of this dissertation's investigation as revealed through the case studies.

Consideration of cultural context, iconography, related artworks and texts, and the relevant critical and historical literature will form important elements within the research process for each case study. Attention to the chosen paintings themselves, the nature of the painted surface, and the author's interpretation of formal and compositional structures supplement this textual information. Meanings produced through these synthesized processes form a background for comparison and evaluation of readings produced through Gaze theory. The hope is that the explanations will harmonize, and the integrated process will generate a balanced interpretation that maintains external credibility and illuminate the use of Lacanian-based Gaze theory as a tool for critical art history.
Notes

1 The French term “regard” means both “look” and “gaze.” For clarity, this paper will capitalize the English word “Gaze” when referring to Lacan’s Gaze theory.

2 Each painting necessarily forms a vital part in this dissertation, and over the course of the investigation was studied closely. This intense visual analysis of “paintedness” was conducted in front of the actual work, and included such aspects as composition, formal qualities, surface quality and changes in brush strokes, and the painting’s impression upon viewers. Initial impressions were confirmed by repeated visits, and augmented with the overheard comments of and even conversations with other viewers. Repeated visits to Titian’s Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge England took place the first week of May, 1997. John Singleton Copley’s painting, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris), was viewed the second week of January, 1999, in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where it is on loan from the Pennsylvania Historical Society. Mary Cassatt’s Study of a Woman with a Fan (Miss Mary Ellison) was viewed the second week of July, 1999, as part of the “Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women” exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington.
CHAPTER I
THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation involves the application of two theories: “iconography” as developed by Erwin Panofsky, and the “Gaze” as found in the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. The position of the theories within the investigation determines the extent to which each is discussed, and an initial review of iconography will be followed by a more thorough study of Lacanian Gaze theory. Panofsky developed iconography specifically as a tool for excavating the meaning in visual art works. It is an established, historically accepted, and well-known method of interpretation. As such, the meanings produced through its application may serve, to some extent, as markers against which those of Gaze theory might be measured. In contrast, Lacan’s theory of the Gaze developed within a larger discussion of psychoanalysis. More complex and less well-known than iconography, the Lacanian Gaze was not intended as an independent tool for the interpretation of art works. Before an exploration of its interpretive potential might begin, the Gaze must first be explicated within Lacan’s theory of the subject.

Panofsky’s Iconographic Method

In the introductory chapter of his 1939 Studies in Iconology, Erwin Panofsky explained a process of iconographic interpretation that evolved in three levels and produced a meaning grounded within an artwork’s original cultural context. Panofsky combined pre-iconographic evidence read from a work’s form, an initial iconographic analysis based upon the work’s subject matter, and a deeper iconographic interpretation built by moving beyond the work to reconstruct an understanding of its function within the producing society. The essay reappeared almost twenty years later in Panofsky’s 1955 Meaning in the Visual Arts. In this slightly revised version, Panofsky clarified the split between two stages he had earlier described as “iconography in the narrower sense” and “iconography in the broader sense.” He now used the term “iconology” to distinguish the
broadest and deepest level of synthetic iconography. This clarified the stages of his method, separating them into a pre-iconographic inventory of motifs, an iconographic analysis of images, and a culturally grounded iconologic interpretation of the entire painting. However, Panofsky stressed that in the application of his iconographic/iconologic methodology in the interpretation of a work of art, it is impossible to separate the investigation completely into pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconologic stages.¹

Stage I: The Pre-Iconographic

Although we exist as sighted subjects in a world of moving shapes and colors, we do not see with innocent eyes, and Panofsky found the straight unmediated perception necessary for purely formal experience improbable for an enculturated subject. Instead, we organize our perceptions into “factual meaning.” This unconscious translation weaves the colorful realm of form into an eventful space full of separate but interrelating objects and people. Individual life experiences supplement this categorical information by providing the background for empathetic responses to the “expressional meaning” of a gesture, mood, or atmosphere. This too is an automatic process, and supplements the factual meaning by allowing the viewer access to the “psychological nuances” within an event or representation. When factual and expressional meanings are combined, people recognize an atmosphere as claustrophobic, a posture as aggressive, or an expression as fearful. The broader a person’s everyday life experience, the greater his or her ability to order, recognize, and categorize the data within the visual world.²

For Panofsky, viewers of representational paintings read brushstrokes and paint pigment as space and figure in ways similar to their perception of the real-world’s physical objects and events. Primary subject matter forms “artistic motifs” intentionally incorporated into the work by the artist during the process of creation. Identification of these motifs produces an inventory. Such an inventory might begin with a basic description like the following: a knife-wielding man moves aggressively toward a fearful
woman in the claustrophobic space of a bedroom. Although viewers might initially apprehend both factual meanings (knife, man, woman, bedroom) and expressional meanings (aggressively, fearful, claustrophobic) through an automatic act of identification, motifs are constructs and so likely to change in form and subject with culture and time period. An initial determination should be verified through comparison with contemporaneous motifs used in the place of production, and amendments of classification made as necessary. In addition, the identity of strange motifs might be approached through consultation with literary texts and experts. The accuracy of this initial identification is important, for together factual and expressional motifs form the foundation for iconographic investigation.

Stage II: Iconographic Analysis

Analysis begins when we find that a painting’s motifs hold significance within the larger context of culture. Motifs bearing more than factual and expressional meaning become images, and images combine in compositions to tell stories and form allegories that deal with themes and concepts. Excavating the information that allows motifs to be identified as images transforms an artwork’s composition into an intelligible narrative and allows the pre-iconographic inventory to be retroactively read as the primary subject matter. This process of collection and classification constitutes Panofsky’s “iconography in the narrower sense.”

For Panofsky, this initial analysis begins with the identification of the story or allegory used by the artist in the work under investigation, and extends to include both literary texts and other images. Since Panofsky believed that literary texts formed the main source for the concepts interpreted in visual art, identifying written sources available to the artist forms an important part of the analytic process. When a culture recycles similar motif combinations, it becomes possible to trace the evolution of the image “type.” Comparing the painting’s image to both the textual evidence and the history of types further verifies the identified subject matter.
Consideration of the intelligible secondary or conventional meaning produced by iconography moves the investigator beyond the sensible (sense-able) knowledge necessary for natural existence and into the realm of convention and cultural context. Iconography entails identifying related literary texts and similar image types that might have influenced the artist. Through this investigative process, the figurative motifs become an image containing named characters in an unfolding story. In the case of the above example of an aggressive knife-wielding man attacking a fearful woman, recognizing the subject as "Tarquin and Lucretia" rather than a generic murder scene allows access to the narrative of Lucretia as found in the writings of Ovid and Livy and to the European tradition of Lucretia images. Developing this initial analysis and categorization into an interpretation involves entering Panofsky's third stage, iconology.

Stage III: Iconographic Interpretation or Iconology

While the initial pre-iconographic investigation inventories motifs, an iconographic analysis reads the motif combination as an organized image representing the concepts and themes that form the work's subject matter. These processes deal with the qualities held by the work of art itself. Deeper iconography involves interpretation, and reaches beyond the work to consider the subject matter's meaning within the broader realm of the producing culture. In an attempt to clarify the difference between iconographic analysis and iconographic interpretation, Panofsky eventually called the second "iconology."

In Panofsky's hierarchy of meaning, iconology investigates an all-encompassing sphere of meaning that determines the possibilities of both the pre-iconographic and iconography. At this level, meaning becomes "content" that the artist consciously and unconsciously embedded in the artwork during creation. Panofsky attributes great importance to the meaning excavated through iconology, for it reveals the governing beliefs of a society. As a product of her environment and history, the artist unconsciously imparts through her artwork the cultural attitudes, assumptions, and principles provided by her background and circumstances. These cultural principles are filtered and distilled
by the artist's own perspective and personality. The meaning revealed through iconology explains both the image and the form that it took; it explains reality as perceived and understood by people in a particular cultural situation, and so creates a contextualized interpretation that illuminates both the painting and the creating society.

Iconological investigation is a creative process that begins when iconographic analysis is integrated with another method. Panofsky suggests three compatible methods: historical, psychological, or critical. Since a single work does not provide enough information to fully excavate unconscious cultural attitudes, broadening the scope of investigation strengthens the interpretation it produces. A synthetic approach that combines several methods allows a painting to be studied in relation to the literary trail, compared with the composition and function of similar image types, and interrelated with the cultural context in which it was produced. This deepens the interpreter's understanding of how a work might have functioned within its original context. Combined methods allow for the inclusion of ideas external to the painting and for the consideration within the interpretation of issues such as ethnicity, class, and sex as experienced within the producing society.

Panofsky's interpreter plays an active role in the re-constitution of meaning, for he or she must use "synthetic intuition" to diagnose how an image's theme or concept functions as a symptom of both underlying cultural principles and the "essential tendencies of the human mind." This active involvement allows the interpreter's own personality, history, and cultural background to influence the meaning being produced. This perspective bias should be diluted by comparing results obtained through iconology with conclusions drawn from "documents bearing witness to the political, poetical, religious, philosophical, and social tendencies of the personality, period or country under investigation." As many documents as possible should be consulted in order to strengthen the validity of the interpretation.

The literary sources identified in iconographic analysis become vital in building the interpretation, and they corroborate the cultural attitudes iconology reveals as the
painting's intrinsic content. Panofsky viewed these texts as objective witnesses and weighted the iconologic process in their favor. When disagreement arises between an initial interpretation and outside textual evidence, the interpretation should be changed until it "makes sense." Iconology uses the evidence of iconography to build a chain of observations link by link. The inclusion of a new link causes review of the whole followed by the performance of necessary structural amendments to create a seamless fit. Meanings should also be compared to those produced by the art historical tradition. Ideally, the iconologic process results in a fully rounded meaning deeply grounded in the principles held by the culture in which the painting was produced.

Summary of Panofsky

Panofsky's process of iconographic investigation begins with a pre-interpretive inventory of a painting's representational subject matter. Iconography takes the motifs, notes their combination into images, and identifies the story or allegory embodied by the composition. Interpretation begins with iconology, which investigates the link between a painting's subject matter and the texts and image types within the culture of production. Iconology integrates with psychological, historical, and critical methods to produce a synthetic process guided by the interpreter's intuition and checked by the factual data of historical context. Treating the painting and its image as a cultural symptom, iconology investigates the work's cause and function in an attempt to reveal the underlying cultural principles and attitudes unconsciously embodied in the artwork by the artist. These principles form the painting's intrinsic meaning or content.

Lacan's Theory of the Gaze

In the early 1950s, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan began devoting his yearly training seminars for clinical analysts to the theories and writings of Sigmund Freud. Built upon the implicit insights he found between the lines of what had become canonical texts, Lacan's interpretation of Freud sought "the truth" of the divided human subject, who
experiences a permanent split between his or her ego and unconscious. As the gap between Lacan's re-readings and traditional interpretations grew, so did the challenge he posed to the orthodox Freudians. When the French psychoanalytic establishment censured Lacan in 1964, he chose to move beyond the training of analysts and continued his seminars in a new environment. This change immediately presented him with a larger and more diverse audience drawn from scholars throughout the humanities. That year Lacan selected as his topic four basic concepts in Freudian psychoanalysis: the unconscious, transference, repetition, and the drive. Eventually Lacan chose this as the first of his twenty-six seminars to be translated into English, and it appeared as Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis in the early 1970s. Écrits: A Selection also appeared, offering an abridged collection of Lacan's writings. For the first time, the English-speaking world had ready access to Lacanian theory.

Interest in Lacanian theory among film critics and feminists was further sparked in 1975. That year Screen published "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey's now classic inaugural and exploratory use of Lacanian Gaze theory as a tool to interpret, explain, and critique visual representations. In subsequent years, people working with Lacanian-based Gaze theory followed Mulvey in quoting most heavily from two sections of Lacan's work: (1) the paper "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," which Lacan included in Écrits: A Selection; and (2) several lectures within "Of the Gaze as Objet Petit a," itself a section of The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. At the present time, film critics and theorists such as Kaja Silverman also bring in other aspects of Lacan's theory. As she delves into the complicated relationship between spectator, camera, point of view, and moving image in cinema, Silverman amends and expands past Lacanian-based methods. Although Silverman remains closer to the text of Lacan than Mulvey, she concentrates almost exclusively on the moving images of cinema.

Gaze theory has been a less fertile interpretive method in the field of art history. In the early work of art historians Griselda Pollock, Roszika Parker, and more recently Paolo
Berdini, a simplified theoretical structure developed which equates "the Gaze" with the objectifying look found in patriarchal images of the woman as given-to-be-seen. In another direction, Norman Bryson used a form of the Lacanian Gaze in conjunction with a semiotic interpretation to produce a theory that denigrates the power of the visible. More recently, Hal Foster discussed images in relation to a culture explicated through a discussion of Lacan's Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary orders. This is a promising direction. As part of a larger investigation, however, Foster's discussion of Gaze theory was brief and its potential remained untested. For art historical use of Lacanian Gaze theory to develop into a vital, respected, and visually sensitive method for the critical interpretation of specific paintings, a more nuanced investigation should occur. Among the issues needing investigation are the relationships between representation, viewer-artist, power, desire, looking, and cultural context. These concerns are at the heart of Lacanian Gaze theory. However, it first will be necessary to explicate how the Lacanian "orders" effect the split nature of the divided or split human "subject." With an understanding of desiring subjects as inherently both social and specular creations, we will turn finally to the Scopic Drive and its petit a, the Gaze.

Part I: The Three Orders: Real, Imaginary, Symbolic

Lacan delineates three interdependent but very different "orders": the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. These exist simultaneously and are defined in relation to each other. The Real is beyond or outside both the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and it encompasses all that cannot be imagined or known. In a sense, the Real is pure natural being without the differentiation provided by language and images. Lacan posited that a newborn enters the Real at birth but is soon captivated by the Imaginary, which provides a species-specific image-based identification. In addition, although the Imaginary forms an unfiltered "natural" order for animals, humans experience its images only through the transforming filter of the Symbolic. The human infant forms its image-based self-identification, or ego, through an Imaginary that has been structured by the culture and
language of the Symbolic order. Through acculturation, the Symbolic imposes limits, definitions, and prohibitions that cause repression and create the subject of the unconscious. Indeed, the existence of three rather than two orders separates the human from the animal realm, and results in the divisive gap between ego and unconscious that results in the "lack" of wholeness constituting the divided Lacanian subject. As the institution of and interaction between the Imaginary and Symbolic forms the human subject, a chasm opens between the image-oriented ego of self-identification and the subject of the unconscious. This permanent split establishes a void in the heart of the new subject, whose lack of wholeness creates a constant desire for unity and completion. The Real continues to exist beyond human "reality," despite attempts by the Symbolic to corral, partition, and supplant it through signification.

The Symbolic and the Other

Although grafted onto and into what had been the Real, the Symbolic neither evolves from nor depends upon the Real. Unlike the Real and Imaginary, the Symbolic is a new autonomous order, both entirely human and divorced from the natural (Real) world. The empty indeterminate signifiers of language, which gain meaning only through difference, make up the Symbolic. Its laws and linguistic structure determine, and are determined by, society and culture. It is the realm of prohibition, repetition, and lack; and its advent in the infant produces the subject of the unconscious. The Symbolic arrives all at once, retroactively replacing parts of the Real and structuring the Imaginary. At its advent, it engulfs the individual in a universe of signifiers and triadic relationships governed by the "Other."²⁴

Lacan's "grand Autre," the "Other" with a big "O" ("A"), is the structurally incomplete²⁵ and the irredeemably alien Other of and as Language, the unseen Other of the Symbolic. This multivalent Other assumes many forms, including that of demand, desire, and jouissance.²⁶ As Cultural Law, the Other catalyses subject formation through the prohibiting No/Name of the Father whose divisive intervention between mother and child
positions the subject in culture. As Language, the Other is the chain of signifiers constituting speech and structuring the subject. As part of the Symbolic, the Other existed before the subject, will outlast the subject, and cannot be controlled by the subject. Instead, the Lacanian subject itself is instituted of and by signifiers. Their effect in turn creates the unconscious, which both is built of repressed signifiers and is part of the Symbolic Other. In addition, the Other functions as a third aspect that mediates all intersubjective relationships. Since psychoanalysis deals with the unconscious, Lacan spends a great deal of time developing his theory of the Symbolic.

Threshold of Subjecthood: Need and Demand

Lacan hypothesized that the infant initially experiences life as an unmediated everywhere-ness with no separation between the world and the self. The infant takes as part of itself everything it sees, hears, and experiences. As its body undergoes the ebb and flow of natural pressures, the infant feels jouissance, a total sensory overload of painful pleasure. Completely dependent on its caregivers, the infant cannot fulfill the physical needs necessary for survival. It comes to signal experiences such as hunger, cold, and dampness through cries that obtain meaning retroactively when answered by the attending adult. As they are linked with meanings, these cries become demands. In order to demand effectively, the child begins to use language. It surrenders into the world of signifiers and is assimilated into a mother tongue. This permanently separates the unmediated existence of the living Real body from the new human subject, who exists hereafter only in language and culture. In addition, the child learns through difference and language that its body has limits, that everything is no longer of and for the self. It feels the presence of loss, lack, and fragmentation. As the cries are associated with responses, they become a dual demand: for the object of satisfaction, and for wholeness inherent in the constant attention and unconditional love of the caregiver. Since the caregiver is not eternally present and turns his or her attention onto other objects, the second aspect of
demand is never satisfied, and the child continually experiences separation and loss. This constant pressure for connection and completion is desire, and it is a self-perpetuating and unconscious force.\(^3\)

The Subject and Desire

When the child enters language, “desire becomes human.”\(^3\) The new subject forfeits Real objects forever, and henceforth experiences only fantasy and discourse. Although experienced several ways, desire forms a single pressure that originates in the subject as an effect of the Symbolic.\(^3\) A Lacanian subject desires the other’s desire and experiences desire for, by, and of the Other.\(^3\) Although the Other is initially represented for the child through his or her primary caregiver (an “other”), the Other remains an inherently extra-human concept. In desire for the Other, the subject’s initial thwarted desire for wholeness and unity with the Other begins the perpetual desire for what cannot be obtained. In desire by the Other, the subject also desires the self-affirming recognition and love produced by being the object of another subject’s desire. In desire of the Other, the subject desires what the Other desires, taking that alien desire as his or her own. This in turn implies an acceptance of the interchangeability of surrogate objects, since changing desirability itself determines an object’s importance.\(^3\)

The Imaginary

The Imaginary is the order of image, illusion, and spectacle. It is a visual and aural field structured through and given meaning by the Symbolic. The child enters the Imaginary in the “Mirror Stage” when it develops an ego based upon misidentification with an external image. Forever after, the ego retains an alienating external orientation towards the specular\(^3\) other, and remains susceptible to the lure of the Imaginary’s seductive and fascinating images. Binary relations, such as that between the ego and its image, prevail in the Imaginary order. In addition, its images can create interference between the subject and the Symbolic Other.
The Mirror Stage

In the Imaginary order a relationship of dependency forms which allows the ego to assume a structure, definition, and identity. Lacan uses the analogy of small sensory robots to explain the assumption of these qualities:

Let us suppose that this little [child] machine is constituted in such a way that it is incomplete, and will jam, will only be definitively structured as a mechanism once it perceives—by whatever means, a photoelectric cell, for instance, with relays—another [mother] machine identical to itself, with the sole difference being that it would have already perfected its unity through what we may call a prior experience. . . . The movement of each machine is thus conditioned by the perception of a certain stage attained by another.37

Although the Imaginary as “photoelectric cell” serves as a device for visual perception, the little machine “jams” until it distinguishes a similar yet complete other on whom to mold an ego-identity. Based upon the newly perceived perfection of the second machine, the first unites into a functional self-image. Since this is the natural Imaginary before the Symbolic, the machines remain caught (“captated”)38 in a perpetual, externally oriented duality. The image of the second machine (the caregiver) fascinates and captivates39 the dependent first machine (the child). In addition, as the first machine becomes functional, it lures the second machine into the same visual trap of fascination.40 Like polarized magnets, each affects and is suspended by the other.

During the Mirror Stage the physically uncoordinated child takes its first self-identification from a primary Other, in Lacanian theory the mother-as-caregiver and first “other.”41 This is an example of the rare occasion when a subject assumes the position of defining Other for another subject, for the child identifies itself with this other, whom it perceives as a unified and powerful embodiment of the completion that the child itself wants.42 As the ego develops, it continues to build a sense of self that is both alien and other. As Lacan explains,

the human ego is the other and . . . in the beginning the subject is closer to the form of the other than to the emergence of his own tendency. He is originally an inchoate collection of desires—there you have the true sense of the expression fragmented body—and the initial synthesis of the ego is essentially an alter ego, it is alienated. The desiring human subject is
constructed around a center which is the other insofar as he gives the subject his unity, and the first encounter with the object is with the object as object of the other’s desire.\textsuperscript{43}

In the formation of its self-identity, the ego mis-recognizes (méconnaissance) an external image for itself. Through the Imaginary identification of this mistaken conflation of self and semblance, the child assumes an external self-concept.\textsuperscript{44} The desiring subject takes the ego’s false self-image—an image that is both an “other” and an “object”—as its unity-providing alter ego. From this point on, self-conception remains permanently oriented towards external images, specularity, and the other.\textsuperscript{45}

Symbolic Ordering of the Imaginary

The Imaginary stasis Lacan described in his machine story is fleeting for the human “machine,” since even in the Mirror Stage the Symbolic accompanies the Imaginary and orders what is seen. By filtering and signifying the images as the Imaginary produces them, the Symbolic builds them into and connects them with a web of external meaning that forms a “screen” of cultural reality.\textsuperscript{46} Other people reinforce the child’s externally oriented identification, saying of a mirror reflection “Yes, that is you!” or identifying the child with one of its caregivers through exclamations such as “She’s just like her mother.” In this way, the cultural concepts of the Symbolic give meaning to the child’s experience of visual reality.\textsuperscript{47}

Through the presence of a third “other,” the Symbolic (re)configures the object of identification by separating the child from caregiver-as-Other and instituting the “Other” of language. Lacan calls this introduction to Western culture the “Nom-du-Père,” or “Law of the Father.”\textsuperscript{48} “Nom” and “non” are homonyms when spoken in French, and Lacan’s pun fuses the “Name-of-the-Father” and the “No” of the Father into the “Law-of-the-Father” or the “paternal metaphor.” In western culture, this “No” involves the prohibition against caregiver-child incest.\textsuperscript{49} A subject who represents cultural authority intervenes in the symbiotic caregiver-child relationship and says “no.” In traditional
western culture, the father assumes the position of Other, and separates mother-as-
primary-caregiver from the child. The mother complies with cultural law, distancing
herself while mediating between the child and the Symbolic Law and its representative. The child experiences this intercession of the “No” as prohibition and frustration caused by the barring of any (re)unity with the mother (other) as objet petit a. The child’s acceptance of this separation creates repression and gives birth to the unconscious and to the interminable desire that lies at the heart of the Lacanian subject.

Through the Imaginary and Symbolic orders, the ego ends up with two external specular “ideals.” The formation of the first is detailed above in the Mirror Stage and Lacan’s “little machine” story. This is the “ideal-ego” which coalesces from the collage of images mistaken by the ego for itself. It forms the primary specular image of the ego. This identification provides a comforting illusion of wholeness and control. In contrast, the “ego-ideal” is culturally based, and forms during the child’s acculturation as a subject within the symbolic order. This ego develops as the child is separated from the primary caregiver and positioned as a sexed being by the cultural order. The ego-ideal embodies predetermined views of sex-linked gendered perfection, and develops as the child is separated from the primary caregiver and positioned as an independent sexed being within a cultural order.

The point of the ego ideal is that from which the subject will see himself, as one says, as others see him—which will enable him to support himself in a dual situation that is satisfactory for him from the point of view of love. As a specular image, love is essentially deception. . . . It is . . . centered on the Ideal point, capital I, placed somewhere in the Other, from which the Other sees me, in the form I like to be seen.

As a set of societal standards, the ego-ideal is, like the ideal-ego, inherently other. The ego-ideal maps the subject into culture’s web, binding him or her to a range of definitions, assumptions, and prohibitions. Distinct from the unified self-image embodied in the ideal-ego, the ego-ideal provides a perspective from which the ego views itself through cultural eyes. When the two ideals agree, the ego-ideal affirms the ideal-ego’s perception of itself. When they disagree, problems and internal conflicts arise.
its ideals when structuring interpersonal relations and identifications. Functioning within the Imaginary, the egos allow the subject to identify with similar egos, and to project his or her own ego onto an other subject. This identification allows the subject to perceive the existence of the other as an individual subject rather than as an object.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{Objet petit a}

For the infant-child, the object received in response to a demand becomes important as a sign for the caregiver’s unconditional recognition and love.\textsuperscript{57} The perception of such love reflects a yearning for an impossible state of wholeness and unity with the caregiver-Other which the subject fantasizes existed in the pre-Symbolic Real. The split between the insatiable demand for love and the satisfaction of need gives birth to a relentless desire whose Real object cannot be imaged or symbolized.

Lacan terms the loss of wholeness which produces desire the \textit{objet petit a}, a very different concept from the big Other of the Symbolic. The \textit{petit a} appears as the child separates from objects it previously experienced as part of itself. These objects—caregiver-as-Other, breast, voice, look—are of the child, yet sometimes absent, cut off, distanced, gone. These part-objects represent the \textit{objet petit a}, the perpetually lost object whose mythic recovery would unite the divided subject and provide completion.\textsuperscript{58} This "\textit{autre}" ("other") with a small "\textit{a}" ("o")\textsuperscript{59} remains simultaneously a part of and separate from the subject.

Like its Symbolic relative, the "\textit{a}" is multivalent and assumes several interwoven roles in Lacanian theory. Although an Imaginary object, \textit{a} is located where the three orders meet and it encompasses bits of the Real that resist or escape signification. It also involves the Symbolic, since "\textit{a}" represents the Other’s desire as cause for the subject’s desire. In conjunction with desire and the drives, the subject’s libido takes the imaginary part-objects of \textit{a} as the equivalents of a Real “life instinct” forfeited by entrance into the Symbolic.\textsuperscript{60} As the subject’s ego identity, \textit{a} represents the Imaginary other who both is and is not the subject. It forms the ego’s visual image as reflected or projected as an ideal-
ego in the Imaginary. It should be remembered that the Imaginary is a field of illusion and falsehood, and petit a offers the subject semblance rather than being.  

Subject and Ego

In a specular twist on Descartes’ Cogito ergo sum, the ego’s dependence upon images bolsters a belief in its own unified self-sufficient existence. Lacan describes the false object of the ego’s self image as follows:

the image of the objet a, in so far as it is thus that the subject sees himself duplicated—sees himself as constituted by the reflected, momentary precarious image of mastery, imagines himself to be a man merely by virtue of the fact that he imagines himself.

Through its comforting ‘I see me therefore I am,’ the Ego projects a façade of false being that resists the ‘I’ of its Symbolic twin, the unconscious, and “isolates” it from the Other. The subject of the unconscious, rather than the ego, “is ‘at home’ in this field of the unconscious” and is formed of language’s signifying chains and the effects of repression. It houses desire and repetition, and is both alien and external to the ego. Unlike the ego, the subject of the unconscious cannot be turned into an object. With the speaking subject’s “I,” Lacan turns the Cogito inside out: “I think of what I am where I do not think to think.”

The Drives

Desire is manifested to some extent through the drives. Lacan identifies four partial drives: the oral, anal, invocatory, and scopic. The first two drives concern demand and the last two the unconscious’ ceaseless sexual desire. Constructed as the subject experiences and internalizes the repressive prohibitions and definitions of the Symbolic, the drives resemble surreal four-part montages and form a constant pressure in the unconscious of the desiring subject. Each drive has four components: the erogenous zone from which it springs and to which it returns, the constant force that powers it, the itinerary taken, and the Real partial-object which the drive circles. The traditions and
beliefs of a subject’s culture play a strong part in determining both a drive’s object and its path. Since each loop of the drive outward and back pivots around something unobtainable—an objet a, cause of desire—satisfaction comes not from object acquisition but from repetition of the circuit and the perpetuation of desire. Through this repetitive cycle, the drives partly fill the subject’s constant unconscious desire.

A drive’s structure in an “outwards-and-back movement” involves three stages, which Lacan articulates grammatically. As his primary example Lacan uses the visual or scopic drive, which finds pleasure in seeing and takes its root “in the fact that the subject sees himself” in an illusion of wholeness. The scopic drive begins as it leaves the eyes, which form its erogenous source. The active voice, “to see,” describes this initial stage of the drive as it is directed away from the subject. An outward-and-backward loop follows, represented grammatically by the reflexive “to see oneself.” In this middle stage, the drive circumscribes its part-object, the Gaze. The outwardly directed “to see” and the returning path of “oneself” culminate in the third stage, the actively passive “to make oneself be seen.” The boomeranging loop of the scopic drive places a gap between the initial ‘to see’ and the terminal ‘making oneself be seen.’ At this point the subject “attains what is, strictly speaking, the dimension of the capital Other.” He or she is “called to subjectivity” and “made present” in the terminal moment, as the drive’s subject makes him- or herself to be seen as a subject. This affirming character of the scopic drive answers, at least in part, the perpetual desire for complete being that haunts the subject.

Part II: The “Gaze” in Lacanian Theory

In a series of seminars given the spring of 1964 and grouped together under the title “Of the Gaze as Objet Petit a,” Lacan discussed the subject’s place within the scopic field. This territory concerns not just looking, but being seen. Three accompanying triangular diagrams describe the positions assumed by and assigned to the subject within the specular world. Lacan positions the triangles horizontally, with the tip facing the
base across a vertical line that bisects the body. In the first schema, the subject views an
image of an object (Figure 1.1). The second diagram inverts this orientation to turn the
subject into a picture (Figure 1.2). Superimposing these two schemas produces a third
diagram which illustrates how the scopic field works (Figure 1.3). The following sections
will take up each diagram in turn, and discuss it in relation to the subject as both seeing
and seen.

Diagram I: the Geometric Subject Surveys
its World

The first schema shows the experience of the sovereign geometric subject as
epitomized in the Renaissance perspective systems of Alberti and Dürer. At the apex of
the triangle, the “geometrical point” serves as the eye’s pupil and points out across the
interior space towards its goal, the object of perception. Between stands the image,
which Lacan indicates with a line as opaque and defining as the edges of the triangle itself.
The placement of eye, image, and object illustrates the “cone of vision” as schematized in
linear perspective.

A comparison with Albrecht Dürer’s Draftsman Drawing a Lute (Figure 1.4)
makes clear Lacan’s reference to Renaissance perspective. Optical devices like the one
shown in this woodcut use windows, strings, and other measuring devices to ensure that
the semblance they create accurately reflects the appearance of the world as seen from a
fixed point of view. Dürer presents a side view of the apparatus that clearly shows its
triangular structure. A screw “eye” securely fastened to a wall on our right forms the
geometric point. The object is stationed at a distance opposite it. A window frame stands
between and duplicates the position of Lacan’s “image.” Opening the window allows the
sight line to extend unhindered from eye to object; shutting the window creates an opaque
barrier between them and truncates the view. As the machine is used, the shut image-
plane comes to bear a semblance of the object as viewed from the screw “eye’s” geometric
point.
A thread stretches from “eye” through the window to “object” and marks for the image the interrelationships of things as they exist in space. Dürer’s artists use this literal “line of sight” to plot their drawing. Compare this activity with Lacan’s explanation of images:

That which is the mode of the image in the field of vision is therefore reducible to the simple schema that enables us to establish anamorphosis, that is to say, to the relation of an image, in so far as it is linked to a surface, with a certain point that we shall call the ‘geometral’ point. Anything that is determined by this method, in which the straight line plays its role of being the path of light, can be called an image.87

Since Lacan’s first diagram (Figure 1.1) corresponds to the structure of the Renaissance perspective machine (Figure 1.4), both produce images that order vision through an essential “point-by-point correspondence of two unities in space.”88

And space, Lacan argues, is what this first diagram actually involves.89 It shows only one piece of what occurs in the scopic field. The machinations of diagram one and of the Renaissance perspective machine allow

that which concerns vision to escape totally. For the geometrical space of vision . . . —even if we include those imaginary parts in the virtual space of the mirror . . . —is perfectly reconstructible, imaginable, by a blind man.90

We experience our world part by part over time as we move through space. In contrast, an image presents that world all at once in an illusion of totality. Viewing it, the “I” of the geometrical point may stand apart and presume mastery over what he or she sees. At the same time, looking conflates distance and presence by invoking the “belong to me” aspect of visual perception.91 This semblance of possession allows the subject who assumes the perspective of the geometric eye to take, and even internalize, the spectacle seen as his or her own. Although Lacan does not explicitly say so, this first diagram corresponds to the action of the ego as it imagines itself and its world in an idealized fantasy of a united and complete self.92
Diagram II: Written in the Light of the Gaze

The drawing of Lacan’s second diagram (Figure 1.2) repeats, in inverted form, the triangle of the viewing subject (Figure 1.1). After our study of the first, a casual glance at this new schema suggests a similarity to the mechanics of one-point linear perspective, where ‘converging’ parallel lines recede from the viewer to meet and vanish at an infinite point on his or her horizon. However, this time Lacan diagrams a radical inversion of the visual field. In place of our geometrical subject stands a “picture,” and a “screen” now bisects the cone of vision. Space no longer rushes away toward a vanishing point as ordered from a masterful human perspective. Instead, at a “point of light” distant from the “picture,” light pours into the scopic field.

Experience of the visible as a finite relationship between two positions in space now becomes an immersion in illumination. Inescapable and inhuman, light fills space, pours through and over it, and erases difference and distance. The screen bisects this blinding abundance, filtering it and directing it to form a picture.

If, by being isolated, an effect of lighting dominates us, if, for example, a beam of light directing our gaze [look] so captivates us that it appears as a milky cone and prevents us from seeing what it illuminates, the mere fact of introducing into this field a small screen, which cuts into that which is illuminated without being seen, makes the milky light retreat, as it were, into the shadow, and allows the object it concealed to emerge.

Lacan illustrates this effect of light in the Real with a cross section of its diagramed intersection with the subject’s cone of vision (Figure 1.5). The cone of light eclipses the subject in a blinding, paralyzing immersion in light. The insertion of a “screen” halts this deer-caught-in-the-headlights effect. The divisive network formed by the interaction of the Symbolic and Imaginary functions as this opaque screen and separates the subject from immediate experience of light-energy in the Real. This allows the subject to perceive, but he or she can see only those “pictures” produced by way of the screen itself.

With the intervention of an intertwined Symbolic and Imaginary via the screen, Real light becomes the Gaze. Lacan’s second diagram shows light in its action as Gaze, manifesting the “gratuitous showing” that is the “unapprehensible” and unavoidable
result of being in a visible world. The collusion between Gaze and screen resembles a battery of projectors that simultaneously cast changing images onto the screen, covering it with culture’s images and definitions. The fabric and weave of the screen, as well as the degree of projection overlap and distinction, affect the representations and meanings a subject achieves and perceives. Working with the screen, the Gaze makes a “picture” of the first schema’s geometric subject and so reveals and positions him or her as a culturally defined object in spectacle. As the Gaze pictures with light, its “photo-graphic” action freezes the subject into a predetermined position as a static object upon the cultural screen.

Diagram III: The Subject of and in the Scopic Field

By adding the phrase “Reality is marginal” to the above “Light/Gaze and Screen” diagram (Figure 1.5), Lacan shifts to another level. The scopic field is that of a drive, and a looking subject desires. So enthralling is the subject’s wish for completion, reality is marginalized in relation to desire. The Imaginary partial object around which the scopic drive pivots, its petit a, is the Gaze. As Lacanian theory has developed, the Gaze functions on two levels. Escaping the grasp of image and meaning, an imperceptible, unobtainable Gaze exists apart from human vision and “photo-graphs” the subject by writing him or her in light. Further, as something beyond human grasp and not completely subsumed by the Symbolic, the Lacanian Gaze also escapes human “reality.” Within the context of the cultural screen, however, the Gaze also functions like a camera, using the filters of culturally defined reality to define and position—to photo-graph—the culture’s subjects.

In his infamous parable of the Gazing sardine can, Lacan reinforces both the inhuman quality of the Gaze and the power of the cultural screen. Even more importantly, the story demonstrates how their fusion into a cultural Gaze affirms subjects or renders them invisible. The tale opens with a youthful Lacan playing man of the people and hauling nets on a small boat off the Brittany coast. One of his companions, a true
fisherman named Petit-Jean, sees a floating sardine can reflecting sunlight and tells Lacan "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you." Less amused than his companions, Lacan proceeds to analyze the meaning of the remarks and his own response. Lacan determines that although the can constantly looked at him "at the level of the point of light," it did not see him because

I. at that moment—as I appeared to those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature—looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather out of place.\(^\text{103}\)

The tale harks back to the earlier story of the photo-cell machines, caught in a dual relationship until the entrance of a third provides each with external validation as independent subject. By passing the look among the three of them—a fisherman, himself as a young man, and the flash of sunlight on a sardine can—Lacan breaks up the duality of imaginary capture and introduces the inhuman quality of the Other which mediates subject relationships. In addition, Petit-Jean's reference to the defining scopic power of the can in relation to young Lacan reflects the force of culture and language. The triangular structure of "being seen as" involves both identification and subjectivity, and it takes place within a pre-established system, where inter-subject relationships are mediated by the cultural Other. Unlike the photo-cell story, here the third entity, the Other, has rejected Lacan's self-defined subjectivity. The object as a sardine can did not picture young Lacan within its screened Gaze because he was alien to the life of Brittany fisherman. The Gaze unmasked Lacan's camouflage and opened to view the emptiness of his presence.\(^\text{104}\) To remain a part of the fishing crew, Lacan would need, somehow, "to make himself to be seen" as one of them, within their reality.

Subjection to the Imaginary and Symbolic provides the subject with the images and representations through which he or she experiences a cultural reality.\(^\text{105}\) Lacan's sardine can story shows how the fusion of Gaze and screen into a cultural Gaze can affirm a subject's presence. It also renders invisible those not adhering to the reality produced by
the screen. The Gaze can, at the least, disrupt the subject’s own externally defined sense of self.

At Play in the Scopic Field

If diagram one (Figure 1.1) illustrated the looking subject, and diagram two (Figure 1.2) showed us how the subject is written on the cultural screen by the light of the Gaze, diagram three (Figure 1.3) combines them to represent their simultaneous interlacing operation as experienced by subjects in the scopic field.¹⁰⁶ “I see from only one point.” Lacan wrote, “but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.”¹⁰⁷ We are surrounded by the Gaze, spot-lit and objectified in a world that is its spectacle.¹⁰⁸ This is the “given-to-be-seen” quality of the world; an ever present Gaze that, like language, predates, out lasts, and exists independently from the subject.

Visibility conjoins entry into the Symbolic, and functions as a marker for the division it instills. Through the Gaze, “we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us conscious beings institutes us by the same token as speculum mundi.”¹⁰⁹ Through others, the child becomes a “subject in the visible” and permanently conflates “being-seen-as” with its own “existence as” a subject.¹¹⁰ From its earliest days, the ego’s identification with external images is confirmed, molded, and even resisted by others acting as agents for the screened Gaze of culture.

In the relation of the imaginary and the real, and in the constitution of the world such as results from it, everything depends on the position of the subject. And the position of the subject . . . is essentially characterized by its place in the symbolic world, in other words in the world of speech. Whether he has the right to, or is prohibited from, calling himself Pedro hangs on this place. Depending on what is the case, he is within the field of the cone or he isn’t.¹¹¹

As the Symbolic determines what each individual may see and be as a subject, it imposes fictions based upon sex, ethnicity, race, and class. The screen cutting through the cone of vision at the intersection of Gaze and sight is opaque, and subjects cannot see through it to
the Real. Instead, the mediated pictures of the Imaginary structure reality as experienced within cultures and subcultures.

In Lacan's diagrams, the "eye" with its "look," and the "point of light" with its "Gaze," hold opposing positions. Only the object Gazes, and from a place the subject cannot see, for the screen of culture interposes between subject and immersion in the Real. This does not mean the looking subject cannot simultaneously know and seek the Gaze. Although the operations of look and Gaze can contradict and obscure each other, they share their playground, the screen of cultural vision. Acknowledging the delimiting positions provided by screen and Gaze frees the subject, at least a little, and allows him or her to play with the provided masks and stereotypes.

This restrictive collaboration of Gaze and screen often passes unquestioned and even unrecognized as the ego attempts to accommodate the provided image-ideals. In the process, acceptance of external definitions forms a type of camouflage to the presence of the Gaze. Positioned on the Symbolic terrain, the subject assumes—both intentionally and unintentionally—protective "masks" that provide a culturally approved illusion of wholeness. Playing with the screen's images allows the subject to masquerade, and travesty, camouflage, and intimidation, become tools in the pursuit of objet a.

Only the subject—the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man—is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation. Assumptions of "masks" such as "masculine" and "feminine" provide the individual with the opportunity not only to be visible on, but also to interact with and even modify his or her position upon the Symbolic cultural screen.

Mimicry is not an adaptation, for the subject does not change. Instead, he or she acquires a defensive shield that maintains, obscures, or even reinforces the division between the semblance of completion and the desiring being behind the façade. When
the ego takes a semblance as its self and assumes the form of a picture on the cultural screen, it actually avoids the Gaze, deflects it through mimicry and camouflage. Lacan likens the ego to a "scotoma" in the visual field, a dark spot against the luminosity of the Gaze. "In the so-called waking state" of consciousness, Lacan explains, "there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, it also shows."\(^{120}\)

For the lacking human subject, visuality involves both the precluded search for the mythic object behind appearance, and the chance to achieve a semblance of unity. The division between being and semblance, between subject and ego, manifests itself in the visual field through the break between the Gaze and the eye.\(^{121}\) Woven into a field that involves vision, yet hidden from view by the screening veil of subjectivity itself, the Gaze is, among all the objects circled by the drives, "unapprehensible." This imperceptibility contributes to the facility with which the subject escapes its thrall and achieves the fictitious unity of "seeing oneself see oneself" enjoyed by consciousness.\(^{122}\) And this illusion of wholeness provides the satisfaction offered by the scopic drive.\(^{123}\)

**The Cultural Gaze and Art Historical Applications**

Lacan's three diagrams describe the interlacing structure of the scopic field and the subject's simultaneous existence as seeing subject and object in spectacle. This manifestation of the Gaze forms when the light of Real living existence is vivisected by the imaging of the Imaginary and the structuring of the Symbolic. In conjunction with the Imaginary and Symbolic, the presence of the Gaze is an omnipresent glare that validates or invalidates self-definitions by positioning individuals as static objects and spectacles on the cultural screen. Lacan refers to this as the Gaze we "imagine,"\(^{124}\) an Imaginary cultural Gaze that resembles "the presence of others as such." In a way, this is the Gaze as the Other, a cultural Gaze molded by language and custom and holding the power to determine or deny an objectified subject his or her own place on the cultural screen.

The polarity between the "active" subject whose look powers diagram one, and the "passive" subject who is frozen into a picture by the Gaze in diagram two, has been
appropriated as a method for critiquing objectifying images of women in Western Culture. This interpretive tradition began with Laura Mulvey’s “Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure” article in the 1970s and can be seen today most clearly in the work of art historian Griselda Pollock. In this view, “man” as masculine is synonymous with the active position of looking and defining subject, and “woman” as feminine with the passive position of a seen and externally defined object. However, it should be clear by now that Lacan separates the inhuman Gaze and the human look. Any conflation of Gaze and eye is an illusion whose power rests on culture’s own confirming Cultural Gaze.

Further, Lacan uses diagrams one and two to explicate diagram three, the terrain of the scopic drive, a field where all desiring subjects are always simultaneously both seen and seeing, object and subject. In addition, human subjects are not permanently locked into pre-“photo-graphed” positions. Although the cultural screen functions with the Gaze to define us and structure our possibilities, it also provides a mechanism whereby we can escape the Gaze, deflect it, and “play” with the “masks” of cultural identity. And finally, although a simplified cultural Gaze is the “Lacanian Gaze” that appears most often under the cloak of “Lacanian Gaze Theory,” it is not the manifestation of the Gaze—in its function as the lost object of unity sought in the scopic drive—that Lacan found most interesting, nor the one he explicated through the function of painting.

Part III: Lacan on the Relationship between Painting and the Gaze

Intersubjective relations involving the Gaze as petit a take place on a battleground of subterfuge and illusion, where the essential element is not appearance, but absence. What is missing is the causal object of desire, the objet a, a phantom organ whose amputation plagues the split subject with dreams of wholeness. Since the Gaze is objet a in the scopic field, it deals directly with the ‘lack’ of wholeness created upon the subject’s introduction into the Symbolic. The Gaze as objet a also provokes a corresponding covetous méconnaissance, a fear that others possess the completion lost by the subject.
Since castration as lack of objet a causes human desire, the subject falls prey not only to the natural Imaginary function of visual lure, but also to “virulent, aggressive” envy produced via the Symbolic. Functioning to fascinate or captate the subject, envy manifests itself as an insatiable, greedy craving; a hunger for the objet a that fixes upon any indication that an other might experience satisfaction and completion through possession of the petit a. Armed with envy, the eye not only separates, it mortifies, poisons, and freezes the envious subject. This internal destructive hunger is pacified by . . . painting.

Painting, the Eye, and the Gaze

Lacan’s discussion of the Gaze and its role as petit a of desire in the field of visuality necessitated a discussion of western figurative painting. Painting always involves the Gaze of others—with icons, the Gaze of Gods; with civic art, the Gaze of public authorities; with easel painting, the Gaze of artist and patron—but it is not the Gaze as Other’s Gaze that serves paintings’ function in desire. Nor is it painting as commodity, where it functions as an economic objet a. Delineation of these Gazes supports rather than exhausts Lacan’s search for the radical function of painting. He circles back to the interlacing shown in diagram three (Figure 1.3), to the intersection of the cones of vision and Gaze (Figure 1.5), to the insertion of a cultural screen, and to the phrase: “In its relation to desire, reality appears only as marginal.”

Painting parallels the subject’s own division as manifested within the scopic field, for it involves looking, desire, and the Gaze. There is the eye, the action of the sighted subject as it peruses the world from the twin illusions of mastery and distance provided by its own particular point of view. The eye in its preoccupation with looking is fooled into believing what it sees. This Imaginary delusion encompasses the ego’s own readiness to know itself through and accept as itself a specular semblance. Beyond the shield of this mis-knowing consciousness, the subject of the unconscious resides within, and is subject to, the language-ordered world of the Other. Here there are no appearances and no

27
representations, just the ego's unobjectifiable "other," the unconscious subject who manifests its existence through dreams and slips of the tongue. This is the subject whose lack of being produces the continual desire, the "want-to-be," that fuels the drives.

The Gaze is the loss of wholeness maintained in the scopic field, the objet petit a sought by the hungry eye. It is that wholeness cut from being with the creation of a subject and reappearing as absence within the void circled by the scopic drive. Although the eye continually seeks the Gaze, repossessing it puts a cork in the hole of incompletion, arrests desire, and so freezes the subject—defined as human by that very desire—in stasis. This is what occurs with the envious eye, when the drive jams as the subject fixes on another's presumed possession of the petit a.

The Function of Painting: Trompe-l'oeil and Dompte-regard

Lacan uses the legendary painting duel between Zeuxis and Parrhasios to highlight the nature of painting. In Lacan's interpretation, birds were attracted to Zeuxis' painting because he reduced appearance to a lure. On this animal level of the Imaginary as untainted by the Symbolic, the pigment grapes provoked an avian biological need and so attracted hungry birds. When Zeuxis then asked for the removal of the curtain veiling Parrhasios' painting, the curtain that was the painting, he revealed the function of painting in a world where the Symbolic structures the Imaginary, and all subjects desire. Zeuxis' request shows "that if one wishes to deceive a man, what one presents to him is the painting of a veil, that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it." The paintings that Lacan discusses function like mimicry. They present semblances that pretend to be the objects themselves.

The picture does not compete with appearance, it competes with what Plato designates for us beyond appearance as being the Idea. It is because
the picture is the appearance that says it is that which gives the appearance that Plato attacks painting, as if it were an activity competing with his own. This other thing is the petit a, around which there revolves a combat of which trompe-l'oeil is the soul.\textsuperscript{138}

By pretending to be the Gaze, paintings provide satisfaction for the scopic drive. It should not be overlooked that Lacan deliberately used the word “picture” as a synonym for a painting, and again in reference to the subject’s placement within the visual field.\textsuperscript{139} Painting satisfies the split subject, for it masquerades as a petit a\textsuperscript{140} and so lulls the avid eyes of the scopic drive.\textsuperscript{141}

The looking eye possesses a voracious appetite, and painting feeds it with a gratuitous showing that resembles the given-to-be-seen quality of the world human subjects inhabit.\textsuperscript{142} “The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of his painting which . . . might be summed up thus—You want to see? Well, take a look at this!”\textsuperscript{143} This gift of food for the eye induces “the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze”\textsuperscript{144} as objet petit a and cause of desire. Painting’s visual smorgasbord sates the viewer’s hungry eye so completely, it disarms visual hunger and suggests a connection and wholeness with the specular world that evinces a Gaze.

Although painting manifests a Gaze as objet a of the scopic drive’s desire, it is not the deadly look of envy, nor the cultural Gaze of the Big Other. It is a “certain kind of Gaze,” a deeper response to the scopic nature of painting, that is separate from the conscious workings of the artist’s eye.

Certainly, in the picture, something of the gaze is always manifested. The painter knows this very well—his morality, his search, his quest, his practice is that he should sustain and vary the selection of a certain kind of gaze. Looking at pictures . . . you will see in the end, as in filigree, something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze.\textsuperscript{145}

This is not the cultural Gaze, which might be assumed by the artist or attributed to the characters depicted in a composition. Instead, this is the true Lacanian Gaze, the Real Gaze. As the object whose loss sundered the individual’s visual unity with the world, this Gaze is the objet a sought by the desiring scopic drive. This causal petite a is formed by
the process of creation, made manifest in the “filigree” of the unconsciously applied brush strokes with which the painter brings a composition into being. Painting is a creation of pure desire and embodies the painter’s dialog with an a that materializes “in the miracle of the picture, [as brushstrokes] fall like rain from the painter’s brush.” This rain—which is of the Real rather than of the Symbolic or Imaginary—is “a sovereign act” made manifest through a filigree of paint capable of neutralizing the desire of those who come to lease its a. This materializes what Lacan calls the dompte-regard, the Gazo- taming function of painting.

The desire embodied in a painting remains the other’s desire. The subject does not, cannot, take it upon him or herself because the painting short-circuits the drive. “Modifying the formula I have of desire as unconscious—man’s desire is the desire of the Other—I would say that it is a question [in painting] of a sort of desire on the part of the Other, at the end of which is the showing (le donner-à-voir),” a giving to be seen. By delighting the eye and disarming the Gaze, painting momentarily releases the subject from the scopic drive’s pressure.

**Summary of Lacan**

Using Lacan’s theories, we may say that we are visual beings separated from the Real visual world through Symbolically structured Imaginary representations, a visual experience further delimited by our individual positions within culture. Our view is filtered, incomplete. Something escapes our view, slips from the signifying network, and remains beyond our grasp and behind the veiling screen. In the scopic field, this enigmatic unknowable trace of the Real is the Gaze.

Human subjects inhabit and are part of an independent visual world, a “given to be seen” world which shows itself to us even as we look from our position within the Symbolic. We see “objects” separate from us in our existence as subjects and distanced from us by sight itself. At the same time, the “belong-to-me” quality of our perceptions erases this distinction and abets the ego in its identification with external images. The
scopic drive provides human subjects with comfort by eliding the Gaze to produce the delusion of "seeing oneself see oneself." The individual accomplishes this assurance despite the displacement created by its own division between ego and unconscious subject, a separation mirrored by the division between eye and Gaze, and a split that insures the subject never sees itself from the place where it is.\textsuperscript{151}

Painting offers relief on several levels. As a feast given to the hungry eye, it lulls the seeking subject's ravenous scopic appetite with visual contemplation. The painter as creator also sets up a dialogue with lack, with absence. Through the non-conscious workings of the brush, he or she embodies the tracks of desire onto the canvas and creates the semblance of an \textit{objet petit a} laid bare and unprotected. This allows painting to disarm the viewing subject's deadly envious scopic desire, and furnishes the "the taming, civilizing and fascinating power of the function of the picture."\textsuperscript{152}

Conclusion to Chapter I

For Erwin Panofsky, groups of people exist in a "world of vision" constructed by their shared cultural context. The objects people see and the meanings they find are predetermined by this delimiting environment. Paintings are produced and viewed within these conditions. Panofsky's "world of vision" resembles the pre-given governance of language and image that structures the Lacanian subject upon its entrance into the Symbolic. And like Jacques Lacan, Panofsky stressed the importance of the verbal in constructing factual and expressional meanings, and he privileged culture as the determining and structuring force that creates "reality." In addition, when historians and critics seek to excavate meanings embedded in the lost network of a specific historical time and place, Panofsky himself suggests psychological methodology as a tool compatible with iconographic investigations.

In the theories of both Panofsky and Lacan, the meaning held by an artwork reaches beyond appearance and into the heart of human existence. Panofsky indicates that the artist unconsciously encodes into his or her artwork the beliefs, assumptions, and
principles structuring his or her social environment. In its excavation of "the essential tendencies of the human mind," iconology implies a concern not only with the conscious mind of the artist, but also with the structuring power of society as it affects and is manifested by the individual. Lacan also discusses the significance of painting as existing on a level divorced from mere appearance, and he pushes painting’s function even further than Panofsky. For Lacan, painting’s content lies not in the Symbolic world of culture whose myths structure and position subjects. Instead, painting’s function exists beyond the screen, in the void at the center of the individual as produced by that cultural world.

Lacanian subjecthood involves not just seeing but being seen, an experience that revolves around the Gaze as objet petit a of the scopic drive. This has two forms: imagining the cultural Gaze of the Other, which manifests the defining power of the Symbolic within the field of vision; and experiencing the Gaze as the causal object of its desire, the split between ego and subject of the unconscious as experienced at the level of visibility. The following case study chapters will investigate whether the apparent similarities between iconographic methods and Lacanian-based psychoanalytic Gaze theory hold throughout their application as tools for the interpretation of paintings; and, further, what the twinned Gaze offers to the interpretive mix.
Figure 1.1: Lacan’s first diagram, showing the looking subject’s cone of vision.


Figure 1.2: Lacan’s second diagram, showing the subject of the Gaze.

Figure 1.3: Lacan’s third diagram, showing the functioning of the scopic field.

Figure 1.4 Abrecht Dürer, “Draftsman Drawing a Lute.” Woodcut dated 1525, with monogram. 131 x 183 mm.

Figure 1.5: Lacan’s diagram of the screen and the cone of the Gaze.

Notes


3 For the use of motifs, see Ibid., 4. Panofsky refers to motif use and transformation as the “history of style” (Ibid., 11). Following this bias, Panofsky’s method also stresses subject matter over form.

4 Ibid., 6, 7.


6 Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology,” 41.


13 “The discovery and interpretation of these ‘symbolical’ values (which are generally unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call iconography in the deeper sense: of a method of interpretation which arises as a synthesis rather than as an analysis.” Panofsky, “Studies in Iconology,” 8.

14 Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology,” 35 n. 3.

meaning from Lacan’s texts. That this difficulty is intentional can be seen in statements like the following: “I’m not surprised that something of a misunderstanding remains to be dispelled, even in people who think they’re following me. Don’t think I’m expressing any disappointment here. That would be to be in disagreement with myself, since I teach you that misunderstanding is the very basis of interhuman discourse.” “I would say that it is with a deliberate, if not entirely deliberated, intention that I pursue this discourse in such a way as to offer you the opportunity to not quite understand. This margin enables you yourselves to say that you think you follow me, that is, that you remain in a problematic position, which always leaves the door open to a progressive rectification. In other words, if I were to try to make myself very easily understood, so that you were completely certain that you followed, then according to my premises concerning interhuman discourse the misunderstanding would be irremediable.” Jacques Lacan, “The hysteric’s question,” in The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956, trans. with notes by Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 163, 164.

16 As Jacques-Alain Miller points out, these lectures mark a turning point not just in context, but also in their content as Lacan increasingly rewrites and transforms Freud. See Jacques-Alain Miller, “Context and Concepts,” in Feldstein et al., Reading Seminar XI, 5; for a brief overview of the innovations Lacan begins in his 1964 Seminar, see 7-15.


23 As noted above in relation to “Gaze,” this text uses capitalization to separate words which reference specific Lacanian concepts—such as Real, Imaginary, Symbolic, Other—from “regular” English language meanings.

24 “Needs become subordinated to the same conventional conditions as those of the signifier in its double register: the synchronic register of opposition between irreducible elements, and the diachronic register of substitution and combination, through which language, even if it does not fulfil all functions, structures everything concerning relations between human beings” (Lacan, “Direction of treatment and principles of its power,” in Écrits: A Selection, 255). Lacan used “signifier” in reference to word parts
morphemes and phonemes as the basic structure of language), words, phrases, things, subjects, relationships, and actions. As signifiers, each takes on value (meaning, definition) through opposition with and difference from other items in a closed system. For Lacan, signifiers are linked in endless chains through metonymy. Movement along the chain from signifier to signifier produces the meaning, and as the system moves and flexes, items shift, relationships change, and meaning fluctuates. For a clear exposition, see Evans, "Signified (signifié), "Signifier (signifiant)," "Signifying Chain (chaîne signifiante, chaîne du signifiant)," in An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1996), 186-188.

The Other lacks, for it does not contain the signifier which founds the subject. See Evans, "other/Other (autre/Autre)," in Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, 133.


In patriarchal Western culture, the "No" that splits child from mother and institutes the separation necessary for the existence of a subject is the "Law of the Father," or incest prohibition. "The primordial Law is therefore that which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating. The prohibition of incest is merely its subjective pivot." Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," in Écrits: A Selection, 66.

Signifiers "envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood'; so total that they bring to his birth . . . the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death." Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," in Écrits: A Selection, 68.

Lacan, "The Deconstruction of the Drive," in Four Fundamental Concepts, 164. The caregiver decides what the infant needs and reads the resulting "organic relaxation" as
an expression of gratitude. The adult in turn interacts with the infant-child in a way that extends the pleasurable feeling. This unanticipated satiation and pleasure exceed biological needs and become *jouissance*. See also Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan*, 190-191.

30 Through "dependence on her [the caregiver's] love, that is to say, by the desire for her desire," the child takes her desire as its own. The Lacanian child also "identifies himself with the imaginary object of this desire." Lacan, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis," in *Écrits: A Selection*, 198.

31 "For the unconditional element of demand, desire substitutes the 'absolute' condition. . . . Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting." Lacan, "The signification of the phallus," in *Écrits, A Selection*, 287.


33 "Substitutions . . . bring desire to a geometrically increasing power. . . . [T]o characterize the degree. . . . it would be necessary to distinguish between two dimensions in these substitutions: a desire for desire, in other words, a desire signified by a desire . . . is inscribed in the different register of one desire substituted for another." Lacan, "Direction of treatment and principles of its power," in *Écrits: A Selection*, 257.

34 Lacan, "Of the subject who is supposed to know, of the first dyad, and of the good," in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 235. "Man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," in *Écrits: A Selection*, 58). The child's conception of desire changes as he or she comes to perceive the object of desire as something "the other has or doesn't have" rather than as something the other is (Idem, "Seminar of January 22, 1958," unpublished seminar from *les Formations de l'inconscient*, 1957-1958, summarized in *Bulletin de Psychologie* 11[4-5]: 293-296; 12[2-3]: 182-192; 12[4]: 250-256; quoted and translated in Joël Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan*, 105-106).

35 "Desire is that which is manifested in the interval that demand hollows within itself, in as much as the subject, in articulating the signifying chain, brings to light the want-to-be, together with the appeal to receive the complement from the Other, if the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this want, or lack. That which is thus given to the Other to fill, and which is strictly that which it does not have, since it, too, lacks being, is what is called love, but it is also hate and ignorance." Lacan, "Direction of treatment and principles of its power," in *Écrits: A Selection*, 263; see also Evans, "Desire (désir)," in *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 38-39.

36 Unlike "visual," "specular" and "specularity" also suggest reflection and reflectivity, allowing the term to more easily encompass the idea of image and semblance,
as well as Lacan's notions of the separation inherent in both the cultural screen and in the ego's misapprehension of an Imaginary self-identify.


39 As we shall see, both fascination and captation are functions of the Gaze.


41 This identification with the "other" helps the uncoordinated child, "sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence," compensate for the "insufficiency," and lack of control inherent in a human infant's biological "prematurity" (Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I" in Écrits: A Selection, 4). As a metaphorical explanation for the development of a species-specific identification and the child's acquisition of its own body image, Lacan's Mirror Stage occurs with or without the presence of a literal mirror. Since at this point the infant-child's self has no clear boundaries, watching the people around it also provides the child with "mirror" images of a distant self.

42 "We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated in the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago." Ibid., 2.


44 Lacan, "The hysteric's question (II): What is a woman?" in Book III, 175. "It is in this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego is based." Jacques Lacan, "Aggressivity in psychoanalysis," in Écrits: A Selection, 19.

45 Lacan points out that this is a "species-specific" specularity.


47 "The child recognizes himself in his own image only insofar as he senses that the other has already identified him with this image. He thus receives from the gaze of the
other the confirmation that the image he perceives is his own.” Dor, Introduction to the Reading of Lacan. 159.

48 Lacan, “Seminar of January 22, 1958,” in Dor, Introduction to the Reading of Lacan, 107. In his re-writing of the Freudian Oedipal complex, Lacan distinguishes between the “word of the father” and any actual father, whose authority depends upon a dominant (patriarchal) culture’s nomination of men as spokesmen for “the Law.” The actual (biological) father only serves as a metaphor, and could be replaced by another subject: “The father is not a real object, so what is he? . . . The father is a metaphor. What is a metaphor? . . . It’s a signifier that takes the place of another signifier . . . The father is a signifier substituted for another signifier. And this is the province and the only essential province of the father as he intervenes in the Oedipus complex.” Lacan, “Seminar of January 15, 1958,” in Dor, Introduction to the Reading of Lacan, 94.

49 Citing Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lacan explains that the incest prohibiting “law only operates in the realm of culture. And the result of the law is always to exclude incest in its fundamental form, son/mother incest, which is the kind Freud emphasizes.” Lacan, “Das Ding (II),” in Book VII, 67.

50 Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 279. A primary caretaker does not bow to an individual, but to the weight of culture: “What I do want to insist on is that we should concern ourselves not only with the way in which the mother accommodates herself to the person of the father, but also with the importance she accords to his speech, to—let us say the word—his authority, that is, to the place that she reserves for the Name-of-the-Father in the promulgation of the law.” Lacan, Book III, 218; quoted in Dor, Introduction to the Reading of Lacan, 125. Dor modified the translation and added emphasis for clarity..

51 Acceptance of the “No” of the Name-of-the-Father permanently mediates the child-subject’s desire “through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation—the very normalization of the maturation being henceforth dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation as exemplified, in the case of the sexual object, by the Oedipus complex” (Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I,” in Écrits: A Selection, 5-6). For desire for the mother/caregiver as unsatisfiable, see Lacan, “Das Ding (II),” in Book VII, 68. For the child’s frustration, see Lacan, “Seminar of January 15, 1958,” in Dor, Introduction to the Reading of Lacan, 103, 101. For the distance created by acceptance of the Oedipus complex/Name-of-the-Father as necessary for the formation of an individual desiring subjects, see Lacan, “The imaginary dissolution,” in Book III, 96.

52 The alienation inherent in this external identification “goes a very long way. As far as structuration, organization and by the same token scotomisation—here, I am happy enough to use the term—and all manner of things, which are so many pieces of
information which can be passed from ourselves to ourselves—a special game which reflects back at us our corporeality, that corporeality which also has an alien origin.” Lacan, “The concept of analysis,” in Book I, 153.

53 “In the psyche, there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as a male or female being . . . . the ways of what one must do as man or as woman are entirely abandoned to the drama, to the scenario, which is placed in the field of the Other . . . . the Oedipus complex” (Lacan, “The subject and the other: alienation,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 204). And, “the subject finds his place in a preformed symbolic apparatus that institutes the law of sexuality. And this law no longer allows the subject to realize his sexuality except on the symbolic plane. This is what the Oedipus complex means.” Lacan, “The hysteric’s question (II): What is a woman?” in Book III, 170.


57 Autoerotic (“From love to the libido,” 190-191; “Of the subject who is supposed to know,” 240), narcissistic (“The partial drive and its circuits,” 186), and Imaginary (“The line and light,” 103), love is a specular deception (“Presence of the analyst,” 133, “From interpretation to the transference,” 253, “In you more than you,” 268; all the above are in Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts). “It’s one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level.” “Love is an illusory fantasy of fusion with the beloved.” “To love is, essentially, to wish to be loved.” Evans, “Love (amour)” in Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, 103; quoting Lacan, Seminar I, 142; Seminar XX, 65; Seminar XI, 253.

58 “All speech is demand; it presupposes the Other to whom it is addressed, whose very signifiers it takes over in its formulation. By the same token, that which comes from the Other is treated not so much as a particular satisfaction of a need, but rather as a response to an appeal, a gift, a token of love. There is no adequation between the need and the demand that conveys it; indeed, it is the gap between them that constitutes desire, at once particular like the first and absolute like the second. Desire (fundamentally in the
skigular) is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. It is not an appetite: it is essentially excentric and insatiable. That is why Lacan co-ordinates it not with the object that would seem to satisfy it, but with the object that causes it.” Alan Sheridan, “Translator’s Notes,” in Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts, 278-279.

“Object a is no being. Object a is the void presupposed by a demand and it is only by situating demand via metonymy, that is, by the pure continuity assured from the beginning to the end of a sentence, that we can imagine a desire that is based on no being—a desire without any other substance than that assured by [Borromean] knots themselves” (Jacques Lacan, “Rings of String,” The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Book XX: Encore, 1972-1973. On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, trans. with notes by Bruce Fink [New York: W. W. Norton, 1998], 126). Alan Sheridan reports that Lacan requested he not translate “objet petit a” so it might acquire “the status of an algebraic sign” (“Translator’s Notes,” in Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts, 282). Presumably for the same reason, Lacan does not nail down a definition. The “a” stands for autre (other) and sometimes appears on its own in Lacan’s text (“a”). Lacan also has an “A,” the “Autre” or “grand Autre.” “There is the Otherness of the Other that corresponds to the S[ubject], that is, the big Other, the subject who is unknown to us, the Other who is symbolic by nature, the Other one addresses oneself to beyond what one sees” (Lacan, “I’ve just been to the butcher’s,” in Book III, 56). This is the Other with a capital “A.” Recent translators have begun using the English “other” (sometimes as “o”) and “Other” (sometimes as “O”).


In the unconscious, “the drives are constituted as repressed in the substitution of the signifier for needs.” Lacan, “Direction of treatment and principles of its power,” in Écrits: A Selection, 256.


Dylan Evans, “Drive (pulsion),” in Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, 48. The invocatory (hearing) and scopic (seeing) drives “are the partial aspects in which [unconscious] desire is realised. Desire is one and undivided, whereas the drives are partial manifestations of desire.” Ibid., 49.

70 “With the regard to the agency of sexuality, all subjects are equal, from the child to the adult—that they deal only with that part of sexuality that passes into the networks of the constitution of the subject, into the networks of the signifier—that sexuality is realized only through the operation of the drives in so far as they are partial drives, partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality. . . . The drive . . . merely represents, and partially at that, the curve of fulfillment of sexuality in the living being.” Lacan, “The partial drive and its circuit,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 177.


73 Ibid., 55-56.

74 Drives impel the subject to achieve some satisfaction, even if that satisfaction must come from “pain or displeasure.” Jacques-Alain Miller, “Context and Concepts,” in Feldstein et al., Reading Seminar XI, 12.

75 “The circuit of the drive is the only way for the subject to transgress the [Symbolic’s] pleasure principle” and obtain jouissance (Evans, “Drive [pulsion],” in Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, 47). “The search encounters in its path a series of satisfactions that are tied to the relation to the object and are polarized by it. And at every
point they model, guide and support its movements according to the particular law of the pleasure principle. This law fixes the level of a certain quantity and excitation which cannot be exceeded without going beyond the limit of the Lust/Unlust polarity—pleasure and displeasure are the only two forms through which that same and single mode of regulation we call the pleasure principle expresses itself. "It is between perception and consciousness that is inserted that which functions at the level of the pleasure principle." Lacan "Das Ding (II)." in Book II, 58, 61.

76 "At the level of the scopic dimension, in so far as the drive operates there, is to be found the same function of the objet a as can be mapped in all other dimensions." Lacan, "The partial drive and its circuit," in Four Fundamental Concepts, 182-183.

77 This is in contrast to the genital drive, which (if it exists) finds its form on the side of the Other. See Lacan, "From Love to the Libido," in Four Fundamental Concepts, 189.


80 "I stressed the division that I make by opposing, in relation to the entrance of the unconscious, the two fields of the subject and the Other. The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present in the subject—it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear. And I said that it was on the side of this living being, called to subjectivity, that the drive is essentially manifested." Lacan, "The subject and the other: alienation," in Four Fundamental Concepts, 203.


84 Lacan’s translators consistently use the word “geometrical” rather than geometric or geometrical.


86 A long plum-line string slipped through a screw eye securely fixed to the wall at eye level behind the first artist—Lacan’s geometrical point—and stretched through the open frame to end with a short pointer. A second person controlled the positioning of the pointer, touching the string to the object at a selected position. The plumb-weight pulled the string tight, producing a “line of sight” traversing the frame’s interior at a certain point. Lacan compares this string to light rays as they strike and illuminate objects within the visible. After the first artist repositioned the threads to mark that location, the couple removed the long string and shut the drawing-door. This brought the drawing against the repositioned threads. A dot placed on the drawing marked the intersection. Then the artists opened the door, threaded the long string back through the frame, and repeated the process to locate another point on the object. The more times the couple plotted the intersection of threads and line of sight, the more correspondences they obtained between the appearance of the drawing and what may be viewed of the actual objects through the frame. The finished artwork’s picture plane assumed the position of the frame or pane of glass, providing viewers looking from the geometrical point the illusion of a window—Lacan’s “image”—into a controlled spatial empire.

87 Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 86. See also an earlier description of an “image” as energy Real energy intersecting with and reflecting from a surface in the Imaginary: “An image—that means the effects of energy starting from a given point of the real—think of them as being like light, since that is what most clearly evokes an image in our minds—[these effects of energy] are reflected at some point on a surface, [and] come to strike the corresponding same point in space.” Lacan, “Freud, Hegel and the machine,” in Book II, 49.

88 Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 86. Images occur on reflective surfaces. Whether the image is a product of human perception or the natural reflection of a mountain in calm lake waters, the reflective surface which receives and
projects the image resembles a mirror. “All that’s needed is that the conditions be such that to one point of a reality there should correspond an effect at another point, that a bi-univocal correspondence occurs between two points in real space.” Lacan, “Freud, Hegel and the Machine.” Book II. 49.

89 “What is at issue in geometrical perspective is simply the mapping of space, not sight” (Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 86). “Perception finds the object where it is, . . . the appearance of the cube as a parallelogram is precisely, owing to the rupture of space that underlies our very perception, what makes us perceive it as a cube. The whole trick, the hey presto!, of the classical dialectic around perception, derives from the fact that it deals with geometrical vision, that is to say, with vision in so far as it is situated in a space that is not in its essence the visual” (Idem, “The line and light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 94). The importance of Lacan’s reference to anamorphic perspective is discussed below.


91 “The phenomenologists have succeeded in articulating with precision, and in the most disconcerting way, that it is quite clear that I see outside, that perception is not in me, that it is on the objects that it apprehends. And yet I apprehend the world in a perception that seems to concern the immanence of the I see myself seeing myself. The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from that bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me. . . . [T]his belong to me aspect of representations [is] . . . reminiscent of property. When carried to the limit, the process of this mediation, of this reflecting reflection, goes so far as to reduce the subject apprehended by the Cartesian mediation to a power of annihilation.” Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 80-81.

92 “The Cartesian subject . . . is itself a sort of geometrical point, a point of perspective.” Ibid., 86.


94 “The essence of the relation between appearance and being . . . lies . . . not in the straight line, but in the point of light—the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth. Light may travel in a straight line, but it is refracted, diffused, it floods, it fills.” Ibid., 94.


Lacan, "The split between the eye and the gaze," in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 76. Lacan refers to this as "donner-à-voir," "to-give-to-be-seen." As such, the phrasing resembles the last step in the scopic drive, when the subject makes him or herself "to be seen."


"In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture." Lacan, "What is a picture?" in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 106.

Ibid., 108, 106.


Ibid., 96.

“If beyond appearance there is nothing in itself,” Lacan says, “there is the gaze.” Ibid., 103.

The human subject apprehends the world only through these "owned" images or representations (Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 80-81).

"Indeed, you see this on the schema of the two triangles, which are inverted at the same time as they must be placed one upon the other. What you have here is the first example of interlacing, intersection, chiasma, which I pointed out above, and which


108 Since objects, rather than subjects, are visible, the Gaze “is an object x, the object when faced with which the subject becomes object” (Lacan, “The symbolic order,” in Book I, 220). In consequence, “the subject is reduced to . . . the other.” Lacan, “From love to the libido,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 195.


112 “It is not true that, when I am under the gaze, when I solicit a gaze, when I obtain it, I do not see it as a gaze. Painters, above all, have grasped this gaze as such in the mask.” Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 84.

113 “In the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way—on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them. This is how one should understand those words, so strongly stressed, in the Gospel, They have eyes that they might not see. That they might not see what? Precisely, that things are looking at them.” Lacan, “What is a Picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 109.

114 In another of his optical models, this time involving a mirrors and an inverted bunch of flowers, Lacan expounded on the relationship between the ego and its ideals: “You have only to turn the obturator I referred to earlier into a camera shutter, except that it would be a mirror. It is in this little mirror, which shuts out what is on the other side, that the subject sees emerge the game by means of which he may—according to the illusion of . . . [an] image—accommodate his own image around what appears, the petit a. It is in the sum of these accommodations of images that the subject must find the opportunity for an essential integration.” Lacan, “The transference and the drives,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 159.

115 “What matters the most to me is knowing what the other imagines, what the other detects of these intentions of mine . . . because I must screen my movements from him. It is a matter of ruse. The dialectic of the gaze is maintained on this plane.” Lacan, “The symbolic order,” in Book I, 224.

116 For the relationship between the screen, the Gaze, and the subject’s use of camouflage, travesty, and intimidation, see Lacan, “The line and light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 98-100. “Mimicry also does not always imply a resistant or even a conscious intentionality; on the contrary, it may bespeak a subject’s completely
unconscious compliance with the images to which he or she is accustomed to being apprehended by the camera/gaze. The pose needs to be more generally understood as the photographic imprinting of the body, and that imprinting is not always apparent to the subject in question. It may be the result of the projection of a particular image onto the body so repeatedly as to induce both a psychic and a corporeal identification with it. And the image in question may be generative not of pleasure, but unpleasure.” Silverman, Threshold of the Visible World, 205.


118 “It is no doubt through the mediation of masks that the masculine and feminine meet in the most acute, most intense way.” Ibid., 107.

119 In the mimicry surrounding with sex and death, “the being breaks up, in an extraordinary way, between its being and its semblance, between itself and that paper tiger it shows to the other. . . . [T]he being gives of himself, or receives from the other, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield.” Lacan speaks here of the extreme mimicry involved in sex and death. Ibid., 107.

120 “In the field of the dream, on the other hand, what characterizes the image is that it shows.” Lacan, “The split between the eye and the gaze,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 75.

121 “The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety. The eye and the gaze—this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic drive.” Ibid., 72-73.

122 “Of all the objects in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire, the gaze is specified as unapprehensible. That is why it is, more than any other object, misunderstood (méconnu), and it is perhaps for this reason, too, that the subject manages, fortunately, to symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar (trait) in the illusion of consciousness of seeing oneself see oneself, in which the gaze is elided.” Lacan, “Anamorphosis,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 83.

123 “The gaze may contain within itself the objet a of the Lacanian algebra where the subject falls, and what specifies the scopic field and engenders the satisfaction proper to it is the fact that, for structural reasons, the fall of the subject always remains unperceived, for it is reduced to zero. In so far as the gaze, qua objet a, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration, and in so far as it is an objet a reduced of its nature, to a punctiform, evanescent function, it leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance.” Lacan, “The split between the eye and the gaze,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 76-77.

“In every analysis of the intersubjective relation, what is essential is not what is there, what is seen. What structures it is what is not there.” Lacan, “The symbolic order,” in Book I, 224.

“It is in so far as all human desire is based on castration that the eye assumes its virulent, aggressive function, and not simply its luring function as in nature.” Lacan, “What is a picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 118.

“The gaze in itself not only terminates the movement, it freezes it. . . . [through its] fascinatory effect, in that it is a question of dispossessing the evil [envious] eye of the gaze, in order to ward it off. The evil eye is the fascinum, it is that which has the effect of arresting movement and, literally, of killing life. At the moment the subject stops, suspending his gesture, he is mortified. The anti-life, anti-movement function of this terminal point is the fascinum, and it is precisely one of the dimensions in which the power of the gaze is exercised directly.” Ibid., 117-118.

“It is to this register of the eye made desperate by the gaze that we must go if we are to grasp the taming, civilizing and fascinating power of the function of the picture,” of a painting. Ibid., 116.

Melville points out that to make their theories of vision complete, both Merleau-Ponty and Lacan discuss painting. This indicates “either that painting obliges us to acknowledge that which the visual both overlooks and depends upon, or that human seeing (the seeing of speaking, embodied, and desiring beings) will always find itself in a world in which there will be paintings.” “Division of the Gaze,” 109.

“You see, one can say that there are always lots of gazes behind” a painting. (Lacan, “What is a picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 113). “In the picture, the artist, we are told by some, wishes to be a subject, and the art of painting is to be distinguished from all others in that, in the work, it is as subject, as gaze, that the artist intends to impose himself on us. To this, others reply by stressing the object-like side of the art product. In both these directions, something more or less appropriate is manifested, which certainly does not exhaust the question” (Lacan, “The line and the light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 100-101). A painting takes on value because it benefits someone, “the work calms people, comforts them by showing them that at least some of them can live from the exploitation of their desire. But for this to satisfy them so much, there must also be that other effect, namely, that their desire to contemplate finds some satisfaction in it. It elevates the mind, as one says, that is to say, it encourages renunciation. Don’t you see that there is something here that indicates the function I called dompte-regard?” Lacan, “What is a picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 111.

Ibid., 110.


Although convenient, the decontextualized nature of this collection can be difficult to follow and facilitates misunderstanding.

133 “Generally speaking, the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as objet a, that is to say, at the level of lack.” Lacan, “The line and light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 104.

134 Lacan coined his neologism “dompte-regard,” meaning taming or subduing the Gaze, as a parallel to the “trompe-l’oeil” associated with painting’s ability to fool the eye. The conquering aspect of “dompter” reinforces the power of the Gaze, the energy necessary to corral it, and its non-optical imperviousness to illusion.

135 Lacan, “What is a picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 112. “Zeuxis, turning towards him said, Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it. By this he showed that what was at issue was certainly deceiving the eye (tromper l’œil). A triumph of the gaze [of desire] over the eye.” Lacan, “The line and light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 103.

136 “Mimicry is no doubt the equivalent of the function which, in man, is exercised in painting” [109]. “The point is that the trompe-l’œil of painting pretends to be something other than what it is.” Lacan, “What is a picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 112.

137 Ibid., 110.

138 Ibid., 112. “The point is not that painting gives an illusory equivalence to the object, even if Plato seems to be saying this. The point is that the trompe-l’œil of painting pretends to be something other than what it is.” Ibid.

139 “What is painting? It is obviously not for nothing that we have referred to as picture the function in which the subject has to map himself as such. But when a human subject is engaged in making a picture of himself, in putting into operation that something that has as its centre the gaze, what is taking place?” Lacan, “The line and light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 100-101.

140 Ibid., 112.

141 “Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture—which is not the case in perception. This is the central field, where the separating
power of the eye is exercised to the maximum in vision. In every picture, this central field cannot but be absent, and replaced by a hole—a reflection, in short, of the pupil behind which is situated the gaze. Consequently, and in as much as the picture enters into a relation to desire, the place of a central screen is always marked, which is precisely that by which, in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometral plane.” Lacan, “What is a picture?” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 108.

142 “How could this showing satisfy something, if there is not some appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking? This appetite of the eye that must be fed produces the hypnotic value of painting.” Ibid., 116.


144 The painter “gives something for the eye to feed on, but he [or she] invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his [or her] gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze.” Ibid., 101.

145 Ibid., 101.


147 The painter “is the source of something that may pass into the real and on which, at all times, one might say, one takes a lease. . . . The artist always has some financial body behind him and it is always a question of reducing it—which may, at a certain level, strike you as being rather mythical—to an a with which—this is true in the last resort—it is the painter as creator who sets up a dialogue.” Ibid., 112.

148 “What occurs as these strokes, which go to make up the miracle of the picture, fall like rain from the painter’s brush is not choice, but something else” that is beyond the Imaginary-Symbolic construction of the visible world. This “rain of the brush” amounts to “the first act in the laying down of the gaze. A sovereign act, no doubt, since it passes into something that is materialized and which, from this sovereignty, will render obsolete, excluded, inoperant, whatever, coming from elsewhere, will be presented before this product.” Ibid., 114.

149 Ibid., 115.

150 “In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze.” Lacan, “The split between the eye and the gaze,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 73.

151 “When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that—You never look at me from the place from which I see you. Conversely, what I look at is never what I wish to see. And the relation that I mentioned earlier,
between the painter and the spectator, is a play, a play of trompe-l'oeil, whatever one says. There is no reference here to what is incorrectly called figurative, if by this you mean some reference or other to a subjacent reality.” Lacan, “The line and light,” in Four Fundamental Concepts, 103.

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CHAPTER II
TITIAN'S LUCREZIA ROMANA VIOLATA DA TARQUINIO

Iconographic Issues

The Artist and his Milieu

Titian's family background, the contacts and skills provided by his early artistic training, and his lifelong friendships with humanist scholars, all contributed to his ability to cultivate and maintain his professional status as one of the premier painters in Europe. Titian (Titiano Vecellio) was born about 1485\(^1\) to the respected and monetarily comfortable Vecelli family in Pieve di Cadore.\(^2\) Male Vecelli commonly entered government service or became lawyers, soldiers, and merchants. In an unusual break with family tradition, by the age of ten Titian had been sent to Venice to work as an apprentice in an artist's studio.

Titian's apprenticeship placed him in an ideal political environment and provided him with superior artistic credentials. From the first, Titian found himself in the heart of Venice's art world. Apprenticed initially to Sebastiano Zuccato, the master in charge of San Marco's mosaics, Titian soon moved on to the workshop of Gentile and Giovanni Bellini where he began concentrating on oil painting.\(^3\) Like that of Zuccato, the Bellini studio enjoyed a high status in the Venetian art world: Zuccato worked for the state church of San Marco, and both Bellini brothers eventually gained the position of official painter to the Serenissima. This status ensured a regular income in return for portraits of the Doges and paintings to decorate the Palazzo Ducale; it is a position an older Titian coveted, lobbied for, and eventually gained after the death of Giovanni Bellini in 1516. Titian's initial entry into the Venetian art world through the Zuccato and Bellini workshops clarified his artistic potential and provided him with the art qualifications and political contacts to become a success in his chosen city.

Titian's family and social circles provided him with access to and familiarity with both humanist scholarship and the attitudes of Venetian patricians, influences important to
an understanding of his individual viewpoint. As a member of the Vecelli family, Titian came from and maintained a social background above most artisans. Titian later strengthened and even increased his socially elevated artistic position by becoming Knight of the Golden Spur and Count Palatine. Through his Hapsburg patrons, Titian positioned himself to become one of the most important painters in Europe.

Titian’s contemporaries lauded his status as a gentlemanly painter. In the 1568 version of his Lives of the Artists, Vasari stressed this aspect of Titian’s character:

His house at Venice has been visited by all the princes, men of letters and distinguished people staying or living in Venice in his time; for, apart from his eminence as a painter, Titian is a gentleman of distinguished family and most courteous ways and manners.

Another early biographer confirmed that Titian’s guests included royalty. During a 1573 visit to Venice by King Henry III of France and Poland, the King and his entourage of Italian Dukes “spent some time” with Titian in his workshop. Titian’s status as a gentleman helped foster a context conducive to such visits.

Titian’s circle included humanist scholars, authors, and ambassadors, and he appears to have formed close friendships with Pietro Aretino and the architect Jacopo Sansovino. Aretino probably constituted Titian’s “best friend,” and edited and even composed much of the correspondence Titian sent to his royal and aristocratic patrons. Through the years, Titian also associated with other humanists: Spain’s Ambassador to Venice, Don Diego Hurtado y Mendoza, regularly visited the painter, as did Italian humanist and writer Ludovico Dolce. Dolce featured Titian in his Dialogo della Pittura, a 1557 treatise provoked by Giorgio Vasari’s slighting of Venetian painters in his initial 1550 edition of The Lives of the Artists.

In addition to writing poetry and plays, Dolce translated Latin and Greek texts. Inscribing one such translation of Juvenal with a dedication to Titian, Dolce explicitly referred to the painter’s inability to read Latin: “Now I send it to you so that, not being able to understand it on its own, you can see in mine if the good writers know equally well how to portray with the pen the secrets of the heart.” Here Dolce references the
ongoing debate between the arts of painting and poetry. This quote is important, for it concerns painting’s “art”: depicting “the secrets of the heart.” Dolce explored this further in his 1557 book on painting, Dialogo della pittura. As summarized by Norman Land, Dolce’s thought the painter should

depict the thoughts and emotions of a figure ‘by means of certain exterior actions.’ [Dolce’s fictional] Aretino at this point quotes Petrarch, who wrote that ‘often one may read the heart upon the brow.’ In other words, the gestures and facial expressions of a figure reveal its ‘inner secrets.’ Then Aretino exclaims that the painting ‘serves the eye of the viewers’. . . The illusory figure does not really have thoughts and emotions; the viewer must imagine them on the strength of the figure’s gesture and facial expression.¹²

Painting as an art used postures and expressions to convey inner states and emotions—the soul’s “inner secrets”—which an imaginative viewer actively read in the exterior forms.

**Patronage Issues**

Although Titian became the official painter of the Serenissima, he also sought patrons beyond the Venetian border. Among the most important Italian patrons were members of the Gonzaga and Farnese families, including Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and his grandfather Pope Paul III. Marquess Federico II Gonzaga of Mantua most likely orchestrated Titian’s introduction to the courts of Hapsburg Emperor Charles V. Eventually Charles V and his son Philip II of Spain became Titian’s most powerful and important patrons. Their continual support freed Titian from dependence upon the restricted sphere of ordinary Venetian concerns, and allowed his work to develop in a more individual way.¹³

Titian first met Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) in Bologna during the coronation ceremonies of 1530. When the Emperor and painter met again in 1533, Titian painted the Portrait of Charles V with Hound.¹⁴ The portraits produced by Titian pleased the Emperor to an extraordinary extent, and in May he rewarded the painter with a patent of nobility. In the patent, Charles V classed himself with the greatest Roman Emperors, and Titian with the artists of their courts:
Your gifts as an artist and your genius for painting persons from life appear to us so great that you deserve to be called the Apelles of this age. Following the example of our forerunners, Alexander the Great and Octavius Augustus, of whom one would only be painted by Apelles, and the other only by the most excellent masters, we have had ourselves painted by you, and have so well proved your skill and success that it seemed good to us to distinguish you with imperial honors as a mark of our opinion of you, and as a record of the same for posterity.

Titian became “Knight of the Golden Spur, Count of the Lateran Palace [Count Palatine] and of the Imperial Consistory”; minor titles the possession of which the painter downplayed in Venice but capitalized on in the Hapsburg courts.

In 1548 and in 1550 Titian attended the Imperial Diet at Augsburg and strengthened his relationship with the Hapsburgs. The Emperor, his sister Queen Mary of Hungary, and his brother Ferdinand King of the Romans, all commissioned work from Titian, and in the six years following the initial meeting they acquired at least seventy of his paintings. Working for new patrons rejuvenated the painter’s work, and the Emperor’s family continued to provide Titian with patronage after Charles’ abdication and death. While Ferdinand became Emperor of Germany and Austria upon his brother’s 1556 abdication, Charles’ son Philip II (1527-1598) became King of the Netherlands, Spain, and the Spanish Americas. He also developed into Titian’s major patron.

As he had done with Charles V, Titian initiated his relationship with Philip II by painting his portrait. The two men quickly settled into an agreement whereby Philip provided Titian with a pension and received in return large religious and mythological paintings. The latter included the poesie series based loosely on texts by Ovid. Although Titian declared in 1562 that he had satisfied his part of the agreement, he continued to send his best paintings to Philip. This eventually included Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio.
The Poesie: Expressive Paintings Fit to Decorate an Alcázar

The mythological paintings for Prince Philip included the poesie series, six paintings loosely based on stories in Ovid's Metamorphosis. The poesie investigated the formal and technical challenge of painting the unclothed female body in a variety of poses and from various angles. Correspondence from Titian to Philip documents the evolution of the series. Explaining the composition of Venus and Adonis, the second painting in the series, Titian wrote to Philip II:

And because the Danaë which I already sent to Your Majesty is viewed from the front, I have wanted in this other poesia (the Venus and Adonis) to change, and to make it show the opposite part [Venus's back], in order to render the room in which they will be more pleasurable to the eye.

This indicates that Titian at least partly considered the women he painted as pleasant bodies and formal devices intended to evoke delight in their male patrons. He was concerned both with the craft of painting, as seen in the desire to create an interesting composition, and the inclusion of motifs pleasing to the eyes of a male aristocrat.

However, Titian's paintings of unclothed female bodies do function as more than titillating erotic wall decoration. They evoke compassion and sympathy. Even Vasari recognized this, as can be seen in his discussion of yet another painting featuring a lovely lady:

Titian painted a St Mary Magdalen whom he showed down to the middle of the thighs, and all disheveled, that is to say, with her hair falling over her shoulders and throat and breast; raising her head, with her eyes fixed on heaven, she reveals remorse in the redness of her eyes and sorrow for her sins in the tears she is shedding. This picture profoundly stirs the emotions of all who look at it; and, moreover, although the figure of Mary Magdalen is extremely lovely it moves one to thoughts of pity rather than desire.

This should be considered in relation to another statement by Vasari about Titian's late works: "The method he used is judicious, beautiful, and astonishing, for it makes pictures appear alive and painted with great art, but it conceals the labour that has gone into them." Seeing the Magdalen as an available sexy body without considering her story or her sorrow ignores the way the painting functions as art by, as Ludovico Dolce phrased it,
depicting "the secrets of the heart." Titian made her sorrow come alive in such a way that it transformed a potentially erotic presentation of a moral theme into a composition that plays on the viewer's compassion. This powerful combination is responsible for the artistic strength of Titian's best work.

The themes of living beauty and pathos reappeared a century later in the writings of Carlo Ridolfi. In his biography of Titian, Ridolfi included his understanding of expected audience response to individual paintings. About Titian's Christ Crowned with Thorns (ca. 1550, Louvre) Ridolfi exclaimed "Oh, wondrous effects of that divine image which possesses the power to draw out compassion from the hearts of anyone who gazes upon it"; an Ecco Homo "brings tears to our eyes and sympathy to our hearts" (ca. 1546, now lost); and a Venus and Adonis (ca. 1546, now lost) provoked Ridolfi into a long passage beginning:

As a fable, this painting through its naturalness moves every onlooker to declare: unhappy Adonis, what path will you take? Do you not know that the bellicose god concealed beneath the bristling skin of the wild boar awaits you?

As with the earlier acclaim from Charles V and descriptions by Vasari, Ridolfi's prose praised Titian's work for its life-likeness. As with Vasari's discussion of the Magdalen, the idea of what made the portrayal realistic expanded. Ridolfi found in Titian's painted characters more than a simple similarity to the physical world's appearance; instead, "naturalness" existed in the painting's evocation of the pathos of human life. The images were not static; their life-like presentation not only portrayed emotion, but also evoked from the viewer an emotional response. Although postdating the artist's death by approximately a hundred years and masked by flowery language, Ridolfi joined Vasari in making it clear that Titian's paintings owe their power to an ability to provoke an empathetic response from their audience.

The conflicting double-sided quality of Titian's paintings—are they pinups of lovely ladies or are they Great Art—is in part due to Titian's unique approach to painting, which combined sensual subject matter and sensuous paint handling to expand upon
moments from narratives that often highlighted human frailty and mortality. At different periods in his life, Titian tipped the scale toward seduction or toward tragedy. The dramatic compositions, extreme key contrasts, and manipulative brushwork of Titian’s last paintings push them more strongly toward tragedy. This is the time in which he painted Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio.

The artist first mentioned this painting in a 1568 letter to Philip II:

And because I desire to close the days of this my extreme old age in the service of the Catholic King, my lord, I promise you that I am composing another invention of painting of much greater labor and ingenuity than perhaps any I have produced for many years now.  

Three years later the artist again wrote to Philip, asking if his painting “Lucrezia romana violata da Tarquinio” (Roman Lucretia violated by Tarquin) pleased the king. Slow development of a painting over the course of years allowed for a deliberate, considered response to the subject and the composition, and was a method favored by Titian, as revealed in Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio by alternating paint and dirt layers.

In the progress report sent to his royal patron, the painter indicated more than simple satisfaction with the careful development of the painting. Titian tells King Philip to anticipate the future delivery of a masterpiece that required of the aged painter great ingenuity and labor, a labor that Titian’s own art concealed.

The Painting “Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio”

Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio (Figure 2.1) is an oil painting on canvas. It is signed “TITIANVS. F.” painted in red on one of the red slippers in the lower right corner. Colors are intense, with red and green and dark and light contrasts prevailing. The painting offers viewers a disturbing narrative: a brightly clothed knife-wielding man (Tarquin) rushes in from the viewer’s left to attack a quietly resisting unclothed woman (Lucretia). These figures are presented almost life-sized, and their bodies fill most of the canvas. The action takes place on a bed, which stretches across the vertical rectangle of
the painting from left to right. Behind the bed a second man lifts aside the bed curtains to watch.

As we see from the artist’s letters referenced above, the painting was partially complete in 1568, and finished sometime before August of 1571. It traveled from Venice to Spain in the company of the Venetian Ambassador, Antonio Tiepolo. Philip hung it with his favorite Titian poesie. Although a fire swept the Alcázar in 1734 and destroyed many Titian paintings, this one was rescued without significant damage. In 1813 Joseph Bonaparte took the painting with him as he fled Spain after his forced abdication during the Peninsular War. After his death it appeared at Christie’s, beginning a sequence of collection hopping that continued for decades. Finally in 1918 the painting was given to the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge, England, in whose collection it remains today. At some point in its history, the painting suffered a slight size reduction. This was probably about an inch. The painting now measures approximately six feet two inches high by four feet nine inches wide. The painting’s condition is good and its placement in the museum gallery striking.

Iconography in the Narrower Sense, I: Textual Trails

Titian’s status as the son of a provincial noble, supplemented by his eventual knighthood by the hand of Charles V, situated the artist on the lower edge of the European aristocracy. Friendships with leading humanist scholars in Venice and the Empire placed Titian in a learned atmosphere and provided him with access to the narratives of Ovid and Livy through books, manuscripts, and discussions. Powerful international patrons provided Titian with flexibility that included freedom for individual interpretation. Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio reflects this freedom. The product of lifelong investigations, it became a painting whose excellence the artist himself recognized. This section discusses the iconography and sources woven together by Titian during the construction of this painting.
Linking the individual motifs within the painting—the man, the woman, the naked blade, the spectator in the shadows, and the bedroom setting—and connecting their combination to a narrative, begins what Panofsky referred to as an "iconographical analysis in the narrower sense." Lucretia’s story as represented in the painting forms what Panofsky called secondary or conventional subject matter. Investigation of the source as found in Livy and Ovid reaffirms and deepens the connection between Titian’s combination of motifs and the painting’s title, and provides information supplementing our understanding of Titian’s invenzione.

Lucretia’s story could be found in sixteenth-century publications of Livy’s History of Rome and Ovid’s Fasti. Although Ovid expanded upon both Tarquin’s actions and Lucretia’s response, the authors told a similar story. Since an Italian translation of Livy’s text most likely served as Titian’s primary narrative source, the following synopsis draws most heavily from the History of Rome. Supplemental information from Ovid will be incorporated when descriptions in Fasti correspond to the action in Titian’s painting.

Lucretia’s tragedy began at a military encampment, when during an argument about wifey virtue her husband Collatinus Tarquinius drunkenly boasted to his fellow officers about her superiority. A competition ensued, and the men traveled in mass from home to home as each sought to prove he possessed the best wife. The princely officers found excellence only in Lucretia. Despite the late hour, they discovered Collatinus’s wife spinning wool by lamplight in the chaste company of her maids, so Lucretia’s impressive beauty and validated chastity “won the contest in womanly virtue.” His boasts vindicated, Collatinus returned to the siege with his comrades at daybreak.

The winning qualities proved irresistible to one of the officers participating in the contest—Sextus Tarquinius (Tarquin), youngest son of the King of Rome. Both Livy and Ovid made it clear that the Prince responded to more than physical beauty. The superlative combination of Lucretia’s outer and inner beauty, of her bodily attractiveness and chaste morality, fired Tarquin’s lust. Ovid showed this clearly in his description of Lucretia’s tear-stained face as she dropped her yarn to weep in lament for her husband’s
absence: "The gesture was becoming; becoming, too, her modest tears; her face was worthy of its peer, her soul."

In this description of Lucretia's virtuous demeanor, Ovid described her physical beauty with a reference to her soul. This makes it clear that Lucretia's perfection extends beyond her physical beauty, for she also possesses inner excellence and a soul of great beauty.

In contrast, Ovid's Tarquin "caught fire and fury, . . . he raved" with "senses crazed" and "plotted violence and guile against an innocent bed," because Lucretia's figure pleased him, and that snowy hue, that yellow hair, and artless grace; pleasing, too, her words and voice and virtue incorruptible; and the less hope he had, the hotter his desire.

In Livy, too, the combination of physical and moral excellence "kindled in Sextus Tarquinius the flame of lust, and determined him to debauch her." The prince lusted for Lucretia's grace and physical beauty, but raged out of control over her innocence. Qualities which won for the husband a contest in wifely excellence aroused in Tarquin the desire to debase and corrupt both Lucretia's body and her integrity. With Collatinus back at the war camp, Tarquin surreptitiously returned to her home plotting her downfall.

Unsuspecting, Lucretia welcomed Sextus Tarquinius as an honored guest and kinsman. As the household slept late at night, he entered her bedroom intent on violation. Titian depicted this scene. He painted the threatening moments before the physical act of rape as Lucretia awakened to find the prince's left hand on her breast, his right brandishing his sword, and his voice demanding silence and threatening her with death. The action in Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio (Figure 2.1) differs here from the textual accounts. In the painting, Tarquin holds a knife rather than a sword, his left hand grabs Lucretia's right forearm rather than her breast, and a second man watches.

Manhandled from her sleep by Tarquin, trembling with fear, and voiceless in terror, Lucretia still resisted his lust. In the texts of both Livy and Ovid, Tarquin progressed to entreaties, prayers, and bribes; returning to a death threat as she refused to acquiesce. Lucretia remained untempted. Although Livy described only her terror and unbending will, Ovid elaborated the confrontation as follows:
She answered never a word. Voice and power of speech and thought itself fled from her breast. But she trembled, as trembles a little lamb that, caught straying from the fold, lies low under a ravening wolf. What could she do? Should she struggle? In a struggle a woman will always be worsted. Should she cry out? But in his clutch was a sword to silence her.47

The actions of the rapist and victim in Titian’s painting appear to parallel this text, with the dominating fury of Tarquin’s movement up over Lucretia, and her trapped body’s weak but agonized resistance as she pushes futilely up against his shoulder and weeps her steadfast refusal. Ovid’s comparisons dehumanized both characters and foretold the story’s conclusion: the rapacious prince as “ravening wolf,” the virtuous wife as “sacrificial lamb.” The result of any such confrontation between carnivore and prey is obvious. Unweaned and completely dependent, a “little lamb” would not survive outside the safety of a shepherd’s care. Doomed to destruction by her isolation, innocent Lucretia had neither recourse nor defense.48

Ovid and Livy both featured a physically powerless Lucretia whose integrity remained unaffected by Sextus Tarquinius’s raging strength, impassioned words, and death threats. Frustrated in his intent to corrupt Lucretia by gaining her adulterous consent, the prince escalated his threat to include both death and dishonor. In Livy’s version Tarquin phrased this new coercion as follows: “If death will not move you, . . . dishonour shall. I will kill you first, then cut the throat of a slave and lay his naked body by your side. Will they not believe that you have been caught in adultery with a servant—and paid the price?”49 “Base adultery” between a patrician wife and a slave was anathema in both ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy.50 It damaged a woman’s patrilineage, her husband, and her family. Death was a justified punishment for such a dishonorable crime.

If chaste Lucretia had died in this indefensible manner, rumors would have completed her destruction and brought harm and dishonor to her family. As Livy explained, “even the most resolute chastity could not have stood” against this heinous threat; and Ovid, too, connected honor with reputation as his Tarquin threatened Lucretia with both death and infamy.51 In *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* Titian included
Sextus Tarquinius’ ultimate threat by painting in a second male figure who evokes both the slave and, as witness, the malicious power of slanderous gossip.

Faced with a choice between the rape of her body or the irredeemable violation of her good name, Lucretia “yielded” her body. Both Livy and Ovid contrasted Lucretia’s inner strength of character against the weakness manifested by Tarquinius’s immoral behavior. By acquiescing to illicit sex only when faced with dishonorable death, Lucretia remained innocent in heart and soul. In addition, a living Lucretia retained her power to speak and to control the outcome of her story, thereby maintaining her existence as a virtuous woman.

Both authors also praised her integrity after the rape. Despite her distress, Lucretia continued to act in accordance with the guiding principles of wifely virtue. In Rome, rape was prosecutable as either “violence” or “criminal wrong,” but only the father or husband of a raped woman could take legal action. Perhaps for this reason, Lucretia quickly summoned from the battlefield both her husband Collatinus Tarquinius and father Lucretius Tarquinius. In the chamber where Tarquinius raped her, she recounted what happened, explaining:

What can be well with a woman who has lost her honour? In your bed, Collatinus, is the impress of another man. My body only has been violated. My heart is innocent, and death will be my witness.

In this speech, Livy’s Lucretia separated her moral integrity from the defilement of her body, whose purity she had sacrificed in order to control her story. Lucretia’s consent, even though forced, destroyed her bodily “honor” since she acquiesced to illicit sex. Yet her adulterous act was a response to extreme duress, and Lucretia remained innately virtuous and guiltless.

Her father and husband also recognized the division between enforced and voluntary action. In Livy “they told her she was helpless, and therefore innocent; that he [Tarquin] alone was guilty. It was the mind, they said, that sinned, not the body: without intention there could never be guilt.” Reminding Lucretia that sin was a deliberate mental act, they consoled her with the determination that blame belonged to Sextus.
Tarquinius alone. This contradicted Roman custom and belief, which maintained that rape and adultery equally and irreparably polluted a woman. A wife involved in illicit sex contaminated her husband and children with a taint removable only through her death. To facilitate this, Roman law gave to the father of an adulterous woman the legal right to restore family honor by killing her. Lucretius and Collatinus's encouraging words show they misunderstood Lucretia's dilemma. Knowing her heart and soul to be guiltless, she intended to forestall the rape's future consequences and preserve the honor of her families.

Lucretia understood from the start that in the court of conventional opinion and history, preserving her family's honor and reclaiming her chastity could be accomplished only by erasing the corporal defilement of rape. For Lucretia the reputation of her body took priority over the reality of her mental innocence and the purity of her soul. Refusing the reassuring pablum offered by father and husband, Lucretia reiterated her determination: "I am innocent of fault," she explained in Livy, "but I will take my punishment. Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve." Revealing a steel dagger hidden in her dress, Lucretia then stabbed herself fatally in the chest. This action forestalled the growth of an adulterous reputation and, as stated by Lucretia herself, was an attempt to erase bodily dishonor rather than to assuage personal guilt.

Lucretia's story did not end with her suicide. Brutus used her violation and heroic death as a primary means to stir the Roman people into rebellion against the regime of the Tarquins. In response, the Roman people banished the family of Tarquinius Superbus and abolished the two-hundred and forty-four year Roman monarchy. The election of Brutus and Collatinus as consuls began what was known as the Roman Republic.

Iconography in the Narrower Sense, II: Types and Themes

During the early Renaissance, images and stories of Lucretia surfaced repeatedly as she was transformed into a Christianized symbol of female excellence. This occurred despite an ongoing theological debate over Lucretia's innocence, an argument which in
turn rested upon disputes over a raped woman’s guilt. In The City of God (413-426) St. Augustine had argued that Lucretia’s prideful shame-driven suicide proved her guilty of pleasure-based consent and thus of adultery. Augustine’s verdict influenced succeeding generations of churchmen. This harsh interpretation did not halt the development of a counter argument supporting Lucretia’s innocence, which fostered the iconographic use of her as an exemplar of chastity.

Lucretia was included as an extraordinary example of holy chastity among the 104 notable women in Boccaccio’s influential fourteenth-century catalog De claris mulieribus (Concerning Famous Women). In an entry based upon Livy’s account, Boccaccio described Lucretia as being equally attractive in her beauty and her virtue. When threatened with “wicked disgrace” she “unwillingly gave her body to the adulterer” and later “cleansed her shame harshly” through suicide. For this action, Boccaccio explained, “she should be exalted with worthy praise for her chastity, which can never be sufficiently lauded.” Boccaccio’s books received multiple translations and publications through to the mid-sixteenth century, and served as literary sources for many artists.

Lucretia as Worthy Woman and Suicide

In the centuries after Boccaccio’s De claris mulieribus appeared, visual catalogs of worthy or peculiar people also became popular. Once again Lucretia appeared often as a pre-Christian example of a saintly female. In Hans Burgkmair’s 1519 woodcuts of Eighteen Female Worthies virtuous Lucretia took her place (as wife) with two other pagan Roman women lauded by Boccaccio for their virtue: the widow Veturia and the daughter Verginia (Figure 2.2), the latter a maiden whose story resembled Lucretia’s in linking chastity with death. Writers used Lucretia’s story as a morality fable, and either idealized or condemned her actions. Visual artists followed suit, creating prints and paintings that depicted her as a fatal seductress or a chaste pagan saint. Within this polarity, a third variety of image developed. Words that labeled Lucretia chaste combined with departures from her well-known narrative—changes that often included a loss of her
clothes—to produce an ambiguous Lucretia who possessed both seductiveness and chastity.

Lucretia’s use as an exemplar led to her inclusion in the decorative schemes of cassoni, the marriage chests Italian brides brought with them to their husband’s households. A cassone’s painted panels served a didactic purpose, instructing the new wife and her husband in proper duties and behavior that included the female virutes of honor, modesty, purity, and chastity. Recent attention has been turned toward one such moralizing decorative panel painting, a work which features Lucretia’s story: the Gardner Museum’s History of Lucretia, painted by Botticelli at the start of the sixteenth century (Figure 2.3). The panel presents a simultaneous narrative, with pre-rape and post-suicide scenes flanking a larger representation of rebellion against the tyrannical Tarquin regime. In the active central section, Lucretia’s rigid, fully dressed corpse lies in state at the feet of Brutus, who stands over her inciting the masses to transform their grief into outrage. Armed men waving weapons around Lucretia’s body show this transition occurring and remind viewers that Lucretia’s rape and suicide helped produce the Roman Republic.

Domestic panels like Botticelli’s History of Lucretia employed sequential narration, subordinating Lucretia in favor of emphasizing the positive outcome of her proper if tragic behavior. In contrast, other representations focused attention on Lucretia herself and featured one of two narrative moments: suicide or rape. In both cases, sixteenth-century paintings and prints in which artists bare all or part of Lucretia’s body outnumber those featuring a completely clothed heroine. By removing both her modesty and her witnesses, images of this type often conflicted with the heart of her story.

Ambiguity of meaning can be found in an early painting by Titian that shows Lucretia in the seconds before the blade reached her breast (ca. 1520, Hampton Court; Figure 2.4). For Lucretia’s pose Titian combined and elaborated upon two sources: a second century sculpture of Venus, and a Marcantonio Raimondi print based on a Raphael drawing of Lucretia’s suicide (ca. 1508-1511, Figure 2.5). The popularity of this type
probably stemmed from the discovery in 1508 of an antique statue showing a single-figure Lucretia in the act of suicide.\textsuperscript{71} In Titian’s painting a monumental Lucretia bisects the picture plane from top to bottom and separates shadowy architecture from sunny landscape. Her long unbound hair swings with her movement and blends into the shadows behind her. During the Renaissance, loose hair could be interpreted as a symbol of rape, innocence, or lasciviousness.\textsuperscript{72} In Titian’s Hampton Court painting, Lucretia is alone and unclothed, her body twisting with gentle contrapposto as she steps forward into the light. Her lowered right hand moves a knife toward her chest and her raised left arm swirls drapery over her head. This posture reinforces the forward twist of her torso and obscures her eyes with shadows and cloth. Although this blinding gesture combined with her upturned face insures that Lucretia can see neither her blade nor her audience, her aim is accurate and her death imminent.\textsuperscript{73} The upturned face and veiled eyes of this Lucretia by Titian hides her actions from herself and her face from us. A sightless Lucretia is a defenseless female body, equally available to Tarquin, knife, and voyeuristic gaze. Rona Goffen interprets Lucretia’s concealing gesture as a device that evokes spectator sympathy and pity. This sympathy then works against the more obvious presentation of her Venus-based “voluptuous” female beauty, creating ambiguity and forcing the spectator into greater involvement in the creation of meaning.

A slightly later painting often attributed to Titian and entitled Tarquin and Lucretia depicts the half length figures of a suicidal Lucretia in the company of a man (ca. 1525, Vienna, Figure 2.6).\textsuperscript{74} Lucretia’s clothing is rumpled and the white camicia slips from her shoulder to bare her upper breasts for a stiletto-like knife blade. She is brightly lit from the upper left and turns her eyes toward the light source and away from both viewer and her companion. Lucretia’s posture and expression combine with the lighting to give her a meditative quality, and in her pensive state she ignores the man at her back. He in turn seems one with the dark shadows, and like them he appears to surround her. He leans over her right shoulder and looks intensely at her eyes. He also firmly grasps her far arm (not the knife arm!) as if to pull her away from or push her onto the long thin blade.
Iconographically, the man should be Collatinus rather than Sextus Tarquinius. However, his shadowy presence and menacing posture suggest that he is the rapist rather than the husband. If so, the painting conflates the destructive moments of Lucretia’s story into one contemplative representation inseparably linking the characters involved with rape to its fatal consequences.

**Titian’s Print Sources and Related Paintings of Tarquin and Lucretia**

Other sixteenth-century representations of Lucretia took the rape scene as their theme. In the black and white prints of this type, Lucretia often reclines in bed with her unclothed body fully exposed to both viewer and rapist. In some prints she appears to struggle against Tarquin; in others, she seems to embrace him. Both prints and paintings commonly show Tarquin looming over Lucretia and threatening her with a long dagger. This situation is found in three paintings associated with Titian and his workshop, including *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* (Figure 2.1). The basic composition explored by Titian in these paintings has been traced by Michael Jaffé and Karen Groen back to several earlier prints by Heinrich Aldegrever and The Master L. D.

In 1539 and again in 1553, the German artist Heinrich Aldegrever created small engravings featuring an unclothed Tarquin attacking an unclothed Lucretia in the shallow space of a curtained platform bed (Figure 2.7, Figure 2.8). Aldegrever’s images are unusual both in the inclusion of double nakedness and in accurately arming Tarquin with a sword rather than a dagger or knife. In both cases, the bed curtains are pulled back in the front top corners of the composition, acting as theatrical frames for the action below. Both prints also show an unused chamber pot; in the 1539 engraving, the vessel is beneath the bed, in the 1553 version Aldegrever placed it on a small pedestal at the print’s left edge. The latter setting in particular seems indicative of storage and disuse, suggesting the pot is an unpolluted vessel and perhaps hinting at Lucretia’s chastity.

In the earlier Aldegrever image (Figure 2.7), Lucretia’s long hair is unbound and swirls in ringlets as Tarquin grabs her right arm. His gesture pulls her into a spread-eagled
position against the picture plane, exposing her body completely to the viewer. In the iconography of medieval and early renaissance rape images, the grasping of a wrist or arm indicates forced action, and a woman’s open hand and upraised arm signal her resistance. Within this iconographic tradition, Tarquin’s hold on Lucretia’s arm and her open palm clearly mark the image as a rape scene. The 1553 engraving (Figure 2.8) reverses the composition, placing Lucretia on the left and repeating her lower body’s open posture. This time she presses her palms together in prayer and Tarquin’s arm crosses over her collar bone as he grabs her far shoulder. His attack pushes her against the pillows with such force that her hair streams horizontally in the space between them. Slippers have been abandoned on the floor beside the bed, and a wooden cabinet behind the figures bears a large plate, an ewer, a glass, and a candle. This particularizes the setting and reinforces its domestic character. Although this image lacks the grasped arm and open palm of the 1539 engraving, Lucretia’s agonized face and pious torso work with her defenseless lower body to heighten the narrative violence.

The Fontainebleau printmaker known as the Master L. D. produced an etching that shows the rape taking place upon a curtained platform bed (before 1547, Figure 2.9). What seem to be bed curtains now cover the back of the composition, drape over the bed, and spill onto the floor in the foreground. Apparently barechested, Tarquin wears sandals, a billowing cape, and a turban-like hat in addition to what might be an armored skirt. This unusual and alienating military clothing does not reappear on other Tarquins. Here it marks him as an outsider and so explains his violence. While the odd twist of Tarquin’s left arm points his short dagger skyward over her head rather than down toward Lucretia, the pressure of his right arm at Lucretia’s neck and his right knee between her legs backs Lucretia up against the left side of the print. Her left arm is raised in resistance, and her nakedness is emphasized by the kerchief which binds her hair. A third figure now makes an appearance in the drama: in the dark shadows of the right background a second man lifts aside the bed curtains. His presence might be a reference to Livy’s account, where Sextus Tarquinius takes a companion with him on the second trip to Collatia. His cloth
head wrap and the cape draped across his upper chest link him with Tarquin, as does the long pike or spear he carries. This weapon suggests a lower military rank and allows the second man to function either as companion or as the slave in Tarquin's final threat of "base adultery."

A clear link exists between the Aldegrever (Figure 2.7) and Master L. D. (Figure 2.9) prints discussed above and a badly damaged Tarquin and Lucretia (ca. 1570, Bordeaux, Figure 2.10), one of three paintings of the rape scene produced by Titian or his workshop. The Bordeaux painting takes Tarquin's lunging assault from Aldegrever's 1539 engraving and reverses the action of near and far limbs. This brings both slashing knife arm and aggressive bent knee into the foreground and moves Lucretia's flailing raised arm, still grasped by Tarquin, into the background. The backward extension of the knife arm brings the blade parallel to Tarquin's raised thigh and Lucretia's braced hand. The angle of Lucretia's body falls between Aldegrever's frontal presentation and the profile view offered by the Master L. D. Both the position of Tarquin's knee on the bed between Lucretia's thighs and the arc of his torso are adapted from the master L. D.'s etching.

With a few important exceptions, the posture of figures in the Bordeaux painting of Tarquin and Lucretia parallel those in Cambridge's Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio (ca. 1568-1571, Figure 2.1); similar, too, are Tarquin's clothing and Lucretia's jewels. However, in the Bordeaux workshop version Tarquin extends his knife arm down in a more explicitly sexual gesture and Lucretia turns her face away. According to x-ray evidence, the Bordeaux Tarquin originally elevated his knife arm, but the artist changed his mind. The lowered knife position creates a parallel between the blade's angle, Tarquin's thigh, and Lucretia's centrally placed left forearm that unifies the figures. This harmony detracts from the violence of Tarquin's rigid stare and his aggressive stance. In addition, the abbreviated bed curtains in the back of the Bordeaux composition seem merely decorative, and function neither to define the painting's space nor enhance its
drama. Finally, there is no painted onlooker like that found in both the Master L. D.’s etching and in Titian’s *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio*.

The Bordeaux painting presents an ambiguous representation of Lucretia. She turns her face away from Tarquin and toward the pillows at her back, implying rejection of his assault. Her hair is loose but trapped neatly between her body and the pillows at her back, and her slightly open mouth is neither open enough for a scream nor down turned in sorrow. Careful paint handling in an otherwise softly rendered face calls attention to Lucretia’s eyes and highlights the direction of her look. Although she averts her face, she glances back from the corner of her eyes to directly engage the painting’s external viewer. If her facial expression and the paint handling indicated greater distress, this look might convey an appeal for help. Instead it seems to moderate her rejection of Tarquin’s assault by inviting the viewer’s complicity, and she seems less clearly chaste. In addition, this painting contains no secondary male figure, an absence that reduces the painting’s complexity. As we have seen, artists used this internal spectator to reference Tarquin’s companion, the military, and the fatal power of gossip. In each case, the second man’s presence tied the depicted actions to narratives told by Livy and Ovid. Within the Bordeaux painting, the absence of the internal spectator combines with Lucretia’s ambiguous expression to reduce the painting’s intensity and to restrict its reference to Lucretia’s tragic story and the complexity and justifiability of her actions.

The raised blade found in the Cambridge painting is repeated in another painting entitled *Tarquin and Lucretia* (ca. 1575, Vienna), an unfinished work usually attributed to Titian (Figure 2.11). Both combatants are shown fully clothed in three-quarter length standing against a dark curtained backdrop. The cropped presentation concentrates attention on the faces and arms of Tarquin, dressed in red, and Lucretia, in white. Tarquin strides in from the left, grabs Lucretia’s upraised arm, menaces her with a dagger, and looks forward. Lucretia braces her ring-less left hand against his chest and looks down the left. She appears to be on the verge of unbalanced collapse, and remains upright only
through Tarquin's grasp on her elevated right arm. Her elaborately braided coiffure begins to spill down her back.

The Vienna painting (Figure 2.11) depicts Tarquin's initial assault upon Lucretia, before he escalates his threat to include the total destruction of her chaste reputation. She is shown upright and moving, her arms flailing and body falling as she reacts to Tarquin’s presence. Heightening the distress conveyed by her face, her awkward, unbalanced position has been described as “twisting around, like a spindle” as she begins to stumble. This description references both Lucretia’s virtuous activity the first time Tarquin saw her, and her situation during his second visit. Her movement is unique to the Vienna painting, for both the Bordeaux and Cambridge paintings contain a Lucretia whose reclining position undermines active resistance. This difference makes narrative sense, reducing Lucretia’s physical resistance as she nears the point of capitulation. Interestingly, although the Vienna painting emphasizes Lucretia’s struggle, she is not shown wearing a wedding ring. Although this Lucretia is clearly more distressed than her Bordeaux counterpart, neither painting equals the deep distress of Cambridge’s Lucrezia Romana Violata Da Tarquinio.

Titian’s “Lucrezia Romana Violata Da Tarquinio”: Painting and Iconography

In Cambridge’s Lucrezia Romana Violata Da Tarquinio (ca. 1568, Figure 2.1) Titian again focused on the early moments and located the action on a bed which stretches across the painting from right to left. He reworked the same basic composition, filled the vertical canvas with almost life sized figures, and incorporated the watching servant found in the Master L. D.’s earlier etching. Titian’s final resolution of the rape theme, as seen in the Cambridge painting, was reproduced in altered form in 1571 or 1572 when Cornelius Cort published an engraving based upon Titian’s design (Figure 2.12). It is likely that Cort worked from a drawing provided by Titian or his studio rather than from the painting itself. In addition to the inescapable left-right reversal, Cort’s version lengthened Tarquin’s knife and obscured or removed Lucretia’s ring. The rendering of the internal

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spectator became tighter, and his face and costume more detailed and exotic. The printed version also extended the composition vertically through the inclusion of more drapery above the figures and several levels of bed platform below. The addition of these elements distances the external viewer from the action and reduces the claustrophobic quality of the space, changes that result in a composition with less psychological impact.

In the Cambridge painting, as in that at Bordeaux, Tarquin enters from the viewer’s left and the force of his movement pushes Lucretia back onto the pillows of her bed. Tarquin is large, physically fit, sumptuously dressed, and armed with a knife whose sharp blade reflects the light. His hair and beard are reddish brown and his skin dark and flushed in comparison to Lucretia’s. A thin silk sash bearing a trio of very dark rectangular jewels adorns his gold-buttoned doublet. The sash crosses his torso from shoulder to waist, where it joins a wide black, gray, and red striped cloth belt that secures the top of his knee-length crimson pantaloons. These in turn are decorated with gold embroidery along the sides and bottom. Seamed scarlet hose and striped red shoes complete his costume. Tarquin is dressed in red from the waist down, a solid color relieved only by the brown sole of his shoe and the bare skin of the thigh and knee placed suggestively on the bed between Lucretia’s legs. Gold- and jewel-encrusted clothing indicate his wealth and perhaps vanity; the prevalence of red in Tarquin’s person and clothing might symbolize passion, lust, or rage. In color and expression he recalls the narratives of Livy, where the “flame of lust” was “kindled” in Tarquin, and Ovid, whose prince “caught fire and fury” and “raved” with “senses crazed.” As in other images of rape, Tarquin grabs Lucretia by her raised right forearm in a gesture symbolic of force.86

Titian paints Lucretia in a manner that highlights both her vulnerability and her innocence. Lucretia is smaller, plump, soft, and weeping. As noted earlier, a woman’s hair style can carry symbolic meaning; this Lucretia does not have the disheveled hair of a woman who has already suffered rape. Not even a single reddish blond ringlet escapes from her restrained hairstyle. Instead, Titian has painted the crime in progress and placed Lucretia at the moment of helpless acquiescence. Her tightly controlled coiffure is that of
a patrician wife, and its tidy respectability contrasts sharply with her nakedness and the agitated brush strokes in the darkness above her. Her skin is pearly white and brightly lit. Bits of embroidered translucent white fabric at her shoulder and lap hint that her night clothing (perhaps a camicia) has been forcibly removed. These cloths disappear in the Cort engraving, which contains an opaque hair scarf and the trailing white fabric.

Despite being undressed, Lucretia is adorned with jeweled gold bracelets, earrings, and a single strand pearl necklace. Gold reappears in Lucretia’s earring, where it surrounds a large rectangular greenish-gray blue stone. Although similar in design to the jewels on Tarquin’s sash, Lucretia’s earring is more ornate. Her bracelets are also gold, and contain rectangular cut flat red gemstones alternating with pearls that coordinate with her necklace. Lucretia’s expensive jewelry indicates that she is at least as wealthy as Tarquin, if more restrained in presentation. In Renaissance Italy, a patrician husband provided his wife with jewels to wear as an indication of his family’s wealth and status. Through this adornment she visually represented his honor. In Lucrezia Romana Violata Da Tarquinio Lucretia’s earrings, bracelets, and pearl necklace help establish her status as a married patrician woman. They provide her with the dignity of a matron while emphasizing the connection between her actions and the honor of her husband’s family.

Even more importantly, Titian provided Lucretia with a jeweled gold ring on the third finger of her left hand. This addition is not found in the earlier prints or paintings of Lucretia discussed above. Within the context of the narrative and patrician life in Venice, this is a wedding ring. Francesco Barbaro’s De re uxoria, an influential fifteenth century treatise on marriage that became available in an Italian translation in 1548, describes a wife’s ring as the visible marker for her married state:

It is commensurate with common usage, to pledge [with a ring] upon the wife’s left hand [sposar la moglie nella man sinistra], on the finger next to the little one, in order that a lasting sign of the love she bears her husband might ever be visible to all. The rational for this custom stemmed from the fact that from this finger . . . departs a small nerve that extends to the heart.
In Titian’s *Lucrezia Romana Violata Da Tarquinio* Lucretia wears a ring as described by Barbaro. The ring is more than a symbolic representation of her married status. In Barbaro’s anatomical explication, the ring connects directly to Lucretia’s heart and so defines her status as wife in relation to her emotional and mental investment in the marriage. Viewers familiar with the customs described in *De re uxoria*—a group Barbaro himself describes as “all”—and acquainted with Lucretia’s story, as Titian’s friends and patrons must have been, would read her ring as an indication that she is happily, lovingly, and chastely married. By bracing Lucretia’s left hand against Tarquin’s chest, Titian places the wedding ring in the center of the painting and so emphasizes its importance.

Titian’s use of Lucretia as his subject was not unique. Research into image types found the Roman matron symbolizing chastity and wifely virtue on marriage chests and in emblem books. In addition, both paintings and prints depicted either the rape scene or her suicide. Titian explored both, and his workshop produced a series of paintings taking the rape as their subject. He appropriated the basic composition for *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* from prints by other artists within the type tradition, but made important changes that highlighted Tarquin’s aggression and heightened Lucretia’s marital status.

**Synthetic Iconography (Iconology)**

Panofsky’s third level of meaning, “Iconographical synthesis,” necessitates delving into the cultural principles and situations that made image types and themes resonate among a population. The use of Lucretia, then, becomes a “cultural symptom” whose presence and potential meaning is explored by accessing information about the historical context in which it arose. Iconographical synthesis should create a culturally relevant interpretation for *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio*. The link between Lucretia and chastity makes that ubiquitous female virtue a good starting point.
Women and Chastity

Humanists and Moral Exemplars for Women

To supplement the visual mnemonics offered by images of legendary virtuous women, humanists wrote books as guides to proper behavior. Judging by the number of fifteenth and sixteenth publications aimed at ensuring decorum, literate men were concerned about the virtue of their wives. Among others, the Venetians Giovanni Caldiera (De veneta iconomia), Francesco Barbaro (De re uxoria), and Lodovico Dolce (Dialogo della institution delle Donne); the Florentine Leon Battista Alberti (Della Famiglia); and the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives, authored treatises that repeatedly emphasized the importance of a virtuous wife and tied the honor of her two families directly to her chastity. Humanist authors also indicated that a woman’s virtue should not be presumed. In his influential De institutione feminae Christianae (The Instruction of a Christian Woman), Vives encapsulated the prevailing opinion: “a Woman is a frail thing, and of weak discretion, and . . . may lightly be deceived.” Widespread belief in these unfortunate properties made the wife a questionable conduit for the perpetuation of her husband’s lineage, and perhaps produced an anxiety reflected in the persistent emphasis on chastity.

Chastity

Juan Luis Vives’ The Instruction of a Christian Woman reached the Venetian audience through an Italian adaptation by Titian’s friend Lodovico Dolce in 1545. One passage from Vives illuminates the gender division in Renaissance society:

Many things are necessary to a man: prudence, eloquence, expert skill in governing the Republic, talent, memory, ability and diligence in leading one’s life, justice, liberality, magnanimity and other qualities which would take too long to recount. If any of these are lacking, he should not be reproached since he has some of them. But in a woman one does not look for profound eloquence or subtle intelligence, or exquisite prudence or talent for living or administration of the Republic or justice or anything else except chastity. If this is not found in her it would be as if all the above-
mentioned virtues were lacking in the man, because in a woman this is worth every other excellence.99

This passage makes clear that the code of moral behavior for patrician women differed from that of men. The nobleman possessed so many virtues the absence of a few caused him no harm. In contrast, a woman of worth was defined by only one dominant virtue: chastity.100 A female without chastity lacked the indispensable excellence that defined “patrician woman.”

Chastity itself depended upon the virtues of “modesty, humility, [passive] constancy, and most of all temperance.”101 Taught from childhood to take these virtues to heart, the ideal noblewoman embraced them as her guiding principles. They then made her purity possible. Learning household management from her mother in order to insure domestic harmony for her husband filled a great deal of the young patrician girl’s time.102 In addition, guided reading was thought to combat the harms of idleness while supervision insured against the strains of too much thought and the dangerous effects of unchaste ideas.103 Humble, self-effacing, and obedient, the patrician daughter was taught to oversee a tranquil household and to think always of her father’s and eventually her husband’s happiness. Hers would be a private interior realm of domestic management and child rearing.104

Marriage, Motherhood, and Virtue

In the belief that it would control their potentially dangerous sexuality, Venetian girls were married off to church or husband soon after reaching puberty. While Venetian men married, if at all, when they were in their late twenties, thirties, or even forties, their brides were usually between the ages of eleven and sixteen. In addition, youthful females bent more easily to a husband’s will and provided a tranquil home through recognition of and submission to his authority.105 And given that all Venetian men had the right to physically punish the females under their authority, the behavior of intractable wives and daughters could always be modified by force.106 There is a sense that a family selected a
bride, and then made a wife of her to their specifications. In the words of the Florentine matron Alessandra Strozzi, “a man, when he really is a man, makes a woman a woman,” meaning that he governs and she obeys.

Although the frail nature of the female meant she necessitated much education, governance, and surveillance, her duties and behavior in the home were of paramount importance for the family’s prosperity and well-being. Francesco Barbaro’s De re uxoria affirms that a patrician man married to produce heirs, and selected a bride to bear his children, suckle them, educate them, and provide them with a virtuous role model. The selection of a proper bride made possible the creation of noble and excellent descendants who strengthened the father’s bloodline. An aristocratic mother transmitted her innate virtue—a product of her exalted lineage and proper upbringing—to her children through her blood, her milk, and her guidance in virtuous behavior. Thus, the wife and mother’s virtue was the font from which all else flowed.

Any immodesty in behavior or thought imperiled both virginity and chastity, and danger lurked beyond the doors and windows of the home, and in books, conversation, and even in church. A husband was even cautioned against cultivating a passionate relationship with his wife, lest she become lascivious and be led into temptation. A wife produced heirs; a courtesan, delight. Since girls and women “fell” easily into lascivious behavior, female clothing, conduct, company, and exposure had to be closely monitored and full obedience taught. Silence played a part in this too; as Barbaro put it, “the speech of the noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs.” Speech drew attention that aroused attraction and eroded modesty. Upon her chastity rested a wife’s honor; and on her honor, that of her father’s house, her husband’s house, and even the Republic itself.

Rape and Adultery

While insisting on chastity for their own women, Venetian noblemen joined their less exalted compatriots in regularly assaulting others. Outside the protection of kin
and home, a woman alone in Venice regularly faced the specter of sexual assault. In his study of sex-crime prosecutions in Renaissance Venice, Guido Ruggiero concluded that non-noble women were attacked so frequently that sexual assault became a common, even "normal," event. Unless the girl was underage, the Forty did not consider rape an extremely serious crime and the penalty imposed on the convicted rapist of an unmarried female often involved marriage to his victim. The strongly protected lives of both girls and women in the patrician level of society may have offered them some protection. The prevalence of family homes meant that even with an absent husband, a wife lived surrounded by relations-in-law with a stake in preserving her purity.

If the rape of an unmarried woman led to a long-term sexual relationship, so could the rape of a married woman, and Venetian court records show presumably consensual affairs beginning after an initial violent assault. Without evidence of heroic resistance by the woman and physical violence from the man, the courts were reluctant to declare the crime rape. This held disastrous potential for a noble matron who took Lucretia’s enculturated path of passive resistance against her rapist: she became an adulterous wife instead of a victim.

As seen earlier in Lucretia’s story, a Roman paterfamilias could slay an adulterous female in his bloodline. Only her death removed the stain her actions placed on the families of her father and husband. Although sometimes less fatal to the woman, the legal reaction to illicit sexual behavior in Renaissance Italy was also strong:

Adultery was seen as a serious threat everywhere: at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the criminal statutes of Bologna required that married men or women found guilty of adultery should be executed; Cesena’s statutes insisted at the end of the century on the death penalty for adulterers who eloped. Those of Ferrara allowed adulterous women to be burnt alive. Even in the cities where execution was not required for infidelity, the punishments remained severe: in Sardinia, the penalty was flagellation; in Venice, the man could be imprisoned and exiled, and the woman confined to a nunnery at her husband’s pleasure.
This points out a curious trend. Although the treatises on proper behavior harp on purity and sexual honor, and in Venice even linked the survival of the Serenissima to pure patrician blood and chastity, adultery in Venice was rarely fatal and seldom prosecuted.

In cases of adultery, it was rare for a Venetian noblewoman to be brought to court by her husband, and it happened only when the situation became public and all private attempts to restrain her activities failed. A wife found guilty suffered complete loss of her dowry, imprisonment in jail, and then seclusion in a secure convent. Along with the loss of any power her dowry might have provided, she was cut off from her children, family, friends, and the Venetian world. This was the fate of women brought to trial; it is impossible to know what happened behind the palazzo doors of suspicious husbands and in-laws.

Patricians readily adopted Lucretia as a symbol for virtuous behavior in part because the notions of female license and virtue in Renaissance Italy resembled those in Republican Rome. Chastity reigned as the supreme female virtue, for it helped insure legitimate patrilineal descent. Illicit sexual behavior by noble women was an abomination, and the voluntary or forced nature of a woman's activity mattered little in weighing the outcome: her chaste body violated and her noble blood tainted with impurity. The clearest result of her death was eliminating the possibility of an illegitimate child. If she lived, and thereafter bore a legitimate heir to her husband, the tainted blood of a living adulterous or raped wife weakened the child's nobility and virtue and continued to infect succeeding generations.

What Iconography Offers to Interpretation

As shown above, pictures of Lucretia on marriage chests and in emblem books symbolized virtuous female behavior. Her presence reminded brides and matrons to guard and hold sacred their chastity, the premier virtue defining the patrician woman. This "sanctification" of Chastity developed in an environment where unprotected women were
often victims of sexual violence. In addition, such violence commonly developed from an initial rape into a consensual affair.

Legitimate descent held powerful importance in a patriarchal society that restricted marriage to centralize a family’s power. The purity or impurity of a noblewoman’s blood and virtue were thought to directly benefit or contaminate the bloodline of her husband. To her children she transmitted either her excellence or her degenerate immorality.

Modest, silent, and retiring, the ideal wife managed a tranquil household, raised children conceived passively in duty rather than in passion, and effected her husband’s happiness.

In a painting such as *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquino*, created by an elderly Titian for a King, meaning is less transparent than that found in a modest image from an emblem book or a didactic panel from a *cassone*. As we have seen above, Titian followed an image tradition that at times blatantly exposed Lucretia’s body and invited a visual trespass that paralleled the physical violation of Tarquin or knife. However the Cambridge painting displayed flesh less blatantly. By adopting and merging earlier image types, Titian angled Lucretia into the picture plane while cloaking her breasts with a protesting arm and her pubic area with cloth. This allowed her some modesty in relation to the painting’s external viewer.

This is a brutal painting of a violent theme, created in an atmosphere where chastity was a patrician woman’s supreme virtue and rape a likely possibility if she left her home unprotected and unaccompanied. Titian heightened the pathos of Lucretia by transforming her from Roman wife into a patrician matron with its component character traits: modest, silent, and passive. In addition, Lucretia’s hairstyle and jewelry highlight her married state, a status further emphasized by Titian’s inclusion of her wedding ring and its central placement in the composition. The traditional linkage of ring and heart implies her marriage is a happy one. Her tears, graceless sprawl, and distressed expression reinforce her anguish. This is not a scene of willing complicity.

Yet the image is more complicated than this, for following the narrative in Livy and Ovid, Lucretia neither fought nor screamed for help. Like a lamb before a ravening
wolf: she trembled in silent terror and prepared to die rather than yield. Then the Prince threatened to stain her family's honor with a false accusation of base adultery . . . and she consented. In the world of Renaissance Venice, this made her an adulteress. Titian underscored this with his inclusion and placement of the third figure: the eagerly watching accomplice who leans over the bed behind Tarquin. In the Master L. D.'s print (Figure 2.9), this figure appeared in military garb, indicating a dual role as Tarquin's companion or servant-slave. In contrast, Titian's internal spectator is neither armed nor dressed in a way that clearly makes him a companion-at-arms. This allows the second man to read more clearly as the slave used in Tarquin's ultimate threat, and so reminds viewers why Lucretia yielded. Consequently, the internal spectator reinforces her innocence and emphasizes the beauty of her virtuous soul, for she yields her body in order to control her reputation and so preserve her family's honor. Titian has created a composition that shows the violent destruction of the defining virtue for noble women, chastity. He increases viewer involvement by juxtaposing the themes of violence and chastity, rape and passive consent. The dark echo of Lucretia's eventual suicide runs through this painting, for only her death halts the imagined progression, familiar to the painting's original Venetian audience, of rape to active adultery.

Other Interpretations

During the creation of a deeper synthetic iconographical interpretation, Panofsky recommends checking results against the "tradition." Two conflicting meanings are currently attached to Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio, and they fall along the guilt line. Some critics and historians view the painting as a titillating exhibition of adulterous female flesh, and others read it as a brutal expression of human pathos. The first camp is led by Norman Bryson, the second ably defended by Rona Goffen.

In his limited iconographic interpretation Bryson determines "the painting is, in fact, a conundrum: we seem to be seeing two separate iconographic subjects superimposed—a man who rapes, and a woman who seduces."122 Bryson begins his
discussion by reviewing the classical story. This supports his reading of Tarquin as a rapist, an interpretation he expands with reference to Venetian noblemen's propensity toward rape. Looking at the painting, he sees in Titian's Tarquin "an act of force, of creatural violation,"123 which is a rather odd way to say, or rather not say, that Tarquin rapes Lucretia. Bryson then reviews Augustine's verdict that Lucretia was a self-murdering adulteress who found pleasure in the rape. Having considered the literary tradition in good, if limited, Panofskyian tradition, Bryson uses the Saint's plaint: how can she be raped if she gave consent, to structure his investigation of the painting Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio.

Bryson reads the presence of the second man as a sign for the ultimate "base adultery" threat, signaling Lucretia's present or imminent consent.124 For Bryson, this transforms the scene into one of adultery. The abbreviated presentation focuses attention on the bed, decontextualizes the narrative moment, and works with Lucretia's seductive nudity to highlight her sexuality.125 Bryson concludes his argument by comparing Titian's painting to a later Florentine work featuring a smiling Lucretia. He finds in both women a seductress bearing traces of "Augustine's smile of secondary and involuntary consent." Bryson reads this as reassuring, since "despite every appearance to the contrary she is after all like him, like us."126

For Rona Goffen Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio presents a "wrenching scene of sexual violence [which] permits no doubt whatsoever about Lucretia's innocence, Tarquin's culpability, or the nature of his crime."127 Here the painter's combination of violence and nudity transforms a postulated viewer's lustful response to naked female flesh into compassion for her plight. Goffen's most recent interpretation occurs in a book devoted to Titian's paintings of women, and this provides greater scope for a thorough investigation into the historical context of women in Renaissance Venice. She also undertakes a literary source review, as well as an accurate survey of Titian's print sources and the related paintings of Lucretia produced by the painter and his workshop. She comes closer than Bryson to rebuilding a contextualized meaning for Lucrezia Romana.
**Violata da Tarquinio**, one grounded in history and the painting itself as well as in important iconographic texts. In this way Goffen nears Panofsky's ideal of a synthetic iconographical interpretation that reveals the cultural attitudes as filtered by the individual artist.

Two conflicting interpretations: one shallowly conceived yet dual in nature, the other deeply grounded but closed. Neither effectively discounts the possibility of the other. Goffen's contextually aware iconographic interpretation comes closest to the one we developed above, but can Bryson's reading be discounted completely? In his stress on the importance of the written word, and its resultant denigration of visual evidence, Bryson overlooks the visual evidence offered by the painting he discusses. Similarly, although Goffen uses colors and descriptions from the painting to support her point of view, she does not take the formal analysis deeply enough to allow the painting's own evidence to speak. The following sections correct this oversight. After a brief review of key Lacanian concepts related to Gaze theory and painting, attention turns toward a close reading of *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* as a constructed image and painted surface. In turn, the evidence offered by the painting will serve as the springboard for the application of an expanded Gaze theory.

**Lacanian Psychoanalytic Gaze**

A First View of the Lacanian Gaze

The "classic" version of Lacanian Gaze Theory as first used by Feminist film critics conflated the look and the Gaze, then linked the result to the power position assumed by men in patriarchal society. Mid-century Hollywood movies formed the primary focus of these early studies, and the method used was inflexible in its polarized linkage of predefined gender and sex. "Masculine" traits of power, action, and active looking were always associated with the film's male characters; and the "feminine" traits of objectified powerlessness, inactivity, and passivity were associated with the female characters. In this duality, interpretations found that male audience members, as masculine active viewing
subjects of desire, received pleasure in looking/Gazing at women as passive sexual objects. Female viewers in turn had the choice of assuming—and it was an assumption, since only men really had the masculine power to define—this objectifying male position in relation to other women, or of finding pleasure in seeing themselves in, and identifying themselves with, the passive, powerless, non-subject: the woman-as-object.

A reading of Titian’s *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* produced by this system would subordinate formal and expressional elements in favor of iconographic components supporting an ideology of exploitation. The painting is ripe for such use since it was created by a man, for the pleasure of another man, and takes as its primary subject matter the sexually motivated destruction of a powerless woman. Several interpretations might be supported: (1) the painting allows male viewers to identify with Tarquin and vicariously rape a woman; (2) the painting endorses sexual violence and perpetrates the myth that women desire rape by showing a “seductive” Lucretia whose “no” meant “yes”; or (3) the painting invites male viewers to identify with the second man and so achieve pleasure in watching the brutality. These interpretations leave no room for any but the most masochistic female viewer. In each case, the painting functions as brutal pornography.

Interpretations like these disregard Lacan’s affirmation that to be a human subject is to be spectacle. We are all objects for the Gaze, which within the Symbolic defines us as subjects using the definitions of a culturally specific *a priori* screen. The film studies mentioned above relied upon the similarity between the contemporary and mid-century United States. They used the current cultural environment as the screen with which to study in simplified form the gendering of male and female in the films they discussed. This does not address the question of an acculturated viewpoint. Can a contemporary viewer access the screen of a different period or culture, as an iconographic interpretation attempts to do? Can an interpretation produced by Gaze theory show sensitivity to painted expression and viewer empathy? What happens when the focus of Gaze theory is turned from the seamless surface of a cinema screen and onto the textured surface of a
painting? A brief review of how the Lacanian Gaze relates to representational painting will help answer these questions.

Mimicry, Painting, and the Gaze

According to Lacan, mimicry operates in the land between “being and semblance,” and involves a break between the subject’s self and the Imaginary “paper tiger” the ego uses in identity and masquerade. In a sense, this dependence upon masks began with the development of the ideal-ego during the Mirror-stage. Since this early Imaginary identification predated the subject’s complete entry into the Symbolic, it was free from the fixed gender-linked positioning as a sexed being subsequently established in the internal ego-ideal. This means that on the external cultural screen, subjects can play with both masculine and feminine positions, and the attributes of either might be available as the subject weaves camouflage for itself with pieces from the cultural screen. Lacan identified masculine and feminine as two important masks that function as lure and shield to attract sexual attention and/or to protect the subject from the Gaze. Although limited, this ability to play with self representation allows the human subject to inscribe himself onto the opaque screen rather than simply to be captured and defined within it. In Lacan’s words, “He isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the Gaze.” By temporarily disarming the Gaze, mimicry allows the screen to function as “the locus of mediation” between the subject and the Gaze whose presence enforces cultural proscriptions.

Representational painting functions like mimicry and operates in the land between being and semblance. Indeed, Lacan goes so far as to say painting invites the viewer to “lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons.” In figural painting, this happens for several interconnected reasons. The painting encapsulates the Gaze as “the presence of others as such,” for in seeing the painting as painting we become aware we see from another point of view. When we confront the illusion as viewers, we are faced with challenges to our own subject-based assumption of visual authority. The painter,
too, presumes to take the position of defining Gaze in the creation of a painting. Even the figures in the painting might simulate the possession of the cultural Gaze. There are so many layers of presumed Gazes, of false Gazes; while behind the painting, and outside the confines of the Imaginary and Symbolic, awaits the Real Gaze, the Gaze as objet a for the scopic drive. This Gaze, the true Lacanian Gaze, is also in the painting, and traces of its presence provide painting with its satiating power.\(^{130}\)

In the picture something of the gaze is always manifested. The painter knows this very well—his morality, his search, his quest, his practice is that he should sustain and vary the selection of a certain kind of gaze. Looking at pictures... you will see in the end, as in filigree, something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze.\(^{131}\)

It is this “filigree,” made up of autographic gestural marks of paint which “fall like rain from the painter’s brush,” that encodes within the work both the painter’s individuality and his or her defining actions of seeing and creating. The gestures combine to provide an “impression,” which seems for Lacan to be an immediate emotional response evoked by the work. Furthermore, Lacan’s use of rain as an analogy for painting points to the non-Symbolic nature of the painter’s creative act. While the forms and images might function iconographically to create masks and meanings within a particular societal context, they are woven from a brush-stroke fabric whose creation is, itself, beyond the grasp of word and conscious thought. This highlights the painting’s peculiar power. By offering the illusion of totality it satiates the seeing eye; yet it also contains excess, marks of creation, that both dissolve the illusion and bear traces of the painter’s desire and of his or her search for the objet a, for the Gaze.

When realistic painting functions like masquerade and camouflage, the work presents a semblance of visual reality. On an obvious level, it mimics environments familiar to us, yet it is flat. We see, but what we see is not what it appears to be. Instead, “the picture is the appearance that says it is that which gives the appearance.”\(^{132}\) It plays with look, Gaze, and screen, functioning as a mediation between the eye of the looking individual subject, and the defining cultural Gaze. The next section will focus on the appearance offered by Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio. The resultant descriptive
analysis will consider the painting both as a constructed image and as a textured screen built up bit by bit, as paint “fell like rain” from the painter’s brush.

Nuanced Gaze

The Paintedness of the Painting: Visual and Compositional Considerations

In repeated visits to the painting, the central placement of Lucretia’s left forearm and the vibrant contrast between its warm pearly white and the surrounding cool dark of the shadowed bed curtains captured my attention. This area contains the most dramatic contrast in the painting. From her arm, my eyes followed a flowing line through the ringed hand she braces against Tarquin’s shoulder, across his chest, and up his raised arm to the fist clenching his dagger hilt. The glinting blade points back to the right, creating an implied line that skirts the top of his head and meets the graceful curve of Lucretia’s lifted fingers. Then my eyes plunged down the widening arc of her body, down the cascade of leg and fabric to the floor; and then back up again through the parallel movement of Tarquin’s red legs to his breeches. The darker arc of his torso led me back to her left forearm and ringed hand, where my eyes began again the clockwise spiral over the canvas. Although I kept returning to Lucretia’s arm and face, the lines of movement packed into this painting would not allow my eyes to fall still.

The painting contains a fairly shallow space focused upon the bed. Areas closest to the external viewer include Tarquin’s right side, shoulder, and knife-arm; as well as his pelvis and legs (excepting his right knee, which rests on the bed). Only the lower part of Lucretia’s left leg falls clearly in this space, and her left arm hovers in the division between bed and foreground. This arrangement creates a spatial link between the external viewer and Tarquin, whose body and violence form a barrier between us and the bare female flesh. Spatially, the fist in which Tarquin clenches the dagger hilt comes closest to us. Titian then contradicts this spatial orientation through a manipulation of paint and value contrast. He makes Lucretia’s body and especially her left arm appear closer to us. This
visually reinforces her married status and links us once again with victim rather than aggressor.

The action roughly divides along a diagonal from the upper right to the lower left corner. Tarquin's body and actions fill the upper left, pushing down on the lower triangle occupied by Lucretia's bed and body. A separation of key and color parallels this division of action. The left triangle contains most of the painting's darks and saturated colors, which contrast with the lower right's white sheets and pearly illuminated flesh. Viewing the painting from the left and right angles (especially the latter) seems to enhance the violent motion pressing down on Lucretia. The manner in which Titian painted the two protagonists increases the psychological separation. Difference in handling provides Lucretia with solidity and subliminally separates her from the rougher surfaces used to depict Tarquin and the bedroom environment. The technical virtuosity visible in his doublet, where the painter created the delicate interlaced gold pattern by dabbing highlights over long linear strokes, resulted in a highly broken and deeply fractured surface. The thickly textured brushstrokes on the dagger hilt and the rough surface of Tarquin's right leg also emphasize painted marks and track the presence of the artist at work. These areas function ambiguously, for they suggest that Titian responded differently when painting Tarquin than he did with Lucretia. The broken surfaces on Tarquin undermine the mask and reinforce the paintedness of his figure. As places where the artist's presence is most visible, they suggest an internal agitation over Tarquin and his actions.

Light and dark dramatize the scene and fall diagonally across the canvas, with Lucretia and the lower right portion intensely illuminated. Only strategic portions of Tarquin—such as the glinting knife-edge and the circular folds into which his bare arm disappears—are as brightly lit. The light illuminating the action within the painting comes from the external viewer's space. It angles down on Tarquin, darkens the front of his body, and casts a shadow over Lucretia that repeats the direction of his forward movement. An area of dark extends from the second man's torso, through Tarquin's hips
and torso, to his left shoulder, and up past her raised palm to the right corner of the painting. From there, the dark extends down to where Lucretia’s shadow darkens the bed pillow. This emphasizes the sweeping movement up and over the canvas, then down upon and through Lucretia.

Although strong light strikes Lucretia’s bed linen, it modulates when it reaches Lucretia: edges of shadows soften, darks lighten, and contrasts decrease. This makes her flesh glow. With the exception of her spot-lit forearms, light appears to seep from rather than strike Lucretia. A lighter area on the shadowed underside of Tarquin’s knife-arm, too low to be struck by the light source, even appears to be light reflected from her body.

The paint on Lucretia’s face looks polished, thick and smooth, with little or no visible canvas texture. This careful handling calls attention to and emphasizes the importance of her face. The treatment is repeated to a lesser extent in her arms and hands. This care allowed Titian to create bluish indentations where Tarquin’s fingers sink into Lucretia’s arm. Reflections of Lucretia’s single-strand pearl necklace are visible on her skin. The pearls resemble her tears, which fall from both sides of her eyes and can be found as far down as her chin.

Titian’s organization of the bed reinforces the violence of the composition. Coming into Lucretia from the right at hip and thigh, the horizontal lines of mattresses and pillows tend to push her groin toward Tarquin’s raised knee. The top pillow’s faint pink trim dimly echoes the red of his pants, sandwiching her between man and bed. The emphatic clarity between mattress levels on the lower right is not continued on the left. There is only the suggestion of a split, lost in the shadows under Tarquin’s raised right calf and foot. The bed appears to tilt up underneath Lucretia, for the green covered bed area on the left, which has no weight pressing down upon its surface, is lower than the area bearing her weight. This elevation of Lucretia reinforces her trapped status.
Looks Within the Painting

The watching figure shows very cursory paint handling. Smoothly applied thick paint describes his face, which contains no detail. His line of sight moves from the shadow of his cheekbones to the bottom of the raised curtain to Lucretia’s eyes. A dabbed decoration covers his shoulders, and he wears a turban-like cloth hat. His rolled-up sleeve echoes Tarquin’s. In their simplification, his left arm and hand resemble a claw holding up the fabric. Although he is not dressed like Tarquin, enough similarity exists to complicate an attempt to classify him as a slave or servant. In addition, the great size difference between the two men indicates a distance larger than that of a single bed, suggesting that the action takes place on Lucretia’s marriage bed.

Because of the abbreviated paint handling and lack of descriptive detail used to describe the second man, he forms an area of painterly trace where the representational illusion clearly breaks down. In consequence, he complicates the painting greatly and takes on multiple meanings. As noted before, Master L. D.’s Tarquin and Lucretia (Figure 2.9) contained an armed man who functioned as either Tarquin’s companion or a slave. As a slave, he symbolized the threat of base adultery, which forced Lucretia’s capitulation to a violation of her body’s chastity. Whether comrade or slave, in the print he appeared indifferent to Lucretia’s plight. Titian provides us with a more ambiguous figure, and the complications begin with his ambivalent posture. In the painting there is no indication that this second man intends to stop the rape, yet he moves closer to the action. He watches, even lifting the curtain aside and crawling onto the bed to obtain a closer look at the unfolding action.

Less clearly a soldier or a servant, and certainly more involved than the spear-bearer in the Master L. D.’s print, Titian’s internal viewer might also represent the presence of society in general, and the active spreading of rumor that results in the destruction of reputation. This suggests that Lucretia would not be able to hide the rape, nor answer charges of adultery. And finally, the spectator in the shadows parallels the painting’s external viewer and reinforces the problem set forth by Titian: does the viewer
sympathize with Lucretia, and so read a violent story about a woman’s destruction, or does the viewer mentally take Tarquin’s place, delighting in the sexual domination of a previously unobtainable but now adulterous woman? If we see the spectator as a representative of a patriarchal Gaze who reminds viewers that even as they look, they are seen, this question takes on added urgency. In the moment painted, he looks with deeply shadowed eyes directly at Lucretia’s face, directing our attention to the distress so clearly represented there.

Lucretia does not look out toward us as viewers to invite our participation, nor does she register the existence of the internal spectator. Instead, Lucretia looks straight at Tarquin. She confronts him eye to eye, subject to subject. The impotence of her look registers yet again her helplessness in the face of Tarquin’s brutality. Moreover, what of Tarquin? This is the most unusual aspect: he directs a white-eyed glare over her head and out the right side of the painting. His rigid stare denies her status as a singular human subject; he rapes her but does not see her. This adds a twist to the use of Gaze theory in interpreting the painting. If he is not seeing her, Tarquin cannot be assuming the position of Gaze in relation to Lucretia.

Where do we stand as viewers of the drama? Titian painted the top of the bed and the bottom of Tarquin’s knife-wielding right arm, indicating that his postulated external viewer looks down onto the first and up toward the second. This places our eye level somewhere in the center of the canvas and above our internal counterpart, but below Tarquin. Since we can see the top of Tarquin’s left sleeve and not the underside of Lucretia’s chin, I estimate the painted viewer’s eyes to be level with Lucretia’s ringed hand—and her tear filled eyes. We are meant to sympathize with her plight.

The manipulation of viewer positioning and the interaction of looks within the painting reinforce such a reading. Viewers who identify with the looming rapist or the curious bystander ignore the subliminal signal provided by the location of the postulated viewer’s eye level. As viewers of the painting’s narrative, we are not given the distance provided by looking down (active rapist) or up (passive spectator). Our role is not
predetermined. Instead, Titian constructed the action so that the ideal viewer’s eye level is the victim’s eye level. When we look at the painting, this reinforces Lucretia’s humanity—she is our equal.

Titian’s signature offers a final rupture to the mask created by the representational illusion of the painted surface. In the lower right corner of the painting are two slippers, one of which bears “TITIANUS F” in clearly legible, red block letters. Since “F” represented the Latin word “facere” (“to make”), Titian has deliberately placed the ultimate marker for his presence as creative painter—his signed name—on the insole of Lucretia’s slipper.\(^{135}\) The familiarity inherent in placing a signature on an item of clothing suggests a linkage between the painter and Lucretia that is further nuanced by the symbolism associated with footwear and unclothed feet. In Renaissance Venice, the shoe or slipper held sexual connotations even as the bared foot signified shame, dishonor, and disgrace.\(^{136}\) Since Tarquin’s shod feet contrast with Lucretia’s bare ones, the painting clearly links the sexual shame to Lucretia. In addition, the angle of the sole, and thus of the inscription, repeats the line of Lucretia’s prominent left foot and visually connects Lucretia, the slipper, and the artist. Although both slippers lack heels, the one bearing the signature angles up from the floor in order to create the needed space. Further, the low placement of the signature implies that elderly Titian had to stoop to touch the slipper, an act indicative of humility. In sum, the careful placement of “TITIANUS F” suggests that Tarquin’s sexual attack brought shame upon Lucretia, that Titian felt a connection to Lucretia, and that he responded to her situation with sympathy and humility. This reinforces Lucretia’s virtuous and noble character, for the painter—and by extension the external viewer—would be unlikely to bend in humbleness before an adulterous woman.

**Summary**

Internally, the painting’s whole composition reflects the rushing, uncontrolled surge of Tarquin’s fatal movement toward the more fragile Lucretia. The direction of the glinting knife’s blade, threateningly brandished high above her head by a bared arm,
pushes her downward even while the bent bare knee of his raised right leg forces the bed
clothes upward between her spread legs. The white pillows and bed linens thwart her
retreat and trap Lucretia between Tarquin and her bed. Only her right hand escapes the
force of Tarquin’s arrival. But even this relief is blocked, for he grabs her forearm in the
traditional medieval symbol for the act of rape. Weeping, Lucretia stares wide-eyed at
Tarquin and presses in futile resistance against his chest with her left hand. This centers
her wedding ring and brings it into vertical alignment with Tarquin’s suggestive knee. The
ring sits on her finger at an odd angle, suggesting it may fall off in the attack.

The action takes place on and around a canopied bed which is raised as if to spill
the action out toward the viewer. Above and behind the bed, green curtains hang in heavy
diagonal and scalloped folds. This dark fabric acts like a claustrophobic stage set,
focusing attention down onto the bed and intensifying the red of Tarquin’s clothing. Only
a shallow stretch of wooden floor separates the viewer from the action. Light strikes the
bed surface around Lucretia as she moves back toward the pillows and away from
Tarquin. The contrast between her light skin and the surrounding darkness visually pushes
her left arm with its ringed hand toward the viewer. Central placement of that hand
emphasizes the importance of her wedding ring. A married woman is being attacked.

The postures, paint handling, and clashing colors within the painting intensify a
feeling of violence and agitation. Tarquin’s hostile posture and forward movement up and
over Lucretia reinforces this, and his aggression combines with the painting’s shallow
space, dramatic key contrasts, and lines of movement, to create a feeling of claustrophobia
centered upon Lucretia. The paint handling, composition, action, and setting reinforce the
violence. From the darkness on the viewer’s left a second man, made smaller by his
distance from us, lifts the bed curtain to enter from the left edge of the painting. As we
mirror this figure’s position, Lucretia is cornered by a trio of intruders: rapist, internal
spectator, and the viewer. Trapped and unable to escape, she pushes against Tarquin in
resistance as she weeps. In this painting, rape is a brutal act against a person as subject.
This reading, produced by a Gaze theory modified to take into consideration the painting’s own evidence, coordinates with the interpretation produced by our earlier Iconographical investigation. In sixteenth-century Venice, aristocratic males and females had proscribed roles in society. Through words, images, and deeds men sought to mold their women into “proper” wives: chaste, dutiful, and obedient. The stress placed on chastity reflected an underlying anxiety about family honor and the continuation of a patrilineage. On a married woman’s integrity—her chastity—rested the good name of her father’s family as well as the honor of her husband and children. It is in this context that Lucretia functioned as an exemplar of wifely excellence. Her behavior was held up as an ideal to be emulated by the Venetian wife.

The conclusion reached by a nuanced Gaze theory, however, goes farther than this. Expanded Gaze theory emphasizes Lucretia’s trapped and heroic status in a way that synthetic iconography alone cannot. As we have seen, Titian painted a deeply distressed Lucretia. He reinforced her purity, and perhaps the beauty of her soul, by painting her body glowing with light and her tears as liquid pearls. Although Tarquin is aggressively painted with thrusting limbs clothed in flaming colors, he does not overpower the glowing brilliance of Lucretia. Indeed, visually her body is actually closer to the viewer than Tarquin, despite their relative positions in painted space. The composition further manipulates how we see by establishing where we stand in relation to the work’s painted space. We do not loom over Lucretia as Tarquin, or peer up at her like the spectator. Instead, we are positioned to share Lucretia’s eye level. This makes her our equal and subliminally increases our sympathy for her plight. As we have seen, the artist’s signature supports this response, for Titian placed it in a location that both implies humility on the part of the artist as the painting’s original viewer, and suggests sympathy for Lucretia.

It would be easier for an external viewer to read adulterous complicity if Tarquin and Lucretia exchanged looks. Given the cultural context in which the painting was produced, this would empower Tarquin with a defining “Gaze” in relation to Lucretia. Instead, the painting shows Tarquin glaring out and away from Lucretia, even as the
composition itself reinforces the violence of his attack on her body and soul. In contrast, Lucretia’s status as an individual subject is reinforced, for with a level look she confronts the rapist face to face. This split in attention creates a division between the main characters that reinforces her resistance and works against reading the two as a couple united in adultery.

And what might a Venetian woman have learned from Lucretia’s story, had she viewed the painting? That by definition, she is “given-to-be-seen” as chaste. Her value and existence as daughter, as wife, and as mother depended upon this. Without chastity, she was nothing, no thing, she fell outside the parameters established by her cultural screen. In addition, her status as chaste depended upon the power of words and of reputation; the truth of her own integrity would matter little in the face of an opposing public opinion. And what of the intended viewers, the nobles and patrician men who exhibited such concern for the chastity of their own female kin; how might they have viewed the painting? They would have seen not an isolated representation of brutality, but a moment in a familiar narrative concerning themes they held important. If such a viewer responded with pleasure to Lucretia’s innocent body and tearstained face, he faced a moral dilemma. How could he identify with the internal spectator, and find titillating the violation of a woman held up to his mother, sisters, wife, and daughters as a model of female virtue? Or with Tarquin, who violated customs of hospitality, broke kinship laws, and endangered another man’s lineage through the violation of his property? This quandary is furthered by the agitated lines of movement that reinforce the painting’s sense of violence and keep the viewer’s eye constantly moving over the surface, and by the broken painterly surface on both male figures. Titian allows no resting place, no easy resolution. Ultimately, a viewer sensitive to the painting’s nuances would find himself in sympathy with a vulnerable woman heroically meeting death eye to eye. That is the interpretation supported by an expanded Gaze theory, and it shows the Lacanian Gaze in action, functioning as “the presence of others as such,” and marking the locus of intersection between the symbolic and the field of vision.
Evaluation of the “Test Case”

The initial Iconographic discussion implemented what Panofsky referred to as “iconography in the narrow sense” and provided us with a general background on the artist and the context in which he painted *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio*. This included a consideration of how contemporaries viewed Titian’s paintings, the textual sources for his subject, and the tradition of motifs and types he drew on in creating the painting. As we have seen, Titian not only developed three versions of the iconographic type found in the Cambridge painting, he also appropriated basic compositional structures from the prints produced by Heinrich Aldegrever and the Master L. D. Comparisons with the print sources and the Bordeaux and Vienna paintings by Titian and his workshop illuminated several elements unique to the *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio*. Among these are the multivalent function of the internal watcher and Lucretia’s centrally placed wedding ring. However, although it is important for constructing the basic interpretive framework, the iconographic investigation did not provide guides for filtering information and linking it to a human context. Nor was the painting itself consulted for anything other than the most general evidence.

In our second stage of Iconography, which Panofsky labels “synthetic,” we began coordinating Iconographic evidence already accumulated with the social context of Renaissance Venice. This allowed us to see how the theme of Lucretia functioned as a “cultural symptom” in a society where sexual violence against women was common and chastity held up as an ideal. Our culturally relevant interpretation was then compared to that produced by two historians and conflicts arose. None of the investigations consulted the actual painting in great depth, nor did they accurately, if at all, consider the interaction of gazes within the painting or Titian’s positioning of the external viewer. In addition, by treating the painting as a seamless “image” rather than a textural network of brushstrokes, iconographic interpretation tends to overlook the painterly qualities of the painting.
Unfiltered Gaze theory produced a polarized reading that reflected the power relationships within the painting: Tarquin is triumphant, Lucretia is passive prey, a reading already proposed in Ovid's narrative. Neither the cultural context relevant to the painting's creation nor Iconography contributed to the reading. Once again the painted nature of the work was overlooked, and except for the gendered position and actions of its figures, the painting contributed little to the interpretation. A number of questions arose, suggesting the possibility of a nuanced Gaze.

The initial development of a modified gaze theory allowed us to consider several things of importance in gaining depth of interpretation. We studied how glances within the painting helped structure meaning, where the artist placed his postulated external viewer, and what paint handling and composition suggested about the individual artist's viewpoint. Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio was found to be a painting that uses brutal subject matter to evoke sympathy and protestations from the viewer. Titian's handling of paint and composition reinforced both Tarquin's violence and Lucretia's trapped status. The artist manipulated motifs in the painting to place the external viewer between spectator and rapist, built visual connections between us and Lucretia while separating her from Tarquin, and heightened Lucretia's nobility and pain. Elderly Titian labored over and thought about this work, writing to Philip II that this painting required more invention, ingenuity, and effort than anything he had created in years. The result epitomizes Ludovico Dolce’s description of how an artist should manipulate the external gestures and expressions within his composition in order to communicate thoughts and emotions—"the secrets of the heart"—to sensitive and empathetic viewers. Indeed, although produced for male viewers by a male artist in a highly patriarchal society, it might be argued that the painting takes as its overarching theme the pathos of human female existence in Renaissance Italy.
Figure 2.1: Titian, *Lucrezia Romana Violata Da Tarquinio*, ca. 1568-1571, oil on canvas, 1.889 x 1.454 meters. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge England.

Figure 2.2: Hans Burgkmair, _Lucretia, Verturia, and Virginia_ (from _The Eighteen Worthies_), 1519, woodcut, 7 7/8 x 5 1/8 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Source: Russell, _Eva/Ave_, cat. no. 1, 36.
Figure 2.3: Botticelli, History of Lucretia, ca. 1500, painted panel. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Source: Goffen, Titian's Women, 194, fig. 110.
Figure 2.4: Titian, *Lucretia*, ca. 1520, oil paint on canvas, .952 x .622 meters, enlarged to 1.086 x .635 meters. Hampton Court Palace, Royal Collection, England.

Source: Goffen, *Titian’s Women*, 200, fig. 112, as *Death of Lucretia*, ca. 1525.
Figure 2.5: Marcantonio Raimondi (after Raphael), Lucretia, ca. 1508-1511, engraving, 217 x 133 millimeters. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

Figure 2.6: Titian or Palma il Vecchio, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, ca. 1525, oil on panel, .84 x .68 meters. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Figure 2.7: Heinrich Aldegrever, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, 1539, engraving, 5 x 3 1/16 inches.

Source: Jaffé and Groen, “Titian’s *Tarquin and Lucretia* at the Fitzwilliam Museum,” 163, fig. no. 15.
Figure 2.8: Heinrich Aldegrever, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, 1553, engraving, 11 x 5.7 centimeters.

Source: Jaffé and Groen, “Titian’s *Tarquin and Lucretia* at the Fitzwilliam Museum,” 163, fig. no. 14.
Figure 2.9: Master L. D, Tarquin and Lucretia, before 1547, etching.

Source: Jaffé and Groen, “Titian’s Tarquin and Lucretia at the Fitzwilliam Museum,” 164, fig. 16.
Figure 2.10: Titian’s workshop, Tarquin and Lucretia, ca. 1570, oil on canvas, 1.93 x 1.43 meters. Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

Figure 2.11: Titian or Titian’s workshop, Tarquin and Lucretia, ca. 1575, oil on canvas, 1.14 x 1 meters. Vienna, Akademie der Bildenden Künste.

Source: Goffen, Titian’s Women, 210, fig. 121, as Rape of Lucretia (Tarquin and Lucretia), ca. 1570-76.
Figure 2.12: Cornelius Cort (after Titian), Tarquin and Lucretia, 1571 or 1572, engraving, 370 x 265 millimeters. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England.

Source: Jaffé and Groen, “Titian’s Tarquin and Lucretia at the Fitzwilliam Museum,” 164, fig. 17.
Notes


2 Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 2; and Bruce Cole, “Titian: An Introduction,” in Carlo Ridolfi, The Life of Titian, ed. Julia Conaway Bondanella et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1996), 2 [hereafter, Ridolfi, Life of Titian]. Panofsky points out that Vecelli originally spelled the family name “Guecelli.” The Vecelli were important aristocrats in their home town of Pieve di Cadore, a small town seventy-five miles north of Venice in present day Italy’s Veneto region. Located in the Dolomite mountains, Pieve di Cadore was the principle city in an area poor in farm land but rich in lumber and ore. The local people could grow only a fourth of the grain they needed, for their land was more suited to mining and forestry than agriculture. Importation, storage, and distribution of grain was necessary for the survival of the people of Pieve di Cadore, and the men who supervised the grain storage and inspected the mines held respected, honored, and vitally important positions. Titian’s father, Gregorio di Conte Vecelli, at various times held both offices in addition to captaining the local militia (Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 2; Cole, “Titian,” 2; Ridolfi, Life of Titian, 58, n. 4; Rosand, Titian, 13; Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 1-2).

3 See Cole, “Titian,” 2; Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 3; Rosand, Titian, 14. In the late 1400s Gentile (ca. 1429-1507) and Giovanni (ca. 1430-1516) Bellini turned the workshop begun by their father Jacopo (fl. 1424-1470) into the leading Venetian painting studio. Titian and Giorgione (with whom Titian worked closely in the early 1500s) became major innovators in the still fairly new process of oil painting, and developed influential painting methods that continued to be used for centuries. See Arthur Steinberg, “Blurred Boundaries, Opulent Nature, and Sensuous Flesh: Changing Technological Styles in Venetian Painting, 1480-1520,” in Manca, Titian 500, 2010.

4 This is discussed in the text below.

5 Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Artist, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Classics, 1965), 462. Vasari ends his discussion of Titian with a statement that both praises and derides: “Titian deserves to be loved and respected by all artists because he
produced so many admirable works of art prolonging his memory” (Jody Robin Shiffman, “Artistic Liscense”: Titian in the works of Vasari and Ridolfi,” in Ridolfi, Life of Titian, 47). For Vasari on Titian, see Lives of the Artists, 443-462.

As described by Ridolfi, “The King was eager to see in person this remarkable man of whom fame had spread word even to the North; accompanied by the Dukes of Ferrara, Mantua and Urbino, he spent some time with Titian” (Life of Titian, 135). For more information on how contemporary Venetians viewed Titian’s painting, see Lionel Puppi “Titian in the Critical Judgment of his Time,” in Titian: Prince of Painters, ed. Susanna Biadene and Mary Yakush, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (Munich: Prestel, 1990), 53-56.

They were fleeing the 1527 Sack of Rome. The sculptor and architect Sansovino (Jacopo Tatti; d. 1570) eventually designed the Piazza of San Marco. Wethey reports that Pietro Aretino (d. 1556) engaged in “political machinations that gave him the reputation of a scoundrel,” and Panofsky calls him “the most controversial of all controversial characters.” Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 9; Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 94; and Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 9.

See Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 9; for Titian’s correspondence, see Giorgio Padoan, “Titian’s Letters.” in Titian: Prince of Painters, 46-51; for the relationship between painters and writers in 16th-century Venice, see Ibid., 43-45; for Titian and Aretino, see also Vasari, Lives of the Artist, 165.

The scholar and bibliophile Diego Hurtado y Mendoza amassed a collection that included Greek, Arabic, and Latin manuscripts and eventually became the heart of the Escorial library. He served as ambassador from the imperial court to Venice between 1539 and 1546. Extensive knowledge of Latin was usual for the cultured elite of 16th-century Italy, and Dolce’s mastery of Greek marked him as a “truly learned” scholar. Other humanists of note entertained by Titian at his “Casa Grande” were Jacopo Nardi, a historian from Florence who translated Livy, the writer and satirist Pietro Aretino, and the sculptor and architect Jacopo Sansovino. “Casa Grande” is a description by contemporary Francesco Priscianese, a grammarian from Tuscany who also visited Titian’s home. For information on Titian’s circle, see David Rosand, “Ut Pictor Poeta: Meaning in Titian’s ‘Poesie’,” New Literary History, 3 (3): 543; Padoan, “Titian’s Letters,” 43-52; and Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 94; Ibid., vol. II, 5. Francesco Priscianese described his visit in Gramatica latina (Venice, 1540); English translation in Sir Arthur Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, Life and Times of Titian, vol. II (London: 1877 and 1881), 40-41; referenced in Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, 5. See also Francesco Priscianese, “Letter to Ludovico Becci and Luigi Del Riccio,” appendix to Della lingua romana (Venice 1540), no page given; referenced by Padoan, “Titian’s Letters,” 45, 52.

Titian and Vasari met twice: in 1541 when the latter came to Venice, and in 1546 when Titian visited Rome (Shiffman, “Artistic Liscense,” 46). Usually translated as Lives of the Artists, the full title of Vasari’s first version runs Le Vite de’ più eccellenti


13 See Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, 3-4, 6; and Charles Hope, “Titian and his Patrons,” in Titian: Prince of Painters, 77-84.

14 Charles V with Hound. 1533, oil on canvas, 1.92 x 1.11 m; Madrid, Prado Museum (Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, cat. no. 20, 85-87, fig. 55; see also 19, 22). Titian’s earlier paintings of the Emperor have been lost. Before his 1530 coronation by Pope Clement VII as Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V was King of Spain, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. Through his mother (Joanna the Mad of Castile, 1479-1555) Charles V inherited Naples and the Spanish empire of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. Charles V inherited through his father (Philip the Fair of Burgundy, 1478-1506) the northern lands previously held by Emperor Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy: this placed the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany under his rule. In 1526 Charles married his first cousin Isabella of Portugal (1503-1539). Philip II (1527-1598) was their first surviving son. In 1556 Charles V abdicated the throne to enter a monastery at Yuste where he died in 1558. His brother Ferdinand I (1503-1564) became Emperor and Charles’ son Philip II became King of Spain and the Netherlands (Ibid., vol. III, 88-89).

15 Cited by Rosand, Titian, 25-26. A gold chain symbolizing knighthood accompanied the decree, which was issued by Charles in Barcelona on May 10, 1533 (Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, 4).

16 For Titian and the Hapsburgs, see Rosand, Titian, 26; Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, 88; and Hope, “Titian and his Patrons,” 81. Hope reports that “Titian’s work for Philip represents a unique chapter in 16th-century patronage. No other patron of the period supported a major painter so enthusiastically over such a long period. None was rewarded with a comparable series of masterpieces. The history of Titian’s career after 1551 is to a great extent the history of his work for Philip.” “Titian and his Patrons,” 84.

When he was sixteen Philip II (1527-1598) married his cousin Mary of Portugal who died several years later. Philip II became regent of Spain in 1551. With the hope of joining the English and Spanish Empires, Philip married Mary of Tudor (another relative) in 1554 and began five years of travel outside of Spain. When his father Charles V
abdicated in 1556, Philip inherited part of his father’s empire but did not return to Spain until 1559, when he married young Isabelle de Valois (a French princess, d. 1568). His fourth marriage, this time to his niece Ana of Austria in 1570, finally produced an heir (see Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, 127).

Philip II in Armor, 1550-1551; oil on canvas, 1.93 x 1.11 m.; Madrid, Prado Museum. In 1548 Philip made a tour of Europe and met Titian in Milan, where the artist painted this portrait. The painting’s success led to the second invitation to Augsburg mentioned above (Ibid., cat. no. 18, 174-176).

Charles V and Titian initially agreed to exchange an annuity of 100 scudi for paintings. Eventually this amount was doubled, but Titian found the Emperor slow to pay. Upon his father’s death, Philip arranged for Titian to receive unpaid annuities amounting to 2000 scudi. Philip II continued the agreement with Titian, and became the painter’s major patron. Despite Titian’s complaints the king paid well. In return Philip II received from Titian’s studio approximately twenty-five large paintings (see Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. II, 5; and Hope, “Titian and his Patrons,” 82).

According to Hope, only Philip II consistently received quality autograph paintings. Others wanting a painting by Titian often settled for secondary works based upon paintings sent to Spain and crafted with more involvement by subordinate painters in Titian’s studio. Even paintings made for other powerful patrons were not safe. When Cardinal Ippolito d’Este commissioned Titian to paint an Adoration of the Magi (ca. 1556, Escorial), Titian sent the original to Philip II and provided the Cardinal with a less successful second version (Milan) (see Hope, “Titian and his Patrons,” 82).

See Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 71-85. David Rosand thinks Titian’s mythological paintings demonstrate the likeness between painting and poetry to such an extent that they give form to the ancient phrase ut pictura poesis, making Titian’s own term “poesie” a perfect description (Rosand, Titian, 42). See also Hope, “Titian and his Patrons,” 82, who argues that there is proof Titian himself selected the subjects for these paintings, and that the artist never even hinted at grand allegorical meanings. Rona Goffen also supports Titian’s selection of subjects for his paintings, see Titian’s Women (New Haven: Yale University Press, 997), 107, 242-286.


This is the Danaë with Nursemaid (ca. 1554, Madrid, Prado Museum) which Titian developed from an earlier version, Danaë with Cupid (ca. 1544, Naples Museum).

Citations in Jane C. Nash, Veiled Images: Titian’s Mythological Paintings For Philip II (Philadelphia and London: The Art Alliance Press and the Associated University
Press, 1985), 55. See also Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 59, documentation in cat. no. 40. Titian himself referred to the mythological paintings as *poesie* for the first time in a letter dated March 23, 1553 (Ibid., III, 72). See Veiled Images for the interpretive possibilities inherent in Titian’s *poesie* both today and during the time of Philip II.

21 Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 459. This was most likely the *Saint Mary Magdalen* of ca. 1530-1535 now in the collection of the Galleria Pitti, Florence. For a discussion of Titian’s various Magdalen paintings that includes their relationship to contemporary texts, types, and themes, see Goffen, Titian’s Women, 171-192. For a consideration of the “unequivocally moralizing” meaning produced by the male spectator when considering the artist’s deliberate combination of didactic iconography and the corporal and painted sensuousness of the Saint’s female body, see Bernard Aikema, “Titian’s Mary Magdalen in the Palazzo Pitti: an Ambiguous Painting and its Critics,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 57 (1994): 48-59. On Titian’s use of nudity as a symbol for purity and truth, see Ibid. and Erwin Panofsky’s discussion of Titian’s Sacred and Profane Love in Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 155-159.

22 Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 158.

25 Carlo Ridolfi’s “The Life of Titian Vecellio From Cadore, Painter and Knight” formed part of a two volume work published in Venice in 1648 and entitled Marvels of Art or the Lives of the Famous Painters of Venice and Its Environs. An English translation can be found in Ridolfi, Life of Titian, 55-146.

26 Ridolfi, Life of Titian, 91, in sequence.


29 Annie Cloulas, “Documents concernant Titien conservés aux Archives de Simancas,” Mélanges de la Casa de Velazquez 3 (1967), 276-277; cited by Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 180, cat. no. 34; see also Goffen, Titian’s Women, 204, 309 n. 116. This is part of a letter requesting payment and is dated August 1, 1571.


32 Unless otherwise stated, “right” and “left” indicate viewer’s right and left.
See Wethey, *Paintings of Titian*, vol. III, 180-181, cat. no. 26, pl. 37. Perhaps influenced by the presence of canvas strip additions, Wethey proposed that the left and bottom edges of the painting received the largest trimming.

According to the Fitzwilliam, *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* currently measures about 189 by 145 centimeters, or approximately six feet two-and-a-half inches tall by four feet nine inches wide. The Museum’s analysis of weave distortion created by the initial stretching of the canvas material indicates a slight reduction in size occurred at some point in the painting’s history. At most, a few centimeters were cut from the bottom edge and less from each side. Subsequently the size was increased through the addition of two strips of canvas: on piece slightly wider than two inches (6 cm.) was added to the bottom edge of the painting, and a second strip slightly less than two inches wide (5 cm.) was added to the right edge. This resulted in the painting’s current dimensions. It is not known when the painting’s size was reduced or increased (Jaffe and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 165, 166).


Ovid’s Tarquin acts through the uncontrollable influence of love, in Dio Tarquin responds to the combination of chastity and beauty, and in Livy he finds the destruction of Lucretia’s reputation irresistible (Ibid., 4). Young points out that “Livy gives about 75 lines to the violation of Lucretia and nearly the same number to its political repercussions, Ovid, on the other hand, gives over 100 lines to the violation and only 15 lines to the repercussions. Moreover, Ovid’s distinctive contribution lies in the former rather than the latter.” *Echoes of Two Cultures*, 67.


Titian’s lack of Latin would not have complicated his use of Ovid, for translations, commentaries, and interpretations were readily available. In addition to relevant works published by the Aldine press in Venice, Boccaccio’s *Genealogy of the Gods* and Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* and *Fasti* would have been accessible. Ovid in particular was a popular author, with Venice producing fifteen of over thirty editions published during Titian’s
Among these were a 1497 illustrated version—the first to have included both Renaissance woodcuts and an Italian translation from the original—and Ludovico Dolce’s 1553 *Ottava rima*, which both illustrated and paraphrased Ovid’s stories (Wethey, *Paintings of Titian*, vol. III, 94; Panofsky, *Problems in Titian*, 141 n. 5).

39 Tarquinius Collatinus (Lucretia’s husband) and Sextus Tarquinius (the youngest son of Tarquinius Superbus, Etruscan king of Rome) both served as officers in the Roman army’s campaign to conquer neighboring Rutuli. Roman legions surrounded the main city of Ardea, and during the long siege the officers filled their time by going on leave or partying (Livy *Early History of Rome*, 1.57: 97; Livy [Titus Livius], *Roman History*, trans. John Henry Freese et al. [New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1901], 67).

Amid the argument at one party, Tarquinius Collatinus suddenly cried: “Stop! What need is there of words, when in a few hours we can prove beyond doubt the incomparable superiority of my Lucretia? We are all young and strong: why shouldn’t we ride to Rome and see with our own eyes what kind of women our wives are? There is no better evidence, I assure you, than what a man finds when he enters his wife’s room unexpectedly.” Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 1.57: 98.

40 Livy, *Roman History*, 67; *History of Rome*, 1.57: 98. A Roman wife managed her townhouse, supervised her slaves, and could spin and weave if necessary. Indeed, spinning and weaving wool came to symbolize feminine excellence, and represented a wife’s virtue and even her honor. In this context, Lucretia’s work spinning wool serves as yet another representation of her integrity. For the linkage of women, virtue, and spinning, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 169-176, 199.


42 Ibid., II.761-.780: 113; II.690-.710: 107-109.


44 “He was hospitably welcomed in Lucretia’s house, and, after supper, escorted, like the honoured visitor he was thought to be, to the guest-chamber. Here he waited till the house was asleep, and then, when all was quiet, he drew his sword and made his way to Lucretia’s room determined to rape her. She was asleep.” Livy, *History of Rome*, 1.58: 98.

45 In Livy, Lucretia wakened to a death threat: “‘Lucretia,’ he whispered, ‘not a sound! I am Sextus Tarquinius. I am armed—if you utter a word, I will kill you.’ Lucretia opened her eyes in terror; death was imminent, no help at hand.” Ovid’s chaste Lucretia also wakened to the sight of Tarquin’s sword and the feel of his hand: “From the gilded scabbard he drew his sword, and came into thy chamber, virtuous spouse. And when he touched the bed, ‘The steel is in my hand, Lucretia,’ said he. . . . His hands pressed heavy on her breast, the breast that till then had never known the touch of stranger hand.” Livy, *History of Rome*, 1.58: 98; Ovid, *Fasti*, II.793-.794, II.803-.804: 115.
For a consideration of "rape" as a (changing) concept for historians and as separate from the concept of "patriarchy", see Roy Porter, "Rape—Does it have a Historical Meaning?" in Rape, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter, 216-279 (New York and Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 216-279.

"Sextus urged his love, begged her to submit, pleaded, threatened, used every weapon that might conquer a woman's heart. But all in vain; not even fear of death could bend her will" (Livy, History of Rome, 1.57-.58: 98-99). Ovid described a similar approach: "Her lover foe is urgent with prayers, with bribes, with threats; but still he cannot move her by prayers, by bribes, by threats." Fasti, II.805-.810: 115.

Ovid, Fasti, II.797-.802: 115.

In this case, the "lamb" has not strayed. Instead, the "wolf" has been invited into the undefended "fold" (Lucretia's home), and his presence there validated previously by the "shepherd"—Lucretia's husband Collatinus.


Female slaves were used for sex by their male masters without penalty, but under Constantine sex between a free woman and a slave resulted in death for both parties (the male slave being burned to death). The fear that free women would have sex with their male slaves was heightened by proximity, for wealthy Roman women were surrounded by male slaves who were often selected for their physical beauty (Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, 160).

Italian statutes during the Renaissance indicate that extra-marital sex was viewed both as a sin and as a danger to society. This was especially true if wives were involved. The presence of illegitimate children—especially those of a wife impregnated by someone other than her husband—threatened inheritances, made accidental incest possible, and if made public might even raise questions about the "inherent" qualities of the elite in a stratified society. Since nobles and patrician men dominated government and legislative bodies, their concern for the patrilineal transmission of both property and power—a system to which they owed their own status—is mirrored in the regulations seeking to control sex and women. Stable marriages to chaste wives insured that a husband's legitimate sons inherited his blood along with his social position and property (Nicholas Davidson, "Theology, Nature and the Law: Sexual Sin and Sexual Crime in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century," in Crime, Society, and the Law in Renaissance Italy, ed. Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 86).

In antiquity, adultery was a graver crime for women than for men, a status codified when Emperor Augustus made adultery a public crime only for women. Depending upon the circumstances, she might be killed by male relatives or divorced and brought to trial (see n. 56 below). Her punishment when convicted was exile and the loss of half her dowry. Although the wife of an adulterous man held the right to divorce him, she was not required to, and he was not guilty of an actionable crime. Renaissance Italy also viewed a
wife’s adultery as a serious crime with far-reaching consequences, and again the law found a woman more guilty than an adulterous man. Since adultery by a wife tainted the bloodline, she permanently debased herself and corrupted her entire family and the family of her husband (Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, 159; and Goffen, Titian’s Women, 16).

Livy. History of Rome, I.59: 99; Roman History, 68. See also Ovid, Fasti, II.807-810: 115: “Resistence is vain,” said he, “I’ll rob thee of honour and of life. I, the adulterer, will bear false witness to thine adultery. I’ll kill a slave, and rumour will have it that thou wert caught with him.” Overcome by fear of infamy, the dame gave way.”

Legally, a patrician Roman woman could have sexual intercourse only with her husband. In contrast, men were legally allowed sex with prostitutes but forbidden single women and widows from the upper classes. Unmarried women who engaged in illicit sex (stuprum) were guilty of a civil crime and faced punishment if convicted. Emperor Augustus exiled his own daughter and granddaughter for the crime of fornication, and maintained a distance from them even in death, refusing both women the right to be buried in his tomb (Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, 160).

“Rape could be prosecuted—under the legal headings of criminal wrong (iniuria) or violence (vis)—by the man under whose authority the wronged woman fell” (Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, 159). There were legal reasons for the presence of both Collatinus and Lucretius at this stage in Lucretia’s story. In Rome, Lucretius as pater familias (“oldest male ascendant” in a lineage) ruled over his family and in certain instances held the right to be judge, jury, and executioner for a daughter. The pater familias held the right to retain manus (power) over a married daughter or to cede that authority to the husband. If her father retained manus, a woman remained part of his lineage and under his legal authority. The father as pater familias held the right to kill a daughter guilty of illicit sex, whether it be fornication or adultery. This is exemplified in the legend of Verginia (449 BCE), where a father killed his virtuous and virginal daughter because he foresaw a dishonorable end to her chastity. Ceding manus to a husband legally moved a woman from her father’s lineage to that of her husband. She gained property rights equal to that held by her husband’s daughters, and he gained legal authority over her. However a father who ceded manus maintained some control over his daughter, making it unclear whether a husband with manus held the power only to divorce his adulterous wife, to kill her with approval from other male relatives, or to be her sole judge, jury, and executioner (see Ibid., 152-154, 159; for Verginia, see: Ibid., 153; and Giovanni Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, trans. Guido Guarino [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963], chap. LVI, 128-130).

In Livy’s account, Lucretia asked her husband and father to each bring a trusted friend. Her husband arrives accompanied by Brutus, her father by Valerius. For the event, see Livy, Roman History, 68; History of Rome, I.59: 99. See also Ovid, whose Lucretia mourned honorably but alone, “with hair disheveled, like a mother who must attend the funeral pyre of her son.” Fasti, II.813-.815: 117.
In Livy, Lucretia's speech moves from apology to vengeance as she continues: “Give me your solemn promise that the adulterer shall be punished—he is Sextus Tarquinius. He it is who last night came as my enemy disguised as my guest, and took his pleasure of me. That pleasure will be my death—and his, too, if you are men” (History of Rome, 1.58-.59: 99). In Ovid, a distressed and shamed Lucretia had difficulty recounting the rape, and at first the men thought she mourned someone else's death. Although she eventually spoke enough to indicate what happened, her eyes remained downcast: “Must I owe this too to Tarquin? Must I utter,' quoth she, 'must I utter, woe's me, with my own lips my own disgrace?' And what she can she tells. The end she left unsaid, but wept and a blush o'erspread her matron cheeks.” Fasti, II.825-.832: 117.


Lucretia’s decision to yield to Tarquin, even in the face of threats, made her nominally an adulteress. Hence the presence of both Collatinus (husband) and Lucretius (father) at her “confession” and suicide. Together the two men functioned as Lucretia’s judge and jury and their companions as witnesses, legally absolving her of guilt (see Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, 160-161; Donaldson, The Rapes of Lucretia, 23-24; and Young, Echoes of Two Cultures, 62-63).

That sin’s intentional nature was also recognized in Renaissance Italy can be seen in this 1547 passage: “every sin, in as much as it is a reason for guilt, is a voluntary act; the will to sin is its essential prerequisite and its cause. . . . Where there is no will, there is no sin.” Bartolomeo Fumi, Summa: quae Aurea Armilia inscribiture (Venice: 1554), 468r-v; quoted by Davidson, “Theology, Nature and the Law,” 79.

In Livy’s account, Brutus accompanied Collatinus to the house; in Ovid, he felicitously happened by to intrude upon her death scene, where “from the half-dead body he snatched the weapon stuck in it, and holding the knife that dripped with noble blood swore to vengeance and the destruction of the Tarquinius regime” (Fasti, II.840-.845: 117, 119; for Livy’s account of Brutus’ subsequent actions and the results, see Livy, Roman History, 70-71; History of Rome, I.59-.60: 99-101). Sextus Tarquinius retreated to Gabii under banishment, and there he was murdered.
In contrast, writers as misogynistic as the medieval ecclesiastic Walter Map found in Lucretia a noble, chaste, and modest exception to an otherwise corrupt and best avoided sex (see Young, Echoes of Two Cultures, 78-79).

"If she was made an adulteress, why has she been praised; if she was chaste, why was she slain?" (Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, vol. I, trans. George E. McCracken [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957], I.XIX, 89). For Augustine, if Lucretia died chaste, then her suicide must have been caused by sinful (pagan) pride: "her killing herself, because, though she was not an adulteress, yet she endured the act of an adulterer, proves, not her love of chastity, but her irresolute shame. For she was ashamed of another's foul crime committed on her person, even though not committed with her, and being a Roman lady, too greedy of praise, she feared that if she remained alive, she would be thought to have enjoyed suffering the violence that she had suffered while alive. For this reason she thought that she must present evidence before men's eyes to show what was in her heart—the evidence of that self-punishment, since she could not exhibit her conscience to them. In fact, she blushed at the possibility of being believed to be an accomplice of the deed if she were to bear passively the shame that another had actively inflicted upon her" (Ibid., 89). The City of God was available through an edition published in 1467 (Goffen, Titian's Women, 308 n. 86). For Augustine on the violation of virgins and nuns, see The City of God, Book I.XVI, 75-77; on the purity of the soul untouched by bodily rape, see I.XVIII, 79-83; on suicide, I.XVII, I.XX, 77-79, 91-95; on Lucretia, I.XIX, 83-91; see also Donaldson, The Rapes of Lucretia, 29.

Bryson's use of Augustine to justify a reading of a seductive Lucretia in Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquino will be discussed below, this chapter (Norman Bryson, "Two Narratives of Rape in the Visual Arts: Lucretia and the Sabine Women," in Rape, [Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986], 165-167).

"Lucretia, the outstanding model of Roman chastity and sacred glory of ancient virtue" (Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, chap. XLVI, 101). Young described Boccaccio's version of Lucretia's story as "thoroughly wholesome and pious" (Young, Echoes of Two Cultures, 84). For a consideration of the misogynist undercurrent present in this work by Boccaccio, see Constance Jordan, "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in the De mulieribus claris," in Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, ed. Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 25-47. Jordan finds in Boccaccio's accounts of Lucretia, Virginia, and Orgiagonte an equation of the woman's (violated) body with the (violated) freedom of her people; restitution of the first (through death of the woman) restores the second. This equation of female body and body politic is then further developed by Boccaccio in the tragic histories of Dido and Veturia (Ibid., 33-37).

Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, 102, 103. "Because of her action, not only was her reputation restored, which a lewd young man had tried to destroy with the stain of sin, but Rome was made free." Ibid., 103.


For Veturia, see Boccaccio, Concerning Famous Women, LIII, 118-121. When lustful decemvir Appius Claudius had resisting Virgina kidnapped, wrongly declared a fugitive slave, and placed in his own power, Virgina's father preserved her chastity by killing her with a butcher's knife (Ibid., LVI, 128-130).

Anne B. Barriault, "The Abundant, Beautiful, Chaste, and Wise: Domestic Painting of the Italian Renaissance in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts," Arts in Virginia, 30 (1991): 2-21. Barriault discusses Siennese cassone panels featuring Tuccia, a vestal virgin famous for carrying water in a sieve. The source for the iconography is Petrarch's poem the Triumph of Chastity, where Tuccia joins with the virtuous Penelope, Judith, Virginia, and Lucretia. These legendary women assist a parade of personified female virtues: "Beauty and Chastity, Prudence and Moderation, Honor and Modesty, Courtesy and Purity" (Ibid., 6-9, 10). When images of Lucretia were used as exemplars in Renaissance Italy, they functioned in a patriarchal society that defined women as weak vessels incapable of heroic action, and viewed wives as possessions owned by their husbands (Linda C. Hults, "Dürer's Lucretia: Speaking the Silence of Women," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 16 [Winter 1991]: 208). As a vocal and active heroine, Lucretia worked less well on cassone intended to instruct the ideal silent and passive wife. Baskins concludes that Lucretia's representation in Tuscan cassone panels is dependent upon her construction as a visible (and therefore silent) powerless body. This in turn rests upon an equation of female silence with chastity, and female speech with sexuality. Baskins is not entirely successful in explaining Livy's chaste Lucretia, who not only speaks eloquently but also empowers her words through decisive action (Cristelle L. Baskins, "Corporeal Authority in the Speaking Picture: The Representation of Lucretia in Tuscan Domestic Painting," in Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History, ed. Richard Trexler [Binghamton: State University of New York, 1994], 187-206).


For an interesting discussion of images dealing with Lucretia's suicide that concentrates on Dürer's interpretations, see Linda C. Hults, "Dürer's Lucretia: Speaking the Silence of Women," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 16 (Winter

69 Titian, Lucretia, ca. 1520, oil on canvas, .952 x .622 meters, enlarged to 1.086 x .635 m. Hampton Court Palace, Royal Collection, England (Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 166, cat. no. 26, pl. 37). Wethey described this painting as both “unique” and “extraordinarily beautiful”; Jaffé found the painting to be without “moral overtones, . . . an elegant dance movement in a landscape.” Ibid., 26; Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 162.

70 In Titian’s Women Rona Goffen discusses the second century Roman sculpture Aphrodite of Cyrene as one of Titian’s sources for this Lucretia’s posture. She concludes that this added an ironic subtext to the painting since “this ‘second Venus’ dies to expiate the sin committed against her in the name of the first” (p. 199). Marcantonio Raimondi’s print after Raphael ca. 1508-1511, was one of the first to present Lucretia’s solitary suicide and to partly bare her body. For a discussion of the print and its possible meanings, see Patricia Emison, “The Singularity of Raphael’s Lucretia,” Art History 14 (September 1991): 372-396; for a related Raphael drawing see Julien Stock, “A drawing by Raphael of Lucretia,” Burlington Magazine 126 (1984): 423-424, fig. 49.


72 In medieval European courts, rape convictions depended upon evidence that the victim fought back, including disordered hair, torn clothing, and witnesses who heard the woman’s screams. This visual evidence made its way into the iconography of rape images, and loose or disordered hair and clothing were used in combination with the grasped wrist or forearm to symbolize force (Diane Wolfthal, “‘A Hue and a Cry’: Medieval Rape Imagery and Its Transformation,” Art Bulletin 75 [1993]: 44, 42-43). Widows, wives, and nuns wore their hair bound, up, and concealed, since loose hair signified that a woman was either a maiden, a prostitute, or a religious hermit (Goffen, Titian’s Women, 22).

73 For Wethey, Lucretia’s protective gesture “appears at first somewhat melodramatic, but on further consideration it impresses as a stroke of imagination on a high creative level” (Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 27). Perhaps the gesture alludes to blind justice.

74 Titian or Palma il Vecchio, Tarquin and Lucretia, ca. 1525; oil on canvas, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, fig. 33, cat. no. X-33). Wethey attributes the work to Palma il Vecchio.

75 Aldegrever based his 1553 engraving upon a work by the German artist George Pencz; it is unclear whether the Pencz work was a print, a drawing, or a painting. Jaffé credits E. C. Chamberlain with calling attention to the importance of these images. See Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 162-163; Martina Fleischer,
“Tarquin and Lucretia (Vienna),” catalog entry in Titian: Prince of Painters, ed. Susanna Biadene and Mary Yakush (Munich: Prestel, 1990), 362, cat. no. 73; and Rona Goffen, Titian’s Women, 106-207. For Pencz’s Tarquin and Lucretia, including an engraving see that might have served as Aldegrever’s source, see Russell, Liva/Ave, 51-52, cat. no. 14.

76 Wolfthal, “‘A Hue and a Cry’,” 57 and n. 96.


78 As Bernadine Barnes points out, a clothed rapist and a naked victim heightens “the contrast between Tarquin and Lucretia—between the pure whiteness of her skin and the darker shades of his clothing, between her vulnerability and his power. This contrast could make the viewer share Lucretia’s feelings of terror and helplessness, or it could have the opposite effect, making her seem all the more desirable because of her vulnerability.” Barnes, “Heroines and Worthy Women,” 31.

79 Only in Livy does Sextus Tarquinius take a companion with him on the second journey to Collatia. This second man is not described or identified, and he does not appear in Lucretia’s story again (History of Rome, I.57-58, 98).

80 See Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 164; and Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 181, cat. no. 35, pl. 165. This version is now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux.

81 See Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 164.

82 In the Bordeaux painting, there might actually be an upward tilt to Lucretia’s open lips—indicating she is on the verge of smiling. Certainty is not possible without examining the original painting.

83 The painting appears to be in its last stages of development (see Fleischer, Tarquin and Lucretia [Vienna],” 361-362, cat. no. 73). Opinion is divided on attributing the Vienna Tarquin and Lucretia to Titian or to his workshop. For arguments in favor of Titian, see Goffen, Titian’s Women, 211; Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 164; Fleischer, “Tarquin and Lucretia (Vienna),” 361-362, cat. no. 73; and Panofsky, Problems in Titian, 139, n. 2. For an argument against, see Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 86-87, 220-221, cat. no. X-34.

84 Fleischer “Tarquin and Lucretia [Vienna],” 361-362, cat. no. 73.

85 In addition to the print’s left-right reversal of the painting’s composition, Cort’s work includes changes to Tarquin’s clothing, Lucretia’s headdress and earrings, loss of a bracelet and pillow, different patterns and ornamentation on the bed linens, and the variations discussed in the text. See Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 181; Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 164. Jaffé and Groen suggest that Cort’s expanded format might reflect the content of areas subsequently removed from the painting. However, their own investigations show “at most a few centimetres are missing
around the edges,” an amount unable to accommodate most of the print’s vertical expansion and the inclusion of extra draperies, and platforms (Ibid., 164, 167).

86 Wolfthal, “A Hue and a Cry,” 39-64.

87 The embroidery does not match that of the pillows, suggesting that the cloth may not be a sheet. It should be remembered that in the Vienna Tarquin and Lucretia discussed above, a painting whose subject appears to precede this narrative moment, Lucretia wore white.

88 The style is unclear. Either her earring has multiple rings, or it pierces her ear twice.

89 “Such adornments manifest the wealth and munificence of the husband rather than the wife’s lasciviousness or vanity” (Francesco Barbaro, De re uxoria, in Prudentissimi et gravi documenti circa la elettion della moglie, Italian trans. Alberto Lollio [Venice; G. Giolito, 1548], 49v; quoted with English translation in Brian D. Steele, “Water and Fire: Titian’s Sacred and Profane Love and Ancient Marriage Customs,” Source 15, 4 [1996]: 24). In the mid 1400s Alessandra Strozzi, a Florentine widow distantly related to the Alberti, was deeply involved in finding brides for her then exiled sons. In a letter to her son Filippo she directly links his own honor to the display of his jewelry on his bride: “Get the jewels ready, beautiful ones, we have found a wife. Being beautiful and belonging to Filippo Strozzi, she must have beautiful jewels, for just as you [my son] have won honor in other things, you cannot fall short in this” (Alessandra Strozzi, Lettere 49 [26 July 1465], in Lettere di una gentildonna fiorentina del secolo XV ai figliuoli esuli, ed. C. Guasti [Florence, 1877]; quoted by Lauro Martines, “A Way of Looking at Women in Renaissance Florence,” The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 4 [1974]: 26). Martines notes that Alessandra Strozzi refers to prospective brides as “merchandise” (Ibid., 25).

90 The ring contains a light blue gem similar in color to the stone in her earrings, but different in cut. In reference to Italian use of wedding rings, see also the 1523 painting Messer Marsilio and his Bride by Lorenzo Lotto (Peter Humfrey, Lorenzo Lotto [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 71, fig. 80). Painted in Bergamo rather than Venice, this double portrait shows the groom placing a ring on the third finger of his bride’s left hand. A hovering cupid holds a symbolic laurel yoke of marriage behind the couple.


92 Titian then paints the ring crossing Lucretia’s finger at an odd angle, suggesting the ring may fall off in the violence of the attack.

93 For Panofsky on iconographic image types, see above, Chapter I.

94 For Panofsky on iconographical synthesis (iconology), see above, Chapter I.
For a complete roster of these publications, see Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1585), 30; in Gloria Kaufman, “Juan Luis Vives on the Education of Women,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 4 (1978): 893 (with her modernized spellings). Dedicated to the Queen, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* was written during Vives’ time as tutor to Queen Catherine of Aragon and the Princess Mary. Vives believed the unstable nature of women meant they needed to be educated into goodness yet protected from the dangerous idea that evil exists, lest they slip into sin. For arguments on the dangers of educating females, see Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, 58-62.


On belief in the inferiority of women to men, see Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).


Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, 24-25; and Junkerman, “The Lady and the Laurel,” 49. King notes of Barbaro’s text: “In the section dealing with the wife’s virtue, the symbolism is martial—the woman is compared to a general. In the section dealing with the wife’s noble origin, the symbolism is agrarian—the wife is a field or a plant.” King, “Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage,” 34, n. 49.

Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, 25. To chastity some Renaissance advocates added piety, which in turn depended upon her possessing “humanity, courtesy, courage, justice, prudence, and learning” (Ibid., 30). That these were typically masculine virtues may explain why calls for piety lacked the universality of those for chastity. But the addition of piety made sense. Consider the vocations open to a patrician Venetian woman: marriage to man or to Christ. The choice of husband, of course, belonged to her father.
For Barbaro, a female’s aptness for household management was linked to her character: “since women are by nature weak they should diligently care for things concerning the household . . . . wives ought not to lack praise if they merely organize, as is their duty, the wealth that has collected in the home . . . . and they ought always to consider how well they are doing so that they will never be deficient in their care, interest, and diligence in household matters.” Barbaro, “On Wifely Duties,” 216.

In their publications, the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives and the Italian Lodovico Dolce both argued (as many did not) that a literary education helped provide for proper behavior. They disagreed, however, about what the ladies should be reading. Vives proposed that logic, grammar, and history be left to men; he vetoed books on war and romance, including Boccaccio; the Greek and Latin poets, including Ovid, Homer, and Hesiod; and books on divinity (lest they make women contentious). He also was not too happy with eloquence. However when supervised by “wise and learned men,” beneficial reading might come from “good and holy books—the Old and New Testaments, the works of the Church Fathers,” and works of moral philosophy including authors such as “Jerome, Cyprian, Augustine, and Ambrose, Hilary, and Gregory . . . Plato, Cicero, Seneca. Plutarch, Valerius Maximus, . . . Aristotle, and Xenophon” (Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 73; also see Kaufman, “Vives on the Education of Women,” 894). The Venetian Lodovico Dolce was one of the proponents for a rather extensive education of females—including Latin, and sometimes Greek—in order to promote chastity, fill dangerous idle hours, and increase feminine charm. He advised supervised reading in these languages of selected moral works by ancient writers like Plato, Seneca, Virgil, Horace, and Cicero; as well as more modern works (again, the chaste parts) by men such as Petrarch, Dante, Bembo, and Castiglione (Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 71-72).

The wife should “imitate the leaders of bees, who supervise, receive, and preserve whatever comes into their hives, to the end that, unless necessity dictates otherwise, they remain in their honeycombs where they develop and mature beautifully.” Barbaro, “On Wifely Duties,” 217.

Since Venetian girls married soon after they reached puberty, brides were usually thirteen or fourteen but sometimes as young as eleven. Patricians preferred slightly older brides, so their daughters were more likely to marry in their mid-teens. Whatever her age, a married woman was considered an adult (Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros, 13; and Stanley Chojnacki, “Dowries and Kinsmen in Early Renaissance Venice,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 5 [Spring 1975]: 585-586). Often a family would limit the number of sons to marry. This reduced the growth of collateral lines and so consolidated the family’s wealth and power. A tendency to limit the number of patrician marriages also provided greater selection when a family went bride hunting, caused more daughters without vocations to be sent to nunneries, and put increased emphasis on the virtue of the wives upon whose chastity the patrilineal bloodline depended. See Ibid.,

106 “The prerogative of corporal punishment belonged without question to all husbands whatever their rank, carrying with it some conviction of its necessity as the only efficacious cure for certain evils inherent in women.” Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, 85.


108 For Barbaro, the health and safekeeping of the Venetian Republic depended upon preserving the lineages of the patrician men who governed her, and the primary function of patrician marriages was to produce such men. This places increased importance upon the selection and education of a chaste bride. Ideally, a Renaissance wife managed the house as her husband desired, the servants her husband obtained and trained, and (under his direction) the younger children. See King, “Caldiera and the Barbaros,” 31-35; and Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, 110-111.

109 Virtue and nobility were seen as intrinsic qualities made visible through the proper behavior they produced, and a good mother nourished her children into virtue through her blood and milk as well as by her example. The production of virtuous children necessitates the possession of a virtuous wife, for just as citizens emulate their statesmen and soldiers follow their generals, so are children molded by their mothers (see Barbaro, *Uxoria*, 32-33, referenced in King, “Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage,” 33-34). In Barbaro’s words, “it is very important that an infant should be nourished by the same mother in whose womb and by whose blood he was conceived. . . . The power of the mother’s food most effectively lends itself to shaping the properties of body and mind to the character of the seed. . . . Therefore, noble women should always try to feed their own offspring so that they will not degenerate from being fed on poorer, foreign milk” (Barbaro, “On Wifely Duties,” 223). Conversely, the blood, milk, and example provided by a woman of questionable virtue would infect children with sinfulness, taint the bloodline, and produce sons unfit to rule the republic.

110 Barbaro cautions that it endangers chastity for a wife to take pleasure in sexual intercourse: “If a woman should transgress these limits, I wish that she will curb herself so that she will be, or at least seem to be, chaste in that sort of temperance from which chastity is derived. It would be conducive to achieving this result if, from the very beginning, husbands would accustom themselves to serving as the helpers of necessity rather than of passion. And wives should bear themselves with decorum and modesty in their married life so that both affection and moderation will accompany their lovemaking. Lust and unseemly desire are harmful to their dignity and to their husbands. . . . nothing should seem so delightful that it would ever keep them from their obligation to do
everything in a modest manner” (Barbaro, “On Wifely Duties,” 213-214). See also Kelso Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 165; and Constance Jordan, Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 145; quoting from Alessandro Piccolomini, Della Instituzione di Tutta la Vita dell’ Huomo Nato Nobile e in Citta Libera (Venice, 1552), bk. 9, sig. D3 and D2v, respectively.

111 “When a certain young man saw the noble woman Theano stretch her arm out of her mantle that had been drawn back, he said to his companions: ‘How handsome is her arm.’ To this she replied: ‘It is not a public one.’ It is proper, however, that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs.” Barbaro goes on to state that “women should believe they have achieved glory of eloquence if they will honor themselves with the outstanding ornament of silence. . . eloquent, well-considered, and dignified silence” (‘On Wifely Duties,” 205, 206). For restrictions on female behavior, also see Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, 87; on clothing, see 47; on company and conduct, 49; on vigilance, 47-48; for the link between proper behavior, chastity, and honor, 97.

112 In discussing rape as a crime in the 14th and 15th centuries, Nicolas Davidson makes an important point: “Rape is a word which carried very different implications in the Renaissance. Catholic theological literature did not always categorize rape in the modern sense as a separate crime: intercourse without consent was incorporated into discussions of other offences, such as adultery or defloration. The term—raptus—could thus be used for any abduction, whether sexual intercourse followed or not. The same attitude is apparent when we examine the behavior of secular courts” (Davidson, “Theology, Nature and the Law,” 84). However, the following discussion relies heavily on Guido Ruggiero’s investigation of sex crimes in Renaissance Venice. He found that although the borders are fuzzy and crime types often overlap, enough distinctions existed for fornication, adultery, and rape to be prosecuted under separate categories. The rape and adultery border was especially, and perhaps intentionally, ambiguous. However, when the Forty prosecuted a “Rape” crime, the term referred to attempted or obtained nonconsensual violently forced sexual intercourse. See Guido Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

113 In Renaissance Venice, a woman alone on the streets would likely be raped, and she could not be sure of her security even in church. Ruggiero describes the case of a nobleman who regularly accosted a serving maid attempting to pray in San Marco, the state church of Venice (Ibid., 85).

114 Noblemen appear to have been the most violent group in Renaissance Venice, and there were cases where patrician girls were raped by and then married to noblemen. Indeed, it was common for “relationships” that began with rape to develop into consensual sex and end in marriage, a progression that suggests a link between violence and sex. The violence toward women endemic to Venice is perhaps epitomized in the treatment of the legendary Venetian courteans, who were allowed a proscribed freedom in an otherwise
restrictive world. However a woman who crossed the accepted boundaries of honest courtesan behavior might be beaten, branded, mutilated, or raped. She might also pay with her life; the intent of ‘thirty-ones’ (serial rape by the lover, then twenty-nine lower class men) and the even more horrible ‘royal thirty-ones’ (eighty men) was to infect a courtesan with syphilis, thereby ending both her career and her life. On the progression from rape to marriage, see Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 31; on violence against courtesans, see Lynne Lawner, Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1987), 73-77, 126.

The Forty viewed rape as equivalent to assault, and elevated the crime’s seriousness according to whether the victim was wife, widow, or unmarried; in the latter case, they also considered her age relative to puberty. Since the rape of a married woman caused property damage, her rapist faced a moderate penalty, that of a widow, less. Rape of a puella was viewed with the greatest severity, but if a girl reached puberty and remained unmarried, raping her brought little penalty. In legal terms, puella meant an age of twelve or younger, although in the 16th century this increased slightly or was decided on a case by case basis dependent upon the victim’s maturity. The Forty thought older girls might be seeking husbands, and so viewed their charges with suspicion. For the severity of raping underage girls versus raping those of marriageable age, see Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 31, 96, 102, 148-152; for the raping of wives or widows, see 96; for examples of men convicted of rape and sentenced to marry their victims, see 89-108; on rape as a crime equal in weight to assault, see Ruggiero, Violence in Early Renaissance Venice (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), 153.

Rapists might attack the wives or daughters of friends, often entering the victim’s room and hiding under her bed. Prosecuted cases of fornication and adultery show this violent approach often led to an affair. Since affairs—which meant committing the crime of either fornication or adultery—often began with rape, and accused rapists admitted they forced sex in the hopes of beginning an affair, the lines between the categories were blurred. Physical signs of violent force and extraordinary resistance remained the mainstay in successful prosecutions of rape. See Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 103, 32, 102.

Davidson, “Theology, Nature, and the Law,” 89. However, Fumi also stated that adulterous wives should be punished less harshly than their male lovers, since women were mentally inferior to and less capable of rational thought than men (Ibid., 81).

Often this involved the adulterous pair running off together, making the scandal public and its resolution by the courts unavoidable. The relative gentleness with which the Venetian courts handled cases between nobles can be seen in the 1476 case of a Soranzo wife who ran off with her Pisani lover. The Soranzo husband brought the matter to the courts after five months of private negotiations. In the meantime, his wife became pregnant with a Pisani child. The Forty ruled her and her unborn child the responsibility of her lover. After the child’s birth, her husband became responsible for a yearly stipend to provide her with living expenses and Pisani kept the child. She spent two years in a
convent in lieu of jail. Her sentence could be waived if at any point her husband wanted her back; if she returned to adultery, however, she lost both the fee and her dowry. Her lover received a slight fine and a three month jail term, set to begin after he finished his current term in government. See Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros, 56.

119 Ibid., 56, 178-179 n. 37. A woman’s dowry remained her property and left when she did—unless it were a case of adultery. Women’s leverage within the family increased with dowry levels, and they tended to pass this power on to their daughters by boosting their dowries in turn, so loss of dowry meant a loss of power. See Chojnacki, “Dowries and Kinsmen in Venice,” 586, 587-590.

120 That dishonor had a ripple effect is evident in the Strozzi concern over prospective brides: with the assistance of his mother, Filippo Strozzi stopped a younger brother from wedding Mareta di Lorenzo Strozzi. Because she was beautiful, orphaned, and had lived outside her family’s home, Filippo doubted Mareta’s purity. Even more importantly, past bankruptcies in the families of both her mother and her father could stain the reputation of her husband’s house. See Strozzi, Lettere di una gentildonna . . ., (Guasti ed.), 594-95; referenced in Martines, “A Way of Looking at Women in Renaissance Florence.” 21. n. 21.

121 Davidson, “Theology, Nature, and the Law,” 86. Also, see note 50 above.

122 Bryson, “Two Narratives of Rape in the Visual Arts,” 170. Bryson’s treatment occurs in an article dealing with other rape images, and so necessarily is brief.

123 Ibid., 168. For Bryson’s use of Augustine, see 163-167.

124 Ibid., 168. Bryson repeatedly refers to this figure as “the negro slave,” although I have not found references to the slave’s race in Ovid or Livy.

125 Ibid., 168-169. Since he finds in the work no indication of Lucretia’s married status, the bed is a place where sex will happen rather than a marriage bed. Bryson incorrectly states that the prints Titian used as sources all showed clothed Lucretias.

126 Ibid., 170.

127 Goffen, Titian’s Women, 204, 123. For Goffen’s discussion of Titian’s Lucretia paintings, see 198-213.


130 "The gaze of the painter, which claims to impose itself as being the only gaze. There always was a gaze behind." Ibid., 113.


133 The width of horizontal mattresses and pillows duplicates that of legs and arms.

134 The following analysis is based upon notes made by the author during several visits to the painting in the spring of 1996. Visual analysis was conducted with the help of a ladder and binoculars. For an interesting and thorough technical investigation into Titian’s actual painting process as based upon pigment analysis and x-rays, see Jaffé and Groen, “Tarquin and Lucretia in the Fitzwilliam,” 162-172.

135 The painted positioning of is slippery is ambiguous, and it might be upside down. The “F” served as an abbreviation for several tenses of facere, a Latin verb meaning “to make.” It appeared as “F” and in full in other Titian signatures. For a discussion of the placement and form of signatures by Venetian painters, including Titian and the Cambridge painting, see Louisa C. Matthew, “The Painter’s Presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance Pictures,” Art Bulletin 80 (December 1998), 616-648, 642; for Titian’s signatures see also Wetley, Paintings of Titian, vol. III, 246-48.


137 If Titian is inviting the external viewer to share his delight in a beautiful female body, he is positioning us into identifying with the second man, and the voyeuristic enjoyment contradicts the morality inherent in the Roman story. See Donaldson, The Rapes of Lucretia, 15.

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CHAPTER III
J. S. COLEY'S PAINTING OF MR. THOMAS MIFFLIN
AND MRS. SARAH MORRIS MIFFLIN

Introduction

John Singleton Copley's painting of Thomas and Sarah Mifflin (Figure 3.1) constitutes an exceptionally fertile site for investigating the Gaze. Painted in Boston in 1773, the portrait presents the husband and wife together in an unusual format for the eighteenth century: he looks at her, and she turns her attention out toward the external location occupied by the viewer. In addition, both the political and personal subtexts surrounding the painting illuminate possible interrelationships between painter and patrons. Although Copley worked hard to preserve his façade of political neutrality, his prominent and vocal Tory in-laws were often targeted by the Sons of Liberty, as they were later that year in the Boston Tea Party—an event for which Copley's father-in-law, Richard Clarke, involuntarily provided the tea. In contrast, the Mifflins openly supported colonial liberty, and Thomas worked to advance Whig causes as an elected member of the Pennsylvania Assembly. Wealthy, socially prominent, and politically powerful, the Mifflins were among the elite of Philadelphia. As an added complication, they were also Quakers, a religion that condemned painters and prohibited portraiture. In Boston, Copley had succeeded in his ambition to be both a painter and a gentleman. Now the commission for Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin brought him face to face with high society Philadelphian revolutionaries, patrons who might not recognize him as an equal.

In order to establish the framework for possible interactions, this chapter examines Copley's situation in Boston and the Mifflins' environment in Pennsylvania. With this preliminary contextual groundwork, the study then investigates the meeting of the painter and patrons as evidenced within painting itself. The look Sarah Mifflin directs out to the implied viewer forms one key for interpreting the interaction of the Mifflins' within the painting, their relationship with the viewer, and by extension, with Copley as artist.
Ultimately, an expanded Gaze theory produces an interpretation that encompasses cultural context, iconography, and formal analysis, yet probes more deeply than these traditional approaches. The conclusion evaluates the interpretation produced and considers what Gaze methodology contributed to the investigation.

**The Painter: John Singleton Copley, Gentleman**  
**Artist from Boston**  
**Early Life and Environment**

John Singleton Copley was born in July of 1738 to Irish immigrants, Mary Singleton [Copley] and her husband Richard Copley, who owned a tobacco shop on Boston’s Long Wharf that doubled as their home. As a widow, Mary Copley assumed legal control of the shop in the spring of 1748 and remarried, transferring her tobacco inventory to the home of her new husband, Peter Pelham (c.1695-1751). This not only removed her son from the rougher wharf environment of the sea trades, it placed him in the home of an artist and schoolmaster.

Although originally apprenticed in London to a mezzotint engraver, John Singleton Copley’s new stepfather, Peter Pelham, supplemented his meager studio income by teaching others in Boston the trappings of gentility. Writing, arithmetic, dancing, fancy needlework, painting on glass, and manners—these were among the cultured offerings Pelham taught would-be ladies and gentlemen. Copley now entered the often contradictory worlds of the artist’s studio and cultured refinement, two interests that would guide his life in years to come. Although Pelham had older children from earlier marriages, upon his death in 1751 his stepson took over the studio.

The Boston of Copley’s youth boasted several portrait painters. John Smibert (1688-1751) constituted Peter Pelham’s primary competition and operated a unique studio-shop that sold art supplies and prints. Smibert not only offered for view his own works, he owned and displayed a collection of European copies of famous paintings and casts of sculptures. As Smibert aged, his painting moved away from Continental traditions. In the second quarter of the century, this trend reversed with the work of
Robert Feke (c. 1707-post 1750) and John Greenwood (1727-1792). As native born and trained painters, Feke and Greenwood developed visually pleasing painting styles that remained wedded to the decorative two-dimensionality of the non-academic tradition. The paintings of Feke in particular influenced young Copley. Feke employed flat planes, intense color contrasts, and sharp-edged shapes rather than modeled volume. Greenwood entered the portrait painting profession after being trained as a sign painter, and his work showed sensitivity to the possibilities of two dimensional design. Early American painters also used mezzotints of English and European paintings as sources for ideas and compositions, and the works of Feke, Greenwood, and Copley himself reflect the strong light and dark contrast intrinsic to that print medium.

With the arrival in 1755 of an academically trained English painter named Joseph Blackburn, Copley gained a major competitor. Blackburn’s work enlivened the art market, and for the first time Boston hosted an artist who supported himself completely by portrait painting. Still a teenager, Copley studied the Englishman’s style, learned from it, and modified his own in response. By his twentieth birthday, Copley had developed a consistent style that combined his earlier tendency toward dramatic lighting with a new elegance and emphasis on color. His work captured the attention of the colonial art scene, people began commissioning portraits, and young Copley became a success.

When he embraced painting as a way to earn his living, Copley did not abandon his desire to be a gentleman. In 1769 he married Susanna (Sukey) Farnham Clarke, the daughter of Elizabeth Winslow and Richard Clarke. Through Sukey, he acquired membership in one of Boston’s most prominent families. The Winslow family had maintained an eminent position since their initial arrival on the Mayflower, and the Clarkes were among Boston’s most successful merchants. Sukey’s parents were ardent Anglophiles, and the family’s political orientation is reflected in Richard Clarke’s service as Boston agent for the British East India Company. Following his marriage, Copley moved from his studio-house in the city to a farm on Beacon Hill. In their new estate, the Copley’s nearest neighbor was John Hancock—a staunch Whig and one of the wealthiest
men in the colonies. Through marriage and relocation, John Singleton Copley symbolically separated himself from the craftsman tradition, and became the social equal of those he painted.9

Through the accumulation of wealth combined with an attention to appearance, Copley transformed himself from the boy in a tobacco shop into Boston gentry. With the proper appearance backed up by land and family connections, he had re-fashioned himself in a manner that paralleled his creation of appearances for his clients.10 By 1773 he was moving easily through Boston’s highest society, negotiating and interacting as an equal. Yet he still painted portraits, a labor that remained tied to craft rather than liberated in Art.

Painting, Portraiture, and Gentility

Copley’s success depended a great deal upon his ability to create a “likeness” that recreated in paint the particular appearances of people and the objects they treasured. This was a powerful tool in colonial America, capable of making the absent present through representation. In addition, a painter skilled in crafting a likeness held the power to change reality’s appearance to reflect the patron’s personal conceit (as filtered by the artist’s point of view) or the painter’s own agenda.11 Copley’s success in creating the illusion of presence is dramatically represented in a story told by the Scotsman Thomas Ainslie, who commissioned a portrait from Copley and then sent the painting to his mother. When Ainslie subsequently also sent his fifteen month old son home to Scotland, the boy mistook the realistic painting for his absent father. As recounted by Thomas’ father in-law:

the Infant eyed your Picture, he sprung to it, roared, and shriched, and attempted gripping the hand, but when he could not catch hold of it, nor gett You to speak to him, he stamp’d and scolded, and when any of us askt him for Papa, he always turned, and pointed to the Picture. What think [you] of this proof of the Painters Skill in taking Your likeness?12

To Copley’s clients, stories like this of the “innocent eye” proved the painter’s true genius, which resided for them in his ability to “capture” their reality in paint. Consequently, they praised him for the verisimilitude of his illusions: “Your picture ... is universally
acknowledg'd to be a very masterly performance, elegantly finish'd and a most striking Likeness; in short it has every property that Genius, Judgement and attention can bestow on it." By stressing surface quality and accurate performance, comments like this evaluated painting as a craft rather than an Art. While pleased with praise and monetary success, Copley would not have agreed that portraits held "every property that Genius . . . can bestow," for such works provided him with little room for allegory and invention. To a painter who dreamed of achieving greatness in the European hierarchy of painting, success as a portrait painter was a financially rewarding convenience incapable of bringing true glory and fame.

The Taint of Trade

Smibert's small museum of copies and casts had brought the European tradition to Boston, and in the process made it clear that although the American colonies possessed a native tradition, they lacked academic art on par with that of England and Europe. Seeking to educate himself in his chosen profession, Copley acquired a library of academic art treatises that delineated a clear hierarchy of worth with regard to the subjects a painter selected and the way he treated them." Copley's decade-long correspondence with expatriate painter Benjamin West reinforced the message. As a result Copley developed a sense of the fine arts that placed his present occupation, portrait painting, near the bottom.

Portraiture maintained this humble position for several reasons. In its dependence upon a patron who also served as its subject, portraiture resembled the product a gentleman might order from an artisan or craftsman. This is why praise like that quoted above cut, even while it lauded. In addition, likeness—the defining characteristic of most portraiture—highlighted the artist's ability to duplicate natural appearance. With its emphasis on the mechanical duplication of "reality," portrait painting seemed a pursuit far removed from the lofty ideas, inventions, and idealizations embodied in the highly valued artistic pursuit of history painting. Copley felt the stigma keenly:

A taste of painting is too much Wanting [in Boston] to afford any kind of helps; and was it not for preserving the resemblance of particular persons,
painting would not be known in the place[.] The people generally regard it no more than any other useful trade, as they sometimes term it, like that of a Carpenter tailor or shew maker, not as one of the most noble Arts in the World. Which is not a little Mortifying to me. While the Arts are so disregarded I can hope for nothing, eith[er] to incourage or assist me in my studies but what I receive from a thousand Leagues Distance [England], and be my improvements what they will, I shall not be benifitted by them in this country, neith[er] in point of fortune or fame.15

Copley lamented that Bostonians viewed him as a skilled tradesman from whom they could order custom-made products, rather than as a practitioner of a "noble Art." Despite this, Copley sought to define himself as both a gentleman and a fine artist capable of higher, morally uplifting pursuits. He longed to paint exalted allegories, to follow the grandest traditions of his art, to construct paintings that illuminated and embodied the noblest qualities of humanity, and to achieve an international reputation.16 At the same time, Copley’s audience and clients valued his representational product as a highly skilled craft rather than as example of intrinsically worthy "fine art."17 Although he reached "gentleman" status in Boston through his personal appearance, hard-earned wealth, and marriage, such success was not enough.

Genteel Façades

Secure in the belief that their wealth was God-given, Copley’s New England clients acquired possessions and clothing that visibly symbolized their self-satisfied social and financial status. A portrait could be ordered from a painter in the same way that a silver service might be purchased from a signature silversmith. The commissioned painting functioned as the ultimate symbol of wealth.18 In this use of painting as commodity, the link between a person and his or her image played a pivotal role in confirming status.19 In addition, items within the painting—lace, textiles, furniture, jewelry, books, flowers—also functioned like coins in the bank, allowing the portrayed to possess both item and semblance, or perhaps the semblance alone.

The nature of portraiture as a façade that simultaneously embodied and remained distant from the subject, resembled the structure of self-definition as practiced in the social
level Copley sought to join. In pre-war Boston, the elite lived in a genteel world governed by rules of etiquette and behavior. This "polite" society of wealthy merchants and landed gentry linked refined taste with power, and measured both through appearance. The regulation and presentation of the body and mind through movement, posture, cleanliness, clothing, and ornamentation, provided an immediate definition of a person's position within society and limited what he or she might do.

Instructors in manners such as Peter Pelham taught their pupils how to move, sit, and enter and leave rooms, in addition to the correct carriage of the body as it genteelly performed these actions. The refined body maintained a straight line from neck to tailbone while curving the torso forward. This subordinated the shoulders by pushing them down and back. The chin remained raised, which helped to keep the mouth firmly shut. All posturing had to appear effortless. As the century progressed, the truly genteel could recline into easier poses. Copley's portraits repeatedly demonstrate both the formal and more casual postures of elegance.

The attempt by eighteenth-century Americans to mediate societal identity by learning the visual markers for gentility resembles Lacan's description of the scopic field, where the subject is simultaneously source of the look and object under the Gaze (Figure 1.3). The opaque "screen" of language and cultural images mediates between the subject and this objectifying Gaze, filtering the latter to determine the poses in which a subject might be "photo-graphed." In Chapter I of this study, this interaction of Gaze and screen was termed a "cultural Gaze." The pre-established positions sanctioned by the cultural Gaze might not agree with the ego's own self-image of desired completion. However, by playing with the screen's images as if they were masks, the subject can sometimes moderate and even deflect the power of the cultural Gaze. This self-definition is not possible if the cultural Gaze unmask the subject or otherwise resists his or her assumption of an identity.

In learning the poses and masks of "polite" behavior, Bostonians engaged in this type of mimicry. The individual masks of gentility fit together into a defensive shield
which, if completed by external validation, deflected the initial positioning by the cultural Gaze in favor of a new one as part of society’s “elite.” The subject’s ability to assume an identity position, and operate within its parameters—in Copley’s case, as gentleman artist rather than artisan—depended solely upon the concurrence of others who acted in mass as agents of the cultural Gaze. Their acceptance or rejection of a subject’s attempt at self-definition was in turn based upon their own interactions with the pre-existing cultural screen.

Gentility was a performance where players in the scopic theater turned a critical eye upon themselves and those around them. The Lady’s Preceptor, an etiquette book popular in the colonies, warned genteel young ladies about the ceaseless Gaze: “wherever you are, imagine that you are observed, and that your Behavior is attentively scanned by the rest of the Company all the while, and this will oblige you to observe yourself, and to be constantly on your Guard.” To be genteel in colonial America was to be immersed in spectacle, with the audience as cultural Gaze standing ready with confirming or delimiting definitions based upon the protective façade of behavior and appearance. Although his clients read a Copley portrait as a record of their reality, the re-creative character of painting allowed it to function as one of the masks. Successful portraits projected a semblance of completion and refinement that both reassured the depicted and deflected the critical eye of his or her audience.

Fashioning a Semblance

Through its depictions of people and objects, representational painting held the power not only of making the absent present, but also of adjusting its presentation of that reality according to the desires of the patron and the artist. This was perhaps what lured New Englanders to portraiture, and it reflects one of Copley’s perpetual complaints. Portrait paintings were jointly produced by, and answered the desires of, both patron and artist. The painter transformed appearance into an image that pleased the client, and into a painting that functioned as art. In his Essay on the Theory of Painting, the eighteenth-
century English painter Jonathan Richardson named two qualities as necessary for successful portrait painting: “likeness” and “invention.” In creating a portrait, the painter exercised “invention” through “the Choice of the Air, and Attitude, the Action, Drapery, and Ornaments, with respect to the Character of the Person.”

The subject instigated the process of portraiture by hiring Copley, and the strength of his or her desire influenced the composition’s initial form. However, the semblance provided by the completed painting was a construct formed and fashioned by the artist alone. Although the “likeness” manifested in Copley’s portraits brought him contemporary acclaim, his best portrait work transcended replication. In presenting the “truth” of semblance, Copley created paintings that manifested his own desires, those of his clients, and the ethos of the culture and time in which they lived. Lulled by the minuteness of detailed observation, the illusion of expensive surfaces, and the cool confidence of his sitters, even today’s viewers accept as truth the presentation provided.

One of the façades fashioned by Copley was his own stance of political neutrality, which he justified as necessary for the good of his art. “I am desirous of avoiding every imputation of party spirit,” he explained, “Political contests being neither pleasing to an artist or advantageous to the Art itself.” During the years of boycott and protest that led to armed rebellion, Copley struggled to maintain this position. His success is reflected in the continued prominence of his clients, among whom numbered both ardent patriots and firm loyalists. However, 1773 proved a difficult year. The receipt of eight commissions in 1773, including that for the Mifflins’ double portrait, caused Copley once again to postpone a long desired European painting tour. Instead of the expected economic success, he found studio supplies hard to obtain and his livelihood threatened as discontent with taxation ripped through Boston’s social fabric. Although Copley strove to keep the peace, his ability to negotiate a truce between his Anglophile merchant in-laws and the angry Sons of Liberty depended upon his non-partisan stance. As hostilities increased, neutrality in the name of art became less and less tenable. Tensions culminated in late 1773. As agent for the British East India Company, Copley’s father-in-law,
Richard Clarke, was inextricably linked to tea; and his ship the Dartmouth was one from which the Sons of Liberty “mohawks” brewed tea in the Boston Harbor. After mobs threatened his home and family the following year, John Singleton Copley finally left for Europe. He never returned.

The Patrons: Thomas Mifflin and Sarah Morris Mifflin, Quakers and Patriots

The Quakers and Pennsylvania

The Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as the “Quakers,” originated under the guidance of George Fox in seventeenth-century England. Individual believers received God’s direct spiritual guidance through an “inward light” that directed Friends—both male and female—to speak and minister on an individual basis. Meetings were times of silent mediation in which the Spirit made itself known by moving a Friend to minister or pray. Quakers built square meeting houses, with the seating directed in toward the center so that all attending could be seen and heard.

Friends rejected as unnecessary the “intermediary” presence of ordained ministers and sacraments, upheld the spiritual equality of men and women, refused to take oaths, and emphasized the importance of an individual’s conscience. Separating themselves from non-believers through their distinct speech, plain behavior, and unadorned dress, Quakers stressed visuality as a marker for individual subjectivity and faith. Combined with their pacifism, this distinctly different corporal presentation made members of the Society of Friends easy targets for persecution in Anglican England.

When William Penn received title to land in the American colonies in 1681, he established a “Quaker state” that became a haven for the Society of Friends. Pennsylvania Friends maintained constant contact with meetings in England. Meetings developed libraries holding epistles, reports of yearly meetings, and books and pamphlets that reproduced the histories and writings of the founding fathers—especially Fox and Penn—and those martyred in the sufferings. Meetings in places with printing presses, such as London and Philadelphia, often made gifts of books to other Meetings. In addition, when
individual Friends were called upon to minister they traveled extensively. This increased contact between Meetings on both national and international levels, while the traveling Quakers provided external supervision for the Meetings they visited.

The Quakers and the Visual

From the beginning, the Quaker fathers emphasized the difference between those persons caught by the worldly lures of secular society, and the plainness of the true Quaker. Encouraged by excessive visual display, the "Lust of the Eye" continually tempted Quakers to step from their true path of plainness and moderation. According to William Penn,

Visible Objects have a great Influence on The People, and therefore Satan is represented tempting Eve with fair Fruit, pleasant to the Senses, the Palate, the Eye, etc. And are not they who sell vain and superfluous Things, exposing them at Door and Windows, Tempters of the People to the Lust of the Eye and pride of Life.35

George Fox also warned of the dangers posed by giving in to the scopic appetite:

Do not all your Fashions please your Eyes? Is not this the Lust of the Eye, and the Pride of Life, and not of [God] the Father? And is not here the Strife in all these Trimmings, and envying one another, and hatred for them that are in a Fashion above your Fashion? And do not you Scoff at one another that is in a Fashion below yours?36

In his denunciation of fashionable apparel, Fox decried such ornaments as ribbons and an excess of gold laces. This extended to the environments in which people lived; they, too, should be free of superfluous trimmings like expensive upholstery and fringed decorations.37 When people vied with one another for possession of the latest fashions and ornaments, the resulting war of display fed the lust of the eye and created a prideful hierarchy of consumption that produced envy and class distinctions while distancing the people from their Christian God.

Eighteenth-century culture targeted the body as the sight for visual signs that registered divisions such as class, occupation, sex, and religion. As discussed above in regards to Copley and his paintings, the display of appearance defined a person in colonial
society. To a great extent, the coveted quality of “gentility” was itself a product of the visible. Cleanliness, ornament, proportion, posture, carriage, expression, behavior, wardrobe, accoutrements, and even handwriting, functioned as visual markers that determined the body’s position in and by society. The Quakers understood the power of the visual, and targeted the body as a symbol for the battle over the believer’s soul. Early Quakers instituted a “plain” style of dress that made visible their tenets of moderation and simplicity. Rather than a “costume,” they adopted a simplified version of the clothing of the time, and then kept it. They selected subdued colors such as brown, fawn, sage green, and creams, but Friends eventually became known for their sober “Quaker gray.” Although the criteria that made clothing plain and simple provided individual Friends with some freedom of choice, Meetings reacted with prohibitions if members wandered too far from tradition.

A plain Quaker man wore his broad-brimmed hat straight rather than cocked, and did not decorate it with a fancy hat band. Ideally, his coat featured straight sleeves, no lapels, and a minimal number of fabric- or thread-covered wooden buttons. Utility rather than fashion determined the number and placement of both buttonholes and buttons, and pockets were all inside the coat to avert decorative effects. To avoid emphasizing his simple cravat, a Friend buttoned his coat to the neck. He was to resist the temptations of elaborate wigs, powdered hair, fringed cravats, and fancy shoe buckles.

The appearance of a plain Quaker woman also reflected a simplifying tendency. She was neither to wear her hair high on her head nor to use color, borders, gathering, or excessive fabric for her headdress. She selected modestly fashioned, unadorned clothing that covered her breasts and shoulders and displayed no embroidered decoration. Fabrics were solid rather than striped or patterned, and sleeves often ended below the elbow with “turned back cuffs.” The plain style of dress also prohibited the use of ribbons, strings, and pearls—indeed, all jewelry. Quakers wore no wedding rings.

While “plain Friends” followed George Fox’s counsel that their only ornament be “a meek and quiet spirit” (Peter 1:3) another group of Quakers did not. These Friends
engaged in prohibited social activities, wore more stylish apparel, and decorated their homes with expensive furnishings and trims. Terms developed that described the difference between the “plain,” “strict,” or “rigid” Quakers, and the more worldly and fashionable “gay,” “white,” or “wet” Friends who failed to resist the lures of secular society. George Anne Bellamy, an English actress from a Quaker family, explained that she rejected “the studied formality of a rigid Quaker,” and dressed herself “only so plain and neat as to entitle the denomination of a “wet Quaker”, a distinction that arises chiefly from the latter’s wearing ribbons, gauzes and laces.” In addition, wealthy wet Quaker women in Philadelphia wore clothing skillfully crafted of the finest and costliest materials available. Although dress was perhaps the most obvious marker of difference, social behavior and the business of Meetings were also areas where the two groups of Friends diverged. While wet Quakers continued to attend meetings of worship, they often did not participate in the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings where business and disciplines took place. In addition, they were so attuned to fashion that it could be difficult to tell by dress alone whether or not they were Quakers.

Another worldly vanity singled out for denouncement by both Fox and Penn was the “making [of] a counterfeit presentment,” or having your portrait painted. The Quaker prohibition against images and portraiture softened somewhat as the number of truly prominent Friends increased. While the possession of “art” continued to be frowned upon, owning objects of information—portraits of others—became acceptable. In any case, the prohibition against images created a dearth of documented representations that makes determining what actually constituted acceptable Quaker dress more difficult. The use of painting as evidence is further complicated by the patrons themselves, for “wet” rather than “plain” Quakers would have succumbed to the portrait artist’s lure.

Clothing provided a clear example of how Friends used the visual as a marker of faith. Although actual pronouncements on clothing made it clear that the Quaker way was not that of surface glitter, they typically left the defining of “moderation,” “plainness,” and “simplicity” to the meetings and their worshiping members. When hard work and God’s
grace produced affluence. Quakers developed individual interpretations of dress and behavior that stretched these basic tenets. This happened in Philadelphia as Quaker merchants consolidated a disproportionate amount of the city's wealth during the eighteenth century. Wealthy Friends who worshiped without participating in their Meeting's business affairs became "wet Quakers" when they indulged in such forbidden pleasures as fashionable apparel, personal adornment, and dancing. They might have occasionally attended theater, bought paintings, or commissioned portraits. These activities were all viewed as dangerous and even damning, for baubles and images fed and encouraged the "Lust of the Eye." As places where individuals simultaneously looked at and were seen by others, Quaker meetings standardized and sanctioned spectacle. The secular behavior of wet Quakers would have brought censor from their plain Quaker brethren. Since Meetings of business where observed behavior defined as deviant would be judged and disciplined often followed Meetings of worship, Quaker society established a form of cultural Gaze.

A Quaker Marriage

Thomas Mifflin was born in Philadelphia in 1744, the first son of John Mifflin and Elizabeth Bagnell [Mifflin]. John Mifflin prospered as a successful merchant in a wealthy, well-established Quaker family. After the death of Elizabeth, John Mifflin married Sarah Fishbourne, and Thomas gained an enterprising and powerful stepmother. A portrait by Benjamin West of Thomas Mifflin at about fifteen shows a fashionably dressed country gentleman (Figure 3.2). He leans elegantly against a Pennsylvania long rifle in a river landscape, with ducks in the background indicating a successful hunt. Not content with curls, gold buttons, and a tasseled gold cord holding his powder horn, the young dandy pulls his opened coat back to reveal a velvet waistcoat, which in turn has been mostly unbuttoned to expose white shirt ruffles from throat to waist. Although hunting for food was an acceptable pass time, this cocky youth little resembles the sober Quaker ideal.
Late adolescence was an awkward time in Pennsylvania’s Quaker society, for merchants in training finished basic schooling at fourteen but could not legally open a business until they reached majority at age twenty-one. In a common procedure, after graduating from the College of Philadelphia 1760, Thomas spent four years of unofficial apprenticeship in the offices of a successful merchant, followed by a year in Europe. Quaker patriarchs in the colonies viewed these “seasoning” trips abroad as a practical opportunity for neophyte merchants to start international networking, increase their business experience, and gain intellectual and cultural refinement. Extended stays abroad, like Thomas Mifflin’s, also served as moral tests for young men, many of whom were living away from families and Meetings for the first time. On his return in 1765 Thomas and his brother George opened a mercantile business in Philadelphia. A charming young man of good looks, genteel behavior, and wealth, Thomas Mifflin turned his attention to marriage.

After two years in business, Thomas Mifflin married fellow Quaker Sarah Morris at Philadelphia’s Fair Hill Meeting House on March 4, 1767. Officially, the first concern in a Quaker marriage was a spiritual love that merged the husband and wife into one soul united with the Light of God. When evaluated and sanctioned by the Meeting, this “union of souls,” or marriage “in Unity,” made possible a supportive spiritual partnership that in turn required mature spouses. In actual practice, merchant Friends viewed prospective marriage partners in terms of both character and wealth, although the latter was of secondary importance. This is clear in the advice Richard Hill gave his son concerning the selection of a bride:

virtue, good sense, good temper and an agreeable person of a good family are so essential that scarce any one of them must be wanting. As to money it’s only to be considered as a good contingent and by no means as a principal motive.

Concern over spiritual harmony and issues of character did not always prevail when young Quakers went courting. Instead, such worldly concerns as money, physical attractiveness, and romance gained importance. Romantic attitudes and “courty love” appear to dominate courtship among Philadelphia Quakers in the middle and late
eighteenth century. Since this placed emphasis on the "lady," it might partially explain the interaction seen within the Mifflins' double portrait.

Sarah Morris and Women's Issues

Sarah Morris Mifflin had been born in Philadelphia in April of 1747 to the Quakers Morris and Susan Morris. Given the dependent nature of a wife's existence, it is relatively rare for her to receive written documentation on par with that accorded her more publicly oriented husband. Sarah Morris Mifflin was not an exception. Abigail Adams described her as an "agreeable" and "delicate Lady," and John Adams found her to be "a charming Quaker Girl," descriptions that indicate Sarah reflected a polite gentility while remaining within the tenets of her faith. Although little direct information about Sarah Morris Mifflin survives, her dual position as a Philadelphia Quaker and wife to a wealthy merchant provides some guidance.

Quaker belief in the universal equality of the human soul empowered women in spiritual matters. When Quaker men gathered to conduct monthly, quarterly, and yearly business for their Meetings, Quaker women met in parallel organizations. Either sex might be moved to speak in Meetings, serve as overseers and elders, or write religious essays. Even more radically, when the inner light called a Quaker to preach, he or she testified with authority and traveled where the spirit led—no matter how distant that land might be.

Equality of spirit did not translate into equality by law, and in secular matters eighteenth-century Quakers were no different than their neighbors in defining women as subordinate to men. A wedded woman's duties were to God, husband, and family. A basic education assisted female Quakers in virtuously fulfilling these responsibilities. Although Quaker girls occasionally received an extensive education, schooling more commonly provided the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. These subjects enabled them to become competent household managers, keep accounts, read epistles, minister, and participate in the business of the women's meetings. The daughters of wealthy
Philadelphia Quakers might also have received a little genteel polish through instruction in French and embroidery.72 Moderate in extent and practical in content, a girl learned things that reinforced the behavior expected of Quaker wives:

First, to be sober; secondly, to love their husbands; thirdly, to love their children; fourthly, to be discreet; fifthly, to be chaste, and keepers at home, and good, obedient to their own husbands.73

Written by George Fox in 1676, this list of appropriate wifely behavior still held true among his followers a century later. Balancing equality of spirit with submission in body cannot have been easy, and letters of advice suggest that Quaker wives occasionally struggled with their dependent position in secular society:

A woman who must rise or fall by the good or ill conduct of her husband has a right to give her opinion in what concerns them both, but it's best policy in her to gain an influence over him by kindness, mildness and condescension and then it will be lasting.74

In order to maintain household harmony, wives and daughters were reminded of their submissive place in the worldly hierarchy. Although the Society of Friends believed men and women were spiritual equals who became one in a divinely sanctioned marriage, in matters of the world the Quakers followed secular customs.75 Sober, discreet, chaste, and obedient, and the ideal Quaker wife loved her family, kept house, and obeyed her husband.

Colonial wives were defined in relation to their husbands, a subordinate position that included legal dependency.76 Eighteenth-century Pennsylvania based its law upon that of England, which included the wife in the husband's legal identity:

by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs everything.77

This was known as "coverture," and affected all Pennsylvania brides.78 Common law used coverture to "protect" a wife by cloaking her in the identity of her husband, who in turn gained possession of all her property and assumed full responsibility for her future debts and illegal actions. By law, her individual existence merged with and became subordinate to his as she entered a position of legal dependency that lasted until either she or her
husband died. Although coverture made a wife "civilly dead," there is evidence that in actual practice Pennsylvania courts often tried and sentenced wives as independent subjects under the law.79

The presence of escorts served as visual reminders of a genteel woman's dependent position. "Ladies" rarely ventured onto the streets without an attending male and did not mingle freely with the city's inhabitants.80 Despite this, young women regularly combined socializing and shopping, and further reinforced their religious network by frequenting the retail shops of Quaker businesswomen. The assumption of household duties transformed shopping from a mostly social activity into a practical necessity. In the uneasy economic and political situation leading up to the Revolution, women's involvement as consumers gave them power in the marketplace that in turn influenced the success or failure of boycotts.81 Despite their dependent economic status and rules of etiquette that mandated escorts, genteel women in eighteenth-century Philadelphia turned purchasing tasks into opportunities for social networking; and, in the years leading up to the revolution, even into a tool for political protest.

The diaries of Elizabeth Drinker, a Quaker among Philadelphia's financial elite, shed some light on Sarah Mifflin's probable daily activities. A wealthy woman did not struggle to complete household duties on her own; she delegated work to other women. When the Drinker household dwindled to four, Elizabeth still employed seven servants, three of whom worked in the kitchen. In addition to cooking, servants "served" family members and their guests, helped with the housework, maintained clothing by sewing and ironing, and whitewashed the property. Drinker supervised and directed all of these activities in addition to hiring, firing, counseling, and paying those employed.

Although Elizabeth Drinker did not garden, horticulture formed a popular and approved Quaker recreational activity, and servants would also have helped in such a pursuit. For Quakers, gardening provided benefits on three levels: it exercised the body, beautified the world, and revealed God's creative power.82 The excellent gardens of Quakers in the Philadelphia area attracted notice as early as 1698.83 The connection
between Quakers and gardening was deeply seated, and during the Mifflins’ time two of the premier botanists were Quakers—Peter Collinson in England, and the John Bartram in Philadelphia. The latter established the first botanical garden in the colonies in 1728, corresponded regularly with European and English horticulturists, and introduced American species to his colleagues overseas. However, the success or failure of a household garden in the colonies was often associated with the woman of the house. It was believed that a wife tended her garden as she did her children, so healthy flowers and fruit symbolized her own virtuous character and, by extension, both her fertility and her success as a wife and mother. In the words of an eighteenth-century American: “Not only the training of children, but of plants, such as needed peculiar care or skill to rear them, was the female province.”

Within a society that equated a woman’s skill in gardening with her abilities as a wife and mother, even genteel eighteenth-century women took up horticulture.

An account from the 1780s testifies to Sarah Mifflin’s industry and skill in household management. When John Penn found himself in the Pennsylvania town of Reading during a tour of the state, he decided to make an unannounced visit to the Mifflins at their farm “Angelica.” As recorded in Penn’s journal, “The General and Mrs. Mifflin received us in a neat farm-house, and being very early risers themselves, provided a breakfast for us, tho’ it was then only half-past seven;” Penn then received a tour of the farm, during which “General Mifflin, with agreeable frankness and affability, pressed us both to stay for an early dinner, to which we sat down about one o’clock.”

It should be pointed out that these were unexpected guests who had arrived at the home of a gentleman farmer, before seven-thirty in the morning. After a gracious reception, Penn and his party were immediately served a full meal. Penn’s wording suggests he found the Mifflins not only up and dressed, but finished with breakfast themselves. Finally, the alacrity with which even unexpected guests were greeted and served suggests that Sarah was in full and active control of her household despite the early hour.
Sarah Mifflin might have been used to guests appearing unexpectedly and staying for meals. Philadelphia merchants and retailers often used ground floor rooms in their homes as business locations. This doubling of domestic and professional space facilitated involvement of women in the family business, and probably encouraged impromptu invitations since the wives of merchants regularly acted as discreet hostesses for their husbands. In addition, conducting business (or politics) in the space of the home would have increased the wife’s participation in creating networks and strengthening contacts. Proximity and familiarity allowed a wife to manage the family business during her husband’s absence, and sometimes helped her gain controlling ownership upon his death. Although legally positioned as a dependent under coverture, some women could—and did, when it was needed—tend to their husband’s business interests with skill and success.

Thomas and Sarah Mifflin, Patriots

The newlyweds were part of Philadelphia’s elite and reinforced their position through charm and genteel behavior. The Mifflins were among a few wealthy Quaker families who began appearing on the exclusive Philadelphia Dancing Assembly’s “lists” in the mid-1760s, despite a deep-seated Quaker prohibition against dancing. During the winter, socializing hit the ice and expert skater Thomas Mifflin frequented events on the frozen Delaware River. A charming and accomplished man of “easy address” and “politeness,” Thomas Mifflin soon obtained memberships in both the American Philosophical Society and the Schuylkill Fishing Company. While the first pursued intellectual and scientific discoveries, members of the second elite group were known for their lavish parties and election celebrations. Despite Quaker prohibition of sport hunting, Thomas Mifflin took part in Philadelphia’s initial Fox Hunts. Although the couple continued to attend monthly Meetings and he pursued mercantile business, their prominence in this social environment drew Thomas increasingly toward politics.

Philadelphia’s merchants and mechanics united in non-importation agreements in 1765 and 1769-70 that resulted in increased awareness of the products crafted by the
city's artisans and manufacturers. Buying local products had become a patriotic act by the mid-1760s. While not an egalitarian community, Philadelphia lacked the strict and arbitrary class distinctions that often promote radical overthrow of governmental systems. Most of those protesting in the 1760s and early 1770s wanted reform rather than revolution. Thomas Mifflin grew into a radical Whig as his initial merging of business and political interests blossomed. This put him in an unpopular minority in Philadelphia, and he adopted a public position as a "moderate." Such a façade enabled Mifflin to work both openly and behind the scenes to appease the demands of the "patriotic" mechanics and to allay the fears of fellow Quakers in the powerful merchant establishment.

The cloak of moderation gave him greater scope for effective diplomatic maneuvering among those less inclined to radical action, and in 1772 Philadelphians elected twenty-eight year old Thomas Mifflin as one of their representatives for the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly. His successful service led to reelection the following year. An active member and able speaker, Mifflin was appointed to the important committees of public accounts, correspondence, and grievances. The last two put him in direct contact with the governments, politicians, and radicals in other colonies. This was his role during the summer of 1773. Over the next months Thomas Mifflin brought his politics into the open, and his true stance as a radical became known. By 1774 John Adams was referring to him firmly as promoting the "American Cause."

Despite a deeply seated Quaker pacifism, Mifflin believed the colonies needed to back up their words with arms and fighting men. To this end, during the spring of 1775 Mifflin began working to convince Pennsylvanians to form armed volunteer forces; when these "Associators" were formed, he served as a senior major in one of Philadelphia's battalions. When word reached the city in April about the battle at Lexington, Mifflin told a crowd of almost 8000 people gathered for a town meeting: "Let us not be bold in declarations and afterwards cold in action. Let not the patriotic feelings of today be forgotten tomorrow, nor have it said of Philadelphia, that she passed noble resolutions, slept upon them, and afterwards neglected them." The commitment with which Thomas
Mifflin embraced the necessity for military forces in the name of Independence caused John Adams to comment the following month, "Mr. Mifflin [is now] a Major. He ought to have been a Genl. for he has been the animating Soul of the whole." In June of 1775, Mifflin accepted Washington's appointment of him to his staff as an aide-de-camp, and he left Philadelphia for the Cambridge headquarters of the new Continental Army. From Massachusetts he wrote to his cousin Jonathan, "It is a righteous Cause. My whole Soul is ardently engaged in it." However, Mifflin's effective and energetic dedication to his "righteous Cause," soon provoked another response from his fellow Quakers. On July 28, 1775, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting officially disowned Thomas Mifflin for supporting armed resistance: "Thomas Mifflin of this city, merchant, having for a considerable time past been active in the promotion of military measures, he hath separated himself from religious fellowship with us." A patriot who worked to encourage and mold the early years of the American struggle for independence, Thomas Mifflin took a stance as patriot that cost him his life as a Quaker.

While Thomas corresponded, maneuvered, and eventually fought in support of the Cause, Sarah Mifflin's activities would have been less public. Evidence from later in the decade indicates that she supported his position. When Thomas took part in support-raising tours of rural Pennsylvania in 1774, she was by his side. At their "grand, spacious, and elegant" house in Philadelphia that fall, Sarah regularly served as a gracious hostess for the principal delegates to the first Continental Congress, and John Adams and George Washington became frequent guests. When Thomas Mifflin joined the Continental Army in Cambridge as an aide-de-camp on Washington's staff, Sarah joined him in Massachusetts for part of 1775 despite the fact that his military activity brought disownment of him by their Quaker Meeting. Finally, as the manager of households, she exercised her commercial power and bought American-made goods.

In a firm statement of purpose during the Revolution, Sarah Morris Mifflin made her position clear:

I have retrenched every superfluous expense in my table and family. Tea I have not drank since last Christmas, nor bought a new cap or gown since
the affair at Lexington, and what I never did before, have learned to knit, and am now making stockings of wool for my servants; and this way do I throw in my mite to the public good. I know this, that as free I can die but once; but as a slave I shall not be worthy of life. I have the pleasure to assure you that these are the sentiments of my sister Americans. They have sacrificed assemblies, parties of pleasure, tea-drinkings and finery, to that great spirit of patriotism which actuates all degrees of people throughout this extensive country.99

In this letter to a friend in Boston, Sarah Morris Mifflin’s paraphrase of the blunt revolutionary slogan “live free or die” states her position with brevity and power. While the actions she indicates might not seem radical to modern eyes, in the polite society of eighteenth-century Philadelphia, they manifested a sharp break with old standards of gentility—the theatre of display found in the Assembly and its façades of sumptuous clothing, polite behavior, and ritual—in favor of a new self-definition as a working woman of sacrifice and power. In addition, women in revolutionary America politicized their handwork, and activities like spinning, knitting, fringe-weaving, and embroidery, became active symbols of independence from and resistance to British rule.100 In her measures to economize and avoid purchasing British products, Sarah Mifflin gave up tea and new clothing, learned to knit stockings for servants, and sacrificed all finery. It might be a “mite,” but motivated by “that great spirit of patriotism,” Sarah took a stance beside her husband for the American Cause.

Copley’s Painting: “Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris)”

By 1770 Newport, Rhode Island, had developed into a popular summer resort for the wealthy, including a few families from Philadelphia. The summer of 1773 found Thomas and Sarah Mifflin in residence from June to September. However, the death of Thomas’ grandfather in Boston brought about their visit to that city in July.101 Boston was an important base for Whig agitation against the Crown, and the home for some of Mifflin’s more radical correspondents. The Mifflins took advantage of their stay in the city to visit with these fellow patriots, including Samuel Adams.102 Boston was also home
for the painter John Singleton Copley, and a majority of his commissions in the years 1771 to 1774 came from Whigs.\textsuperscript{103} At some point during their stay in Boston, the Mifflins—
who numbered among the wealthiest of the patriots—became acquainted with Copleys’
work, and commissioned one of his last American paintings.

Copley’s portrait Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin is unusual in several ways.\textsuperscript{104} It is
one of the largest colonial portraits by Copley, and its size may reflect both the Mifflins’
wealth and the painting’s inclusion of two subjects. When commissioning a portrait, men
who held governmental offices like Thomas Mifflin’s often emphasized their own status
with single-figure portraits of themselves. Many of these officials were loyalists, a group
that constituted most of Copley’s wealthiest clientele. Despite their moderate incomes,
Whigs were more likely to commission from Copley portraits of both husband and wife.
Unlike the Mifflin painting, however, these were usually separate portraits rather than a
single painting that the wedded pair.

In Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin, the first impression is one of contrast between a
cool revealing light and warm concealing shadows. Light rakes into the space sharply
from the viewer’s left and spotlights the couple against an unlit background. Within this
dark environment, the couple sits closely together at a gateleg table. While he pursues the
genteel activity of reading, she is engaged in fringe-weaving. This wet Quaker handicraft
was at odds with the Friends’ proscriptions against decorative trim; in addition, within the
boycott-ridden strife of 1773, fringe-making took on political connotations.

With the partial exception of the Mifflins and the chairs on which they sit, elements
described within the painting create a stabilizing vertical and horizontal network. The
erect cylinder of Mrs. Mifflin’s torso is repeated by the architectural column behind her,
and reinforced by the multiple table legs, portions of her husband’s chair, and the edges of
her table loom. This upward thrust is countered by the horizontals of the wall’s baseboard
and chair-rail, the table edge, and the length of the loom itself as it sits squared to the table
top and parallel to the wall. The careful alignment of wall, table, and loom reinforces a
sense of order and calm.

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The lower section of the dark neutral-gray wall behind the Mifflins bears a rust-red wainscotting that stretches from the wooden floor to the chair rail. This color repeats in the vertical panel along the outer edge of the wall. A cooling shadow deepens the dark behind Mrs. Mifflin and extends to the right edge of the canvas, where it is punctuated by an opening that reveals the distant glow of a twilight sky. This vista is itself divided by a warm brownish-tan column, which begins above the wainscotting at Mrs. Mifflin’s back and stands silhouetted against the gray trees and greenish-blue sky of the cloudless dusk.

A fuzzy crescent of light curves over the shaft halfway up the column. As the only light striking an architectural form, it serves an important structural function within the painting. On a descriptive level, the difference between the sharply divided lights and shadows on Mrs. Mifflin, the slightly lower illumination describing her husband, and the indistinctness of this dimly glowing crescent, sets up a hierarchy that helps the dark expanse behind the couple read as spatially distant. This creates an environment and places the Mifflins within the space of a partly enclosed porch rather than against the flatness of a theatrical backdrop. On a deeper level of meaning, the crescent’s similarity in value to the sky unites the background vista with foreground room, while its source—seemingly the same light that illumines the Mifflins—links the architecture to the couple. This unity implies possession of the room and of the landscape beyond the walls.

Copley places the Mifflins closer to the left edge of the canvas, creating a greater expanse of darkness between Mrs. Mifflin’s back and the right edge of the canvas than between her husband’s arm and the left edge of the canvas. The presence of Mrs. Mifflin’s tall upholstered chair and the addition of the rectangular “window” above it balance this asymmetry. The darker shadow on the wall behind Mrs. Mifflin has a greenish-blue quality that repeats the deep Prussian blue brocade of her chair’s upholstery while simultaneously highlighting the warmth of the couple’s faces. A lighter version of this greenish-blue appears in the teal ribbon anchoring the table-loom and in the sky itself, linking Sarah and her loom with the land outside. In addition, the cool glow of the twilight sky contrasts with the warmth of the furniture and loom, while the red
surrounding the opening repeats that of the wooden furnishings and the wainscoting. Together, the placement and repetition of paired cool and warm elements relieve the stark neutral presentation of the couple's clothing, and subtly unifies and enlivens their situation.

The Mifflins occupy the lower two thirds of the canvas, and their posture and presence effectively separate the external viewer from their painted environment. Rather than an overpowering amount of headroom, the top third of the painting provides the couple with enough space to stand in comfort. This subliminally reinforces their control of the painted space. Although darkness moves over the flat wall behind them and soars through the large "empty" area over their heads, it does not overpower the couple. They instead control both the space and its darkness, contributing to the sense that although artificial, this is their environment. What might have been dominating and oppressive instead appears controlled and personal, a space the Mifflins might stand in and move through. It is also a space forever barred from the external viewer. Copley reinforces this intertwined possession and separation through the proportional relationship between figures and architecture, his hierarchy in paint handling, and his weighting of the warm versus cool, and dark versus light divisions that structure the painting itself. Copley has created a "sense" of the Mifflins that provides them with the power to dominate the composition and to assert possession over their painted environment.

Placed at the rear of the figural grouping, Mr. Mifflin himself is distanced from the viewer by the gateleg table, by Mrs. Mifflin, and by the chair she occupies. The brass upholstery tacks securing the leather seat of his Chippendale side chair add shining golden ornamentation not at all in keeping with proper plain Quaker appearance. He sits sideways in the chair in casual (if uncomfortable) elegance, his torso and chin held upright, his thin shoulders pulled back, and his arms resting on the top of the chair splats. While his torso and head assume genteel positions, his hips and legs indicate an insouciant and relaxed approach to elegance. He had been reading, and marks the page with his index finger. Thomas Mifflin's grasp of his small book opens it to reveal both lines of print and a margin marked with dark spots of ink. These marginalia indicate either a carefully read
and annotated printed book, or a personal missive, perhaps a diary. Either way, the book indexes Mr. Mifflin as a literate and cultured person. His disregard of it in favor of his wife’s attention suggests he values personal interaction over the status symbols of cultured wealth. Further, the deceptively casual way Thomas Mifflin holds the book cloaks its role within the composition. As Copley painted it, the book literally points toward Sarah, a compositional device that reinforces the attention Thomas directs toward his wife. This consideration is in keeping with Quaker marriage beliefs, where two spirits become one when wedded in unity.

Thomas Mifflin appears to be dressed almost completely in dark gray. The tight fitting coat, breeches, and waistcoat of his frock suit are all of the same dark wool. A contrasting spotless white appears at wrist and neck, and again in his silk stockings. Interestingly, the style of Mifflin’s shirt sleeve cuffs appear in no other merchant portraits; instead, Copley featured these narrow cuff bands in his paintings of the Reverend Thomas Cary, eighty-two-year-old Eleazer Tyng, and the patriot artisans Nathaniel Hurd and Paul Revere. Mifflin probably selected this style either for patriotic or religious reasons. And finally, a black bow at the back of his neck constrains the lighter gray of his soft powdered hair, an affectation of gentility more acceptable to Quakers than the wearing of a wig. The severity of Thomas Mifflin’s dress is broken only by large buttons on his coat, which are beautifully covered in a distinctive and unusual pattern of thread, and the small white ruffle which escapes over the top of his waistcoat. This moderate appearance would have been acceptable to Quakers.

As Thomas Mifflin twists from the waist to face Sarah, the pleased expression created by a slight smile counteracts a somber demeanor accentuated by a scar which slants from his forehead down the flesh of his pudgy right cheek. Mifflin’s casually elegant posture, the book he holds, and his sober apparel, are all fitting for a genteel merchant and a wealthy Philadelphia Quaker, as is the affectionate attention he directs toward his wife. A few items hint at possible undercurrents: the brass tacks of his chair contrast with his sober Quaker gray, and the unusual style of his shirt links him visually
with the artisan patriots of Boston. In his sober gray, Thomas Mifflin—the charming politician—appears firmly "Quaker," as if to emphasize his allegiance to the society from which he would be disowned in two years time.

Although Sarah Mifflin also is dressed in Quaker gray, her elaborate clothing, formal pose, and stern facial expression create a demeanor distinct from that of her husband. Although she sits in an upholstered chair, her upright posture distances her back from the fabric as though she refused to take comfort from the support offered by its dark, greenish-blue worsted brocade. This is an expensive setting for a Quaker: worsted wool was the most popular textile in Boston, but chairs were more commonly upholstered in less costly leather. Presented in three-quarter profile as she works a table-top loom, Sarah Mifflin directs her blue-black eyes out toward the external viewers. She turns her head slightly, and her face bears only the faintest hint of a dimpled smile as her hands continue to weave fringe and her graceful body remains still. The genteel verticality of her posture is reinforced by the binding of stays, whose presence is indicated by the flat stiffness of the fabric encircling Sarah Mifflin’s chest.

Although sober in appearance, her finely-made clothing is beautifully ornamented and crafted of expensive fabrics. The brownish-gray neutrality of the dress is lighter than the cloth of Thomas Mifflin’s wool frock coat and, as we have seen, both colors are in keeping with Quaker custom. The dress’s solid neutral color is warmed with reddish tints in the shadows of the folds, and numerous highlights give the surface a luster which suggests satin. Sarah Mifflin’s black hair is pulled up and fastened to the top of her head in a moderately “high” coiffure, and covered with a finely sewn and gathered cap of semi-transparent netting. A ribbon fashioned from the same material crosses the cap as it arcs over the crown of her head, and fine rickrack stitching borders the cap’s edge. This circling motif repeats on her neck, where a small white ruffle that resembles the ornament on her cap is joined by a thin black ribbon that mirrors the color of her hair. Although the torso and sleeves of her gown fit tightly, Mrs. Mifflin’s full skirt bustles out in the back and falls in long folds over her legs. An expanse of gauze descends from her waist to
cover the front half of her skirt in a purely decorative apron that repeats the semi-transparent whiteness of the cap covering her hair and the fichu over her shoulders. As we have seen, high hair, a gathered cap, ribbons, and necklaces, all were prohibited apparel for Quaker women. The use of excess fabric implied by the skirt folds, and the impractical and therefore superfluous “apron,” also contradict standards of plain dress.

This discrepancy continues with the torso of the dress, which bears even more ornamentation. The central section is flanked by two thin vertical panels which combine with the flatness created by stays to visually reinforce her upright posture. A semi-transparent ribbon with white embroidered edges crisscrosses up the central section, and isolates diamond-shaped areas of fabric that are ornamented with small bows of the same white-on-white ribbon. A small white fichu bearing both scalloped and zigzagged edging covers the modest expanse of flesh revealed by the dress, and overlaps the neckline slightly before disappearing behind the corsage. This bouquet of flowers and foliage is in turn decorated with a larger white-on-white bow of three loops, each fashioned of wide transparent ribbon decorated with six long white stripes. However, in a style suggested in Quaker literature, Sarah Mifflin’s dress has half sleeves with turned-back cuffs that bind her arms at the elbow. The cuffs increase in size as they move away from her inner arms and are pleated in ridges secured with decorative brown topstitching. Except for a small expanse of pristine white fabric at the base of the cuffs, Sarah Mifflin’s slim muscled forearms are bare. The startling white between arm and cuff is repeated in her fichu, and serves to reinforce the immaculate body required by polite society. Sober, expensive, and subtly ornamented, Sarah Mifflin’s understated elegance communicates reserve and dignity.

According to plain Quaker tenets, a woman’s dress should be fashioned simply and without excessive material from plain, neutrally colored fabric. Pleats, stitchery, ribbons, strings, gauze, and jewelry were avoided. Further, women were not to wear their hair piled high, and their caps should be simple and plain rather than gathered and ornamented. These exclusions contributed to the distinctive plain Quaker look, and helped members
remain free of the "lust of the eye" and its accompanying vanity and pride. Sarah Morris meets some of these prohibitions. However, an expensive fabric accompanied by pleats, lace, fancy ribbons, and gauze subtly enlivens her somber presentation. Further, her hair is not only dressed high on her head, but also covered with a finely crafted gathered cap which itself is elegantly ornamented. Her appearance stretches the definition of "plain" and "simple" to encompass the symbols of gentility, and places Sarah firmly in the category of "wet" Quaker.

Centered at the neckline of her bodice, Mrs. Mifflin's corsage includes four varieties of cultivated flowers and two types of leaves. As we have seen, horticulture was a valued activity among Quakers. There was also a general belief that a woman's skill in gardening encapsulated her abilities as a wife, a symbolic reading that has been made of flowers in other paintings by Copley. The largest blossom in Sarah's corsage appears to be a small, tightly petaled rose, a flower Copley previously had used as an emblem of love. White roses were associated with purity and spiritual love, qualities appropriate for Quakers who married "in unity." In form and color, the multi-petaled button-centered blossom resembles several early cultivars. Here the cream colored rose petals are blushed faintly peach, linking the flower in color to both Sarah Mifflin's lace and her face. In addition, the placement of the rose blossom upon the intense dark of a heart-shaped green-blue leaf echoes the relationship between Mrs. Mifflin's profile and the shadowy, greenish-blue wall. This leaf is one of two that spear out from the corsage in an artfully arranged manner. The lower leaf points downward in a straight vertical that makes a perfect heart and echoes Sarah's upright posture. The second leaf bears the rose blossom, and points up and to the left at an angle that repeats Thomas Mifflin's relaxed pose. Copley created the veins in both leaves by scraping a sharp object such as his brush handle through the wet paint. This technique adds visual emphasis to the leaves and is repeated no where else in the painting.

A feathery red spike of plumosa spears upward above the rose blossom and partly covers two rose leaves. The plumosa's vertical movement is balanced, on the right, by
a small blossom having a distinctive yellow-orange color and multiple rounded petals. It is, perhaps, a variety of Marigold, a common annual associated with the sun and the Virgin Mary, and valued in colonial gardens for its constancy as well as its medicinal, culinary, and aesthetic qualities. Pale purple violets, most likely sweet violet (*Viola odorata*), complete the floral component of the corsage and probably serve as the source for the heart-shaped leaves. Violets, too, were a popular garden plant, and the sweet violet's scent made it a favorite for use in posies. Among the virtues associated with violets are modesty, humility, and hidden virtue—making it an ideal flower for a Quaker wife.

As we have seen, the white rose echoes the color of Sarah Mifflin's skin and lace just as the heart-shaped leaf behind the rose repeats the dark blue-green of the background wall. Sarah and the rose bloom are visually linked, an association that connects Sarah with the rose's symbolic qualities of purity and spiritual love. Further, the two large heart-shaped leaves echo the posture of both Mifflins, connecting the corsage and the couple. This linkage is apt, for Thomas and Sarah were Quakers married "in unity," a status that emphasized the spiritual union of two equal spirits. The notion of equality is further supported by the couple's similar heights and Thomas's deferential attitude. Even more importantly, in compliance with a marriage "in unity," the Mifflins wear no wedding rings. However, Sarah Mifflin's corsage also contains violets, flowers associated with humility and modesty. These qualities are also fitting for a Quaker wife; despite her spiritual equality, she was legally dependent upon a husband whom, ideally, she was to obey. In form and content, the corsage references the Mifflins' marriage as one of unity and love. In combination with other elements in the painting, it also suggests much about the role of women in eighteenth-century society.

Copley uses dramatic light and shadow to create a hierarchy of visual importance in the painting. The light source strikes Mr. Mifflin at a three-quarter angle and casts the far side of his head and body into deep shadow. Light illuminates the soft gray hair on the crown of his head, gleams brightly over most of his broad forehead, highlights his nose,
mouth, and earlobe, and then brightens the pristine whiteness of his cravat. However, shadows fall over his deeply set eyes and merge the left side of his face with the obscuring darkness of the back wall. Working to subdue what is already a low gray, shadows continue over parts of his chest and most of his left arm. His hands appear as islands of light in this sea of darkness, and join hers in a descending archipelago that ends with her brightly lit forearm on the lower right. Illumination links the hands and contributes to the sense of marital unity. Although light slants over Thomas Mifflin, it strikes Sarah fully in the face. A shadow stretches from under her jaw up the side of her face to her brow, where its darkness merges with her hair to create a dark halo around her brightly lit face. The light dims slightly on the arm and hand closest to the external viewer, and then intensifies again as it reaches the loom threads where thick white paint creates a secondary focal point. Light dims even more as it plays over the fabric of her dress, allowing small thickly painted highlights on the corsage ribbon to gleam brightly against the darker fabric. While shadows cloak Thomas Mifflin and link him with the background, bright light centers attention on Sarah Mifflin and spills over into a secondary focus on her loom.

The Fringe Loom

With his manipulation of light, Copley focuses attention upon Sarah Mifflin’s left hand and increases the emphasis placed on her occupation, which is weaving a fringe of short looped threads. This emphasis may have given rise to the anecdotal account of Sarah posing twenty times as Copley painted her hands. Highlights combine to accentuate the weft threads falling from her little finger, an attention repeated again as the threads rest upon the table. Individual strands in the completed fringe also capture the full attention of the light source and receive distinct brush marks. Emphasis on the act of weaving is subtly reinforced by the white-on-white striped fabric below the cuff of Sarah’s left sleeve, which catches and reflects the light in a manner subliminally linking her arm to the weft threads. This relationship is repeated again in the illuminated white-on-white bow ornamenting the corsage. In each case—the threads of loom and fringe, the white-on-
white of sleeve and corsage bow—Copley used atypically thick paint that left a distinct brush mark. The physicality of this white paint against the smooth gloss of the surrounding surface further emphasizes these areas. Copley structured the composition so as to centralize Sarah Mifflin's left hand. As a symbol for genteel behavior, the handloom equates with the book Thomas holds. Both represented cultured refinement and the leisure made possible by wealth. As a Quaker, however, Sarah should use neither ribbon nor fringe. This creates an iconographic tension in the painting, as Copley focuses attention on an activity prohibited to Sarah by faith.

In the political climate of the times, actions like Sarah Mifflin's became symbolic of resistance to taxation and British rule. A letter by her, quoted previously, directly referenced the politicization of household industry; a process whereby women like Sarah Mifflin consciously transformed polite accomplishments into active performances of economic rebellion. Patriots in "the cause" worked to build American economic independence, and among the shunned imports were fancy goods like tea, fringe, and silk. Given the boycotts of Revolutionary America, Sarah Mifflin might be weaving cotton, linen, or wool fringe; but the thread she uses is silk. With the encouragement of the Society for the Promotion of Silk Culture, Americans were manifesting independence through experimentation with silkworm cultivation and thread production. Sarah Mifflin seemingly references this in her choice of thread. In a sense, each loop of silk represented a step on the road to Revolution. Thomas Mifflin also might be subtly referencing economic independence, for his distinctive buttons were likely covered in an American silk thread.

Unable to throw his own "mite to the public good," Copley colluded with the Mifflins' politics. He manipulated the composition to reinforce Sarah's action as an emblem for the "great spirit of patriotism." While the Mifflins probably determined the loom's presence, it is Copley who has privileged it as the lynchpin for the composition. His painstaking mastery of trompe-l'oeil erased, for the most part, any trace of his
presence and finalized his creation of a comprehensive façade that maintains the Mifflins in an eternal tableau of strength, gentility, and Revolutionary politics.

The Painting and the Gaze

Even today, Sarah Mifflin’s look fascinates, engages, and dominates the external viewer; it seems to endow her with power, control, deliberation, and judgement—with the power of the cultural Gaze. How, within the confining definition of the elite woman in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, can the “look as Gaze” Copley attributed to Sarah Mifflin be explained?

The composition is structured in a way that mediates power positions. Viewers must cross over Sarah and her loom to reach Thomas, a task complicated by the closed and private quality of the space they share. Relegated to the background, Thomas turns his attention to her in an action that parallels that of the external viewer, whose eyes are directed by the composition to return repeatedly to Sarah and her loom. Copley placed her between viewers, where she relays looks and mediates between her husband and the exterior world. This situation heightens her position and reinforces her activity. In addition, the painter linked the Mifflins’ figures together through the appearance of equality and community, an aura reinforced by their close positioning, spot-lit illumination, and dark surroundings. However, although Sarah Mifflin dominates the portrait and she dominates the external viewer, she does not dominate her husband; for Copley has elevated Sarah in a way that does not subordinate Thomas. Within a composition ordered by verticals and horizontals, the singularity of Thomas Mifflin’s relaxed posture and engaging expression strikes a note of freedom and ease. In contrast to the distancing quality of Sarah’s look, the attention Thomas turns towards her actually pulls the couple together. The painting’s composition further confirms this unity. Their well-lit cascading hands unify their bodies, as does the area beneath the table where shadows partly obscure the distinction between her skirts and his stockings.
Although a Quaker marriage “in unity” merged two equal spirits into one, in eighteenth-century Philadelphia Sarah Mifflin was a civilly dead shadow of her husband, with whose conduct she “must rise or fall.” As a Quaker wife, Sarah ran the household, entertained guests, and exercised economic force through observation of boycotts, purchases, and the creation of homemade products. In this context, she dealt with the tradesmen and artisans whom the genteel world defined as other, and classified people and products according to “the Cause.” In this way she functioned, much as she does in the painting, as an agent of interaction with the world.121 Within the limits of wet Quaker behavior and in the spheres of home and market, she fashioned a façade that was genteel, political, and active. In the terms of colonial America, however, this stance was only possible with the corroboration of her husband. This situation is exemplified in the painting by the look Thomas Mifflin directs toward her. From his shadowy seat in the background, he controls the interplay of looks and indirectly engages the external viewer by relaying his attention through Sarah. Thomas Mifflin’s mediating role within the painting resembles his critically important sub rosa political activities in the years preceding 1773, a connection that reinforces the political connotations of the loom and, by reference, of the look Sarah Mifflin directs toward the external viewer. Copley has turned the figure of Thomas Mifflin into a constituting presence who functions as a third to acknowledge and so reinforce the power of the cultural and politicized Gaze that Sarah—representing them both as unified in the composition and marriage—directs out to the external viewer.

As members in and products of the overlapping fields of the Friends and elite society, both of which privileged the visible, Sarah and Thomas Mifflin would have been deeply aware of the defining and excluding power of appearance and look. Thomas and Sarah both grew up in a religious subculture that emphasized a distinct corporal presentation to symbolize and even embody faith, and that warned of the dangers of succumbing to the “lust” of the hungry eye. While the Meeting brought Quakers together in a communion of visuality, secular society set them apart through the visible signs of
dress and behavior. As Quakers, even wet Quakers, the Mifflins would have known the power appearance holds in a visually-oriented society. The cultural Gaze of the Society of Friends was not the only light turned upon the Mifflins. As members of Philadelphia’s wealthy merchant society, they also moved through the sparkling theatre of polite display and refined behavior that constituted the genteel world. Here too was a defining cultural Gaze whose power needed to be deflected through exacting masks of dress, carriage, and attitude. The Mifflins picked their way through the two worlds, stretching the constraints of the first to encompass the luxury of the second. This balance can be seen in the elegant but subtle ornamentation on Sarah’s dress and the way their sober “Quaker gray” clothing reinforces the brilliance of the genteel white at cuffs and neck. Their postures continue to proclaim their gentility, with Sarah’s more formal carriage and Thomas’ casual pose both exhibiting the requisite effortless ease. Their portrait presents a seemingly neutral projection of their self-definition, protecting and affirming their desired position in a specular world.

While Copley’s mimetic skill created the illusion of reality and enabled the painting to function as an affirming shield for the Gaze, his invention elevates the semblance into a re-creative mask that turns back on the external viewer, changing the spectator into the spectacle. This begins to register with a consideration of Copley’s manipulation of eye levels and his positioning of the external viewer, tools which he builds into the illusion of a cultural Gaze. Within the painting, Copley delineated two eye levels. Although placed further back in the composition, Thomas Mifflin possesses the highest eye level. He owes part of his power to this elevation, for it allows him to look “down” toward his wife and (by extension) the external viewer, who appears to share her eye level. The equality implied by equal eye levels should both reassure the external viewer and prohibit Sarah from assuming a position as agent for the cultural Gaze. However, Copley partly negates that illusive equality through the couple’s seated position. A viewer standing before the painting looks a seated Sarah Mifflin in the eye, an incongruency that subordinates the external viewer in relation to both Mifflins. Caught by the painting’s illusion of reality, the
external viewer has to distance him- or herself from absorption in the image before the discrepancy between eye levels and position can register. Copley provided the external viewer with a reassuring appearance, then subliminally undermined it.

Either consciously or unconsciously, Copley carefully mediated the look Sarah Mifflin turns toward the external viewer. Close study reveals that while her right pupil directs a straightforward look of acknowledgement towards a centrally placed external viewer, Copley nudged the attention of her left very slightly down and to the viewer’s right. The minimal nature of this manipulation retains the illusion of direct eye contact while increasing her scopic power. Falling for Copley’s illusion entails conflating the acknowledging look of recognition with the defining Gaze of social positioning: Sarah Mifflin not only looks out, she looks down. The cool, assessing, and distancing quality of the look Sarah Mifflin directs out of the canvas reinforces this subordination. Neither friendly nor unfriendly, it provides her with the appearance of deliberation and honesty. It is a measuring look of appraisal and judgement, a look—conflated with cultural Gaze—productive of a verdict that might not be in the viewer’s favor. It also can not be appealed, for it is impossible for the external viewer to “meet” her eyes. In addition, the subtle conflation of look and the cultural Gaze subliminally elevates Sarah Mifflin’s social situation and lowers that of the external viewer. This puts into operation socially regulated positions of psychological power. Whatever we may be, whoever we may be—maid, neighbor, artist, male or female—we are not the Miffins’ equal, and we remain intruders caught by her impassive and measuring eye. Lulled by the apparent verisimilitude of Copley’s painting, a viewer unconsciously experiences and is positioned by the painting’s deceptive eye levels and looks. This is where Copley’s power to fool the eye gains its greatest force, for the viewer’s experience endows Sarah Mifflin’s look with defining power.
The Painter and the Gaze

The painter established himself—as original external viewer—in a definitively subordinate position. As we have seen, the composition manipulates the external viewer in such a way that Sarah Mifflin assumes the cultural Gaze in relation to the viewer; and further, that she looks down upon that viewer with judgement rather than acceptance. We have also seen Copley's struggle to be successful in art and to be accepted as genteel, dual goals that each required overcoming the “artisan” stigma attached to the “craft” of painting. His desire to achieve fame as the painter of Great Art was difficult to fulfill in a Boston oriented toward portraiture and enamored of “likeness,” a climate that produced praise for mimetic rather than inventive qualities. His dreams of greatness were deferred yet again as he put off a painting trip to Europe in order to complete more portraits, including the double portrait of the Mifflins. Copley was more fortunate in his desire to achieve gentility, for he successfully adopted the carriage, etiquette, and props necessary for the façade of gentility; and Boston accepted him as a gentleman. Yet the painting Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin seems to deny him both desires: it is yet another portrait rather than a grand allegory, and the composition Copley himself created works to negate the persona he labored to form during his Boston years. As the product of an ambitious gentleman painter with dreams of a glorious and independent future as a history painter, the structure of this portrait appears to cater to his patrons to an extraordinary—even a masochistic—extent.

Copley breaks the seamless trompe-l'oeil of the portrait’s surface only in a few places. Thick strokes of white paint pick out the highlights on the white-on-white ribbons that decorate Sarah Mifflin's corsage, describe the white-on-white stripes in the fabric at her left elbow, and illuminate the white threads of the table loom and the completed fringe. These serve to reinforce attention on the loom and Sarah’s act of fringe-weaving. A second surface anomaly appears within the corsage itself, where Copley scraped through wet paint to create the veins in the heart-shaped leaves. As noted earlier, these leaves not only link the rose of spiritual love to Sarah, they also join the couple to each other and
to the corsage by echoing their compositional positions. The art of horticulture transforms nature, using selective breeding to invent new plant varieties that beautified the world, transformed nature through human labor, and reveal God’s creative powers to the gardening Quaker. A gardener grows cultivars from which blooms are picked and carefully arranged in an artful corsage that both provides beauty and conveys meaning. The path horticulture takes from nature to corsage parallels the transformations enacted on nature by art, allowing the corsage to stand as a metaphor for painting, which similarly improves upon God’s handiwork as found in nature.

Reading the corsage as a metaphor for art intensifies the importance of Copley’s marks on the heart-shaped leaves. As we have seen, the Mifflins merged the identities of Quaker, gentility, and patriot, into a successful persona accepted by genteel society. In Lacanian terms, the self is eternally alienated and enamored with external images. Taking one or more of these images as a mirror, the self models itself upon them as it seeks a semblance that answers its own desire for completion. However, the illusory success of this project is dependent upon confirmation by the society’s Gaze, which forms the final arbiter of self and possibility by positioning people according to occupation and sex. That the semblances constructed by Thomas and Sarah were accepted by society can be seen in their social position and his popularity as an elected politician. Further corroboration comes from Copley’s own Boston environment, for both John and Abigail Adams responded positively to the Mifflins and commented on their charm. Sarah, as both feminine and Quaker in a masculine secular society, would have found it more difficult to achieve this self-construction. She overcame the disadvantage created by this outside position, and successfully interwove the separate spheres that craft her image. Further, despite the constraints placed on women by religion, marriage, and social decorum, Sarah manifests a dominating position. In contrast, Copley still struggled to cement his semblance through his quest to be seen as, and therefore become, both a Great Artist and a gentleman. Perhaps Copley identified with Sarah, or at least respected the skill with which she played the art of imaging to a successful conclusion. If so, the corsage comes
to represent both Sarah and her skill in reflecting desired positions within society, and the painterly quality of the white-on-white highlights in the corsage ribbon and sleeve reference Sarah’s merging of Quaker dress codes with the trappings of gentility. As the original external viewer, Copley looks up toward Sarah, who wields the power of the cultural Gaze to validate or reject an adopted semblance, whether it be social gentility, artistic success, or an attempt to combine them into artistic nobility. Although accepted in Boston, his façade of gentility was contested by Sarah Mifflin, whose social background and Quaker upbringing resisted the notion of a genteel artist. In a sense, Sarah Mifflin’s success and Copley’s failure can be seen in the power positions created by the painting’s composition. Further, Copley’s frustrated desire for completion found unconscious expression in the scratches he left on the heart-shaped leaves of Sarah’s corsage. This makes visible his presence as the artist—inventor and re-creator of nature—and so disrupts the painting’s “neutral” reality, revealing it as a crafted façade which itself pays homage to the Mifflins’ success.

As we have seen, the trompe-l’oeil quality of Copley’s paintings offered a visual fascination that lured the eyes into believing in the truth of semblance. Painting functioned as a mirror, its seamless surface offering a “neutral” view of the world. Lacan theorized that the radical function of painting rested in its ability to appease the viewer, to momentarily halt his or her eternal search for visual completion. The painting appeases because the painter’s creation is a process of desire, a desire that achieves satisfaction through looking. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin is a product of this kind of painterly looking, a looking that is split between the conscious decision to paint a certain subject, presented in a certain way; and the unconscious looking embodied in the gesture of painting as a creative act, when the pigment-laden brush falls like rain onto the fertile field of canvas.
Iconography and the Gaze

On the level of the geometric subject in Lacan's first diagram (Figure 1.1), and in the "Great Art" historical tradition of Dürer (Figure 1.4), Copley framed a view of the world, then set out to create a point-by-point correspondence between what he saw and his created image. Copley's paintings manifest clearly the "Take a look at this!" offering of the painter, and consequently feed the hungry, even "lustful" eye of the viewer. Copley did not use Dürer's mechanical device, or employ calibrating lines to measure space; instead, Copley's most realistic paintings catered, on an immediate level, to the "lust of the eye." They functioned like lures, fascinating amazed contemporaries with the strength of their "likenesses," and fooling "innocent" eyes like those of the little Scottish boy who threw a Mirror Stage tantrum when his father's portrait failed to respond. In his almost compulsive attention to the individual appearance and surface of the objects he painted, Copley labored to erase the tracks of his presence and enhance the conscious conceit of trompe-l'oeil. In their mirror-like illusion, the polished surfaces of his paintings seamlessly "reflected" his patrons' façades, providing them with an immediate semblance of completion that mimics the satisfaction obtained through the scopic drive (Figure 1.3). By fashioning his patrons this way, Copley appears to be usurping the position of "point of light" in the second diagram (Figure 1.2). He made to be manifest, within the visible, the perfected "reality" of those he paints. This meaning can be excavated through iconography, which helps to elucidate the mirror-façade of deportment and dress, and imbues such elements as flowers with the symbolism of virtue. In the context of this painting, iconography also reveals the political significance of fringe-making.

According to Lacan, in the scopic drive the subject creates satisfaction by fooling her- or himself through the "making oneself to be seen" that elides the Gaze and both the internal division and external definition it represents. Since it is by nature a specular creation, painting manifests a "making visible," that parallels this process and mimics the gratuitous showing and given-to-be-seen quality of the world. In a society consumed with appearance and semblance, portraits that reflected back to the viewer idealizing
semblances of completion must have been very satisfying indeed. However, the Mifflins were products of a sub-culture that identified the defining function of surface appearance and semblance, and manipulated it in their own self-definition. Perhaps their Quaker background enabled the Mifflins to distance themselves from the fashioning of identity provided by Copley, and to recognize it as a “counterfeit presentment” rather than a mirror of reality. This attitude of elevation, even condescension, ironically might be what powers the cultural Gaze Copley has pictured. At this level, Gaze theory deals with power positions and replicates the conclusions generated when iconology reads clothing and gestures as cultural signs.

However, Gaze theory functions on another level to establish the external viewer and, through cracks in the painting’s semblance, to mark areas emphasized by the unconscious, desiring Gaze of the creating painter. In Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin, Copley disrupts the trompe-l’oeil semblance. On Sarah herself, this occurs two ways: with the veins he scratched into heart-shaped leaves of Sarah’s corsage, and with his painterly handling of select fabric and ribbons. The marks on the heart-shaped leaves and on Sarah’s sleeve and corsage bow contain condensed references to gentility, artful creation, and the success or failure of a desired self-image.

The fringe itself also shows distinctive paint handling which indicates it received extra attention from Copley’s brush. Traces of the painter’s presence are visible in the thicker paint that highlights the loom’s weft threads, the loose strands on the table, and individual pieces of the finished fringe. Copley not only manipulated the composition to unite the couple and provide them, through Sarah, with the defining power of the cultural Gaze; he also privileged the table top fringe-loom. Sarah is weaving fringe, a popular household activity which, as iconological investigation reveals, by 1773 had become a distinctly partisan, political, and even revolutionary activity. In this context, her Gaze becomes still more nuanced. She is a revolutionary matron, wife of an underground radical, a woman who pins the external viewer with a merciless, politically-oriented Gaze.
This Gaze both isolates and subordinates the viewer, suggesting that he or she might not measure up to the political ideas espoused by the Mifflins.

And it is perhaps from this direction, as a muffled history painting, that we should approach the question of Copley's relation to this work. To fulfill his dream of being a gentleman painter who created Fine Art that illuminated the noble ideas of humanity, Copley needed to move beyond portraiture's duplication of appearance and delve into the inventive allegories essential to history painting. In Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin, one of his last American paintings, Copley begins to do this. He composed the double portrait so as to reinforce, on every level, Mrs. Mifflin and her politically oriented construction of self. With Thomas behind her, Sarah Mifflin maintains the picture's action while straightforwardly directing a Gaze outward to intercede with and judge those who stand before the couple. The compositional unity of the couple, Sarah's assumption of the Gaze, and the relay of looks from Thomas to Sarah to the viewer and back again—all combine to create a political painting that elevates, even idealizes, Thomas and Sarah Mifflin as united American patriots. For Copley—fence-sitter extraordinaire in a time of increasingly violent polarization—this sympathetic treatment was perhaps only possible by directing the power through the mediation of a woman and endowing her with a Gaze whose sting, for Copley, might have been unconsciously alleviated by the painting's quiet refutation of his own political neutrality. As revealed by the intertwined investigations of iconography and Gaze theory, the Mifflin commission provided Copley with the opportunity to create a work that functions simultaneously as portraiture and as history painting. Blurring the boundaries between likeness and allegory, the artist—subordinating himself as not-quite-gentlemanly and not-quite-political in comparison with his genteel pro-independence Quaker patrons—began to scale the heights into "one of the most noble Arts in the World."
Figure 3.1: John Singleton Copley, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris), 1773. Oil on bed ticking, 60 ½ x 48 inches. Signed in upper right: “J. Singleton Copley. Pinx. 1773. Boston.” Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and on loan to the Philadelphia Art Museum.

Source: Rebora, John Singleton Copley in America, 319, fig. 80.
Figure 3.2: Benjamin West, *Thomas Mifflin*, ca. 1758-1759. Oil on canvas, 51 ½ x 38 ½ inches. Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Notes


2 Jules David Prown, John Singleton Copley in America 1738-1774 (Washington and Cambridge: Published for the National Gallery of Art by Harvard University Press, 1966), 7-9, [hereafter, Copley in America]. Copley was born on July 3, 1738, probably soon after his family’s arrival in Boston. For Copley’s birth date and early life, see also Henry Wilder Foote, “When was John Singleton Copley Born?” New England Quarterly 10 (March 1937): 111-120.

3 Paul Staiti, “Accounting for Copley,” in John Singleton Copley in America, 29; Prown, Copley in America, 9. For the developing importance of “decorum” in North American, see Richard L. Bushman, The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). For the probable influence on Copley of both his early childhood on Long Wharf and the subsequent years in his stepfather’s artisan neighborhood, see Staiti, “Accounting for Copley,” 25-30. Peter Pelham expanded his studio activity to include painted portraits, which he then used as the basis for prints. There was not a great demand for mezzotints in Boston, and his sporadic production reflects this. However Pelham experienced a surge in print activity while John Singleton Copley lived with him, and scraped seven plates the year before his death in 1751. See Prown, Copley in America, 8-10.

4 On the relationship between colonial American society and the portraits produced by its artists, see Wayne Craven, Colonial American Portraiture: The Economic, Religious, Social, Cultural, Philosophical, Scientific, and Aesthetic Foundations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); for Copley, see 309-352; for Pelham, 139-151; for Smibert, 152-177; for Feke, 281-295; for Blackburn, 296-308.

5 Joseph Badger (1708-1765), housepainter turned portraitist, was a painter of Smibert’s generation whose work exerted little if any influence on John Singleton Copley. Prown even suggests Copley influenced Badger. In addition, Greenwood permanently left the colonies in 1752. See Prown, Copley in America, 14; and Craven, Colonial American Portraiture, 315.

6 Mezzotints served as the primary colonial access to the paintings of England and Europe, and Copley had access to them from an early age. “Six Prints and Pictures” were among the items in the Long Wharf home when Richard Copley died, and Peter Pelham’s profession as a mezzotint artist indicates his home also contained prints. In addition, Smibert lived several blocks from the Pelhams and included mezzotints in his display of European Art. See Trever J. Fairbrother, “John Singleton Copley’s Use of British
Mezzotints for his American Portraits: A Reappraisal Prompted by New Discoveries,”

Colonial American artists like Copley used mezzotints as sources and references for their paintings, a situation originally interpreted as a dependency upon a more original English tradition. However, Copley exhibited creativity even when using a single mezzotint as the source for multiple paintings, and as a mature artist he inventively transformed his sources in an individual and creative way. See B. N. Parker, “English Mezzotints and Colonial Portraits: the Discoveries of W. P. Belknap, Jr.,” Antiques 68 (October 1955): 360-363; Frederick A. Sweet, “Mezzotint Sources of American Colonial Portraits,” The Art Quarterly 14 (Summer 1951): 148-157; and Fairbrother, “Copley’s Use of British Mezzotints,” 122-130.

7 See Prown, Copley in America, 22-27.

8 See Ibid., 61-67; and Martha Babcock Amory, The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley (New York: Kennedy Galleries and Da Capo Press, 1969), 21-22. Elizabeth Winslow traced her ancestry back to Mary Chilton, who married the brother of Plymouth colony’s first governor. According to legend, Chilton’s impatience provoked her into leaping from the Mayflower rowboat and wading through the shallows; she thereby became the first woman colonist to reach land.

9 Prown, Copley in America, 61-67.


11 In the early 1760s, New England experienced a surge in Anglophilia. The linkage of portraiture with English aristocracy and nobility created an increased demand for paintings. Mezzotints of British portraits served colonial artists and their patrons as references and reinforced the aristocratic associations. Clothing, emblems, poses, and even entire compositions, were appropriated from the mezzotints in the creation of apolitical portraits. Despite the anti-British backlash created by Parliament’s imposition of taxes in the mid-1760s, portraiture remained a popular commodity among Boston’s elite. This was fostered in part by the presence of their “own” painter, John Singleton Copley. Works from later in the decade show a decrease in ruffles and lace. The absence of these boycotted English items reflects an increasing politicization among Copley’s sitters, a position reflected in the works themselves. See Carol Troyen, “John Singleton Copley and the Heroes of the American Revolution,” The Magazine Antiques 148 (July 1995): 84-87; for Copley and “likeness,” see Paul Staiti, “Character and Class,” in John Singleton Copley in America, 53.

12 Thomas Ainslie to Copley, Quebec, 12 November 1764, in The Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 30, hereafter, Letters and Papers. In this chapter, the spelling and punctuation within quotations are as found in the sources.
Captain John Small to Copley, Headquarters, New York, 29 October 1769, in Ibid., 77. Perhaps Small refers to Copley’s portrait of General Gage.


Copley to either Benjamin West or Captain Bruce, ca. 1767, Letters and Papers, 65-66; see also Rather, “Carpenter, Tailor, Shoemaker, Artist,” 269-290.

For Copley, portrait painting (not painting in general) involved craftsmanship on the level of a trade. His denigrating conflation of all crafts, whatever their incomes and skills, is further indicated by the claim made later in the same letter that he made “three hund’d Guineas a Year”–an excellent income in 1767 (Copley to West or Bruce, ca. 1767, in Letters and Papers, 66). Seeking greater glory as a fine artist, Copley sent work to be considered for inclusion in the London Society of Arts exhibitions five times between 1766 and 1772 (Fairbrother, “Copley’s Use of British Mezzotints,” 122).


On paintings as commodities and Copley’s merchant clients, see Ibid., 325-350; and Staiti, “Accounting for Copley,” 30-36.

Like other painters of likenesses, Copley viewed a person’s appearance, possessions, and material environment as an accurate reflection of the character within. The objects depicted in a portrait almost became extensions of the person portrayed, and served to authenticate his or her self-definition. A Copley portrait functioned on two levels: as exclusive “wall furniture,” its very presence signified wealth; and as a likeness it refashioned exterior self-identity in accordance with a social ideal. See Staiti, “Character and Class,” 74; and Breen, “The Meaning of ‘Likeness’,” 350.
The importance of appearance runs throughout Bushman’s discussion of
gentility, but see especially Refinement of America, 97, 41-42, 63-73. Staiti also uses
Bushman in his discussion of Copley’s paintings as markers for “gentility;” see “Character
and Class,” 53-78.

Clothing reinforced decorum, since a gentleman’s tightly fitting waistcoats and a
lady’s stays helped enforce proper posture (Bushman, Refinement of America, 64-66).

Abbé D’Ancourt, The Lady’s Preceptor (Woodbridge, New Jersey, 1759), 9; quoted
in Bushman, Refinement of America, 57.

On Copley’s paintings as rhetorical constructs containing metonyms for status, see Staiti, “Character and Class,” 53-78.

Ibid., 53.

Jonathan Richardson, An Essay on the Theory of Painting (London, 1715), 76;
quoted in Fairbrother, “Copley’s Use of British Mezzotints,” 127. I have not found a
reference to Richardson in Copley’s letters.

Breen suggests that “Portrait painters operated in a peculiar market. After all,
they were not selling a finished product. Both parties—sitter and artist—had to negotiate
the details of a process. They worked out schedules and prices. During these discussions,
colonial consumers did not seem to have been intimidated by the painter’s‘expertise’. They expressed opinions and made demands” (“The Meaning of ‘Likeness,’” 339). In his
argument, Breen takes it for granted that sitters are shown wearing real clothing, and that
they owned the specific garments as Copley painted them. This turns Copley into the
technician working Sears’ photography studio, where customers come wearing the
clothing in which they wish to be remembered. In contrast, work by Aileen Ribeiro and
Claudia Brush Kidwell suggests that the painter played a far more active role in the
“fashioning” of his client identities, since he enhanced personal display by painting
imaginary dresses (Aileen Ribeiro, “The Whole Art of Dress’: Costume in the Work of
John Singleton Copley,” in John Singleton Copley in America, 103-116; and Claudia
Brush Kidwell, “Are those Clothes Real? Transforming the Way Eighteenth-Century
Portraits are Studied,” Dress 24 [1997]: 3-15). Seen in Copley’s pre-1770 paintings, this
obvious method of identity construction synthesized styles and forms to create a polished
and unique version of gentility tailored by the artist to meet an image of the client. This in
turn indicates Copley’s awareness of his paintings’ function as masks and agents of
mediation, perhaps even of creation, in the field of specular identity. Consideration of this
would support Breen’s thesis that “the painter and sitter participated in a process of self-
fashioning . . . [in order] to depict that person as he or she wanted to be represented. In
this sense, the painting of a portrait involved a cultural conversation.” Breen, “The
Meaning of ‘Likeness’,” 342.
By communicating information about the distinctive qualities of each sitter in a seemingly forthright way, Copley’s best portraits create an impression of personality and presence. This in turn contributes to the illusion that we are seeing the “truth” of those portrayed. See Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., “An American Despite Himself,” in John Singleton Copley in America, 97.

Copley to Benjamin West, Boston, 24 November 1770, Letters and Papers, 98.

For example, in 1765 Copley painted Boston’s most powerful Tory, Benjamin Hollowell, and its wealthiest patriot, John Hancock. In 1768, his portrait of the General Thomas Gage, who controlled British forces in the American colonies, was balanced by his painting of Paul Revere, a radical even among the Sons of Liberty. See Troyen, “Copley and the Heroes of the American Revolution,” 87-88, 89.

Hence the use of bed ticking rather than artists’ canvas on the Mifflin painting.

Amory, Domestic and Artistic Life of Copley, 26-27. When Britain repealed the Townshend Act, which had levied duties or “taxes” on some goods sold in the colonies, the Tea Tax was exempt. In protest over this continued taxation, a group of angry colonists dressed themselves as Native Americans and boarded three ships in Boston Harbor in December of 1773. The newly arrived vessels, one of which was William Clark’s Dartmouth, were loaded with goods. Once on board, the “Mohawks” threw the tea overboard into Boston Harbor. This act of protest later became known as “The Boston Tea Party.”

The stress placed by the Society of Friends on personal appearance as a marker for belief tied subjectivity to “the visualized body.” This stress on appearance arose from a belief in the seductive appeal of the secular visual world, where the possession of fashions and objects lured Friends into sin. Rules of conduct and regulations requiring plain dress were intended to reinforce the truthfulness proper for a devout and humble Quaker. By visually separating Friends and non-Friends, doctrine on dress and behavior sought to reinforce the distance between the devout realm of nature, necessity, truth, and spirit; and the secular arena of art, superfluity, deception, and the worldly spectacle. See Marcia Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture 1650-1800,” Art History 20 (Summer 1997): 398, 404; and Joan Kendall, “The Development of a Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress,” Costume 19 (1985): 58.


Quakers played up the contrast between their own plain dress and the fashionable excesses of non-believers. From the Quaker perspective, people consumed by worldly fashions believed “they shall not be respected else, if they have not Gold & silver upon their backes, or his heire bee not powdered, or if he have a Company of ribions hunge about his wast red, or whit, or blacke, or yellow, & about his knees, & geets a
Company in his hatt... then he is a brave man... then he is noe Quaker... Likewise ye women haveinge... their spots on their faces... having their rings on their fingers... having their cuffs dubell under and about, like unto a butcher with whit sleeves... having their ribbons tyed about their heds, and three or fourer Gold laces about their Clothes, this is noe Quaker.” Journal of George Fox, vol. I, ed. Norman Penney (Cambridge, 1911), 175, 176, 177; quoted in Kendall, “A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress,” 58.

35 Attributed to William Penn, No Cross, No Crown (1669) in Sophia Hume, ed., Extracts from Divers ancient Testimonies of Friends and others, corresponding with the Doctrines of Christianity, recommended to the consideration first, of Ministers, Secondly, Elders. Thirdly, to every Member of the Church, who makes a plain outward Appearance; ... (n.p. ca. 1760), 67; quoted in Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 407.

36 George Fox, The Fashions of the World made Manifest; also a few Words to the City of London, 1657, in G. Fox, Gospel-Truth Demonstrated, in a Collection of Doctrinal Books, Given Forth by that Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, George Fox (London, 1706), 110-111; as quoted in Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 407-408.

37 Silk or worsted fringes were among the most expensive embellishments for upholstery, window curtains, and bed furnishings, and fringe was a popular trim until the early eighteenth century. However, fringemaking reemerged in the last part of the century as a popular political activity in revolutionary America. Although fringe could be purchased, weaving it on a table-top handloom was a popular and virtuous activity for women from all social classes. Queen Charlotte even kept a fringe loom at Windsor Castle. See Brock Jobe, “The Boston Upholstery Trade, 1700-1775,” in Upholstery in American and Europe from the Seventeenth Century to World War I, ed. Edward S. Cook Jr., (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1987), 71; Linda Wesselman Jackson, “Beyond the Fringe: Ornamental Upholstery Trimmings in the 17th, 18th and Early 19th Centuries,” in Upholstery in American and Europe from the Seventeenth Century to World War I, 142; and Lois Dinnerstein, “The Industrious Housewife: Some Images of Labor in American Art,” Arts Magazine 55 (April 1981): 109-113.

38 Although Quaker tenets of simplicity and plainness led to distinctive clothing, Friends did not establish a “costume” until the 19th century. On Quaker dress, see Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 194-195; for clothing colors, see Kendall, “A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress,” 67-66.

39 See Ibid., 64; and Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 409. The 1704 Philadelphia Meeting reminded Friends to avoid worldly fashions and to dress plainly as befitted their “Godliness”: “If any men wear longlapp’d sleeves, or Coats folded at the sides, Superfluous buttons, Broad ribbons about the hat, or gaudy, flower’d or strip’d Stuffes, or any sort of periwigs unless necessitated [to keep a bald head warm], and if any are necessitated that then it be as near in Colour as may be to their own and in other respects resembling as much as may be, a sufficient natural head of hair without the vain
customs being long behind or mounting on the forehead." Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, "Discipline." (1704), 17; quoted and discussed in Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 194. For similar standards of dress in Britain, see "A Testimony Given forth by the Quarterly Meeting in Joy Unity of both Men and Women's Meetings," 18/v/1698 (Records of Aberdeen Yearly Meeting, Ref. CH110/3/4, Scottish Record Office); quoted and annotated in Kendall, "A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress," 61.


"Also, if any women that profess the Truth wear or suffer their children to wear their Gowns not plain or open at the breast with gaudy Stomachers, needless rolls at the Sleeves or with their Mantuas or Bonnets with gaudy colours, or cut their hair and leave it out on the brow, or dress their heads hight, or to wear hoods with long lapps, or long Scarfs open before, or their Capps or pinners plaited or gathered on the brow or double hemm'd or pinch'd . . . . It being not agreeable to that Shamefac'dness, plainness and modesty which people professing Godliness with good works ought to be found in" (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, "Discipline," [1704], 17; quoted in Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 194). Prohibitions like these arose because Meetings found "too many Women deckmg themselves with gaudy and costly apparel, Gold Chains, Lockets, necklaces and Gold Watches exposed to open view, which shews more pride and ostentation than for use and service, besides their vain imitation of that immodest Fashion of going with naked Necks and Breasts and wearing hooped Petticoats inconsistent with that modesty which should adorn their sex." The testimony of London Yearly Meeting 1718, Norris MS. ix, 46; reprinted Journal of the Friends Historical Society, 1930, 28; quoted in Pointon, "Quakerism and Visual Culture," 409.

See Kendall, "A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress," 64; and Pointon, "Quakerism and Visual Culture," 416.

As styles changed, Meetings produced lists of prohibited fashions. Among the items denounced in a lengthy 1695 list were "Dressing the Head high, . . . Necklaces, or strings about ye Neck, Stomachers with Silk or Stuff of divers colours, or stripd, [and] Girdles, fashioned Gowns with Peaks behind." Minutes of the Lancashire Women's Quarterly Meeting, 5.vii.1695 (Friends House Library, London MS Temp. 508-10); quoted in Pointon, "Quakerism and Visual Culture," 409. On the prohibition against all jewelry, see Kendall, "A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress," 61.

For examples of 18th-century use of these terms, see Kendall, "A Distinctive Quaker Dress," 58-61; for "plain Quakers" in England, see also Pointon, "Quakerism and
Visual Culture," 418, 424; for "wet Quakers" in Philadelphia, see Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 210.

45 An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy, written by herself (London: 1785), in Friends Historical Society Journal 17 (1920), 47; quoted in Kendall, A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress, 59, and in Frederick B. Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 142 n. 90. For use of the term "wet Quaker" in Philadelphia, see Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 210. While visiting Philadelphia in October of 1779, the Marquis de Barbé-Marbois commented on the difference between the strict Quakers and what he termed "the ‘white’ or reformed Quakers" (Our Revolutionary Forefathers: the Letters of François, Marquis de Barbé-Marbois, During his Residence in the United States as Secretary of the French Nation, 1779-1785, trans. and ed. Eugene Parker Chase [Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1929], 143). Tolles suggests that the Marquis thought Philadelphians were saying "white Quaker" when they were, in fact, saying "wet Quaker" (Meeting House and Counting House, 142 n. 90). In late 17th-century Philadelphia, Jean Pierre Brisot de Warville noted the distinction between the plain Friends who were permitted to attend Monthly Meetings and the wet Quakers who were not (Jean Pierre Brissot de Warville, Nouveau voyage dans les Etats-Unis de l’Amerique septentrionale, vol. II [Paris, 1791], 173; cited in Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House, 142).


47 Kendall, "A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress," 58.

48 Scientific Friends such as William Curtis (botanist) and John Fothergill (medical doctor) were among those pressured by secular society to have portraits done. In the 19th century, portraits of individual Quakers tended to be of a "type," privileging the "Quaker" over the individuality of the sitter. See Pointon, "Quakerism and Visual Culture," 413, 412, 414.

49 Kendall, "A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress," 58.

50 "No man may use the creation more or less than another: for we know, that as it hath pleased God to dispense it diversely, giving to some more, and some less, so they may use it accordingly. The several conditions, under which men are diversely stated, together with their education answering them thereunto, do sufficiently shew this.” Robert Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: being an Explanation and
Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People called Quakers (London: n. p., 1678), 516; as quoted in Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 404.

The Philadelphia tax lists provide imprecise evidence. In addition, they recorded only the wealth within Philadelphia and not that, like land, which was located elsewhere. Wills include holdings outside Philadelphia and indicate far greater wealth for many Quakers. The tax records do provide a reasonable starting place for evaluating the financial status of males within the city proper. By 1774 Quakers merchant families outnumbered non-Quakers in the highest tax brackets. According to wealth assessed by the 1774 tax returns, poor families with estates valued at £0 were more likely to be non-Quakers, while those with holdings between £1-49 were equally divided. As the wealth increased so did the number of Quakers on the tax roll. Of those assessed of wealth over £50, fourteen were non-Quakers and thirty-three Quakers. This includes the top of the tax scale, where three non-Quakers were determined to own wealth of over £200, in comparison with eight Quakers. English Quakers also congregated in the merchant trades. The American merchant Friend’s preference for trading with other Quakers, especially those to whom he was related, reinforced the connections between British and Colonial Quakers (Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 202-206, 205, 204). In 18th-century England, Quakers were predominately wholesale merchants and professionals, and it was rare for a Quaker to work as a laborer or become a pauper. Among these English Quakers were the now famous Lloyd and Barclay banking families, and the chocolateers Cadbury and Rowntree (Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 406, 418).

In Philadelphia, wet Quaker participation in both horseracing and foxhunting is documented in the diaries of Thomas Jacob Hiltzheimer. See Jacob Cox Parsons, Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Press of William F. Fell and Co., 1893); and Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House, 137, 259.

For William Penn and George Fox on the dangers of the “Lust of the Eye,” see page 163 above. Fox called for a halt in production by “all you Makers of Images, and Makers of Baubels and Toys to please the Lusts and Vanity of People.” George Fox, A Cry for Repentance unto the Inhabitants of London Chiefly, 1656; in George Fox, Gospel-Truth Demonstrated, in a Collection of Doctrinal books, Given Forth by that Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, George Fox (London: T. Searle, 1706), 76; quoted by Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 405; and see Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 210.

Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 415.

Kenneth R. Rossman, Thomas Mifflin and the Politics of the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 5. Although Thomas Mifflin was a fourth-generation Philadelphia Quaker, his great-grandfather John Mifflin of Wiltshire, England, does not appear on the lists of those who purchased Pennsylvania lands directly from William Penn or his agents, nor is his name in John Ford’s records of payments received or due for land in the colony. However, other documents show John
Mifflin did hold a 1683 warrant and 1684 land patent, placing him among the “reputed” first purchasers. Neither the amount paid nor the lot number or location were recorded (“Doc. 206: Reputed First Purchasers,” in The Papers of William Penn. Vol. II, 1680-1684, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982], 657-664, for John Mifflin see 661). Interestingly, as an “OR” John Mifflin is also listed as paying rent for 270 acres in Philadelphia County; “OR” designated him as an “old renter” in occupation before William Penn’s proprietorship. In 1690 John Mifflin paid an annual rent of 2 7/10 bushels of wheat, worth between 8.1 and 10.8 shillings (“The Blackwell Rent Roll, 1689-1690,” in The Papers of William Penn, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, Vol. III, 1685-1700, ed. Marianne S. Wokeck, Joy Wiltenburg, Alison Duncan Hirsch, and Craig W. Horle, 679-737 [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986], 682-683, for John Mifflin see 716). By the time of the American Revolution, the Philadelphia Mifflins were quite wealthy. Frederick Tolles suggests that possessing a four-wheeled carriage was a clear marker for high social standing and economic success in 18th-century Philadelphia. By 1772, eighty-four people in Philadelphia had such a possession. Among this group were thirty-three Quakers, including a John Mifflin. If Tolles is correct, by 1772 the Mifflins were among the elite of colonial society. For the Quaker elite, see Tolles, “Quaker Grandees,” in Meeting House and Counting House, 109-143; for carriages, see Ibid., 130-132, and 131 n. 60. On John and Thomas Mifflin, see also United States Army Center of Military History, Thomas Mifflin, Soldier-Statesmen of the Constitution, A Bicentennial Series (CMH Pub 71-20), 2.

56 Thomas Mifflin became used to forceful women at an early age, for his stepmother was a woman of strong will. According to family legend, Sarah Fishbourne put herself through the best schools after she was orphaned at age thirteen. See Dinnerstein, “The Industrious Housewife,” 109.

57 Having his portrait made seemingly became habitual for Mifflin, since this is the first of six he commissioned over his lifetime. In chronological order, they are: (1) Benjamin West, ca. 1758-1759, Thomas Mifflin, oil on canvas, 51 ¼ x 38 ½ inches; collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (Rebora et al., John Singleton Copley in America, 318, fig. 226); (2) John Singleton Copley, 1773, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris), 60 ½ x 48 inches, oil on bed ticking; signed in upper right: “J. Singleton Copley. Pinx. 1773. Boston”; collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and on loan to the Philadelphia Art Museum (Ibid., 319, cat. no. 80); (3) John Trumbull, ca. 1790, Thomas Mifflin, 4 x 3 inch oval miniature portrait in oil painted on mahogany wood; collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (Ibid., 318, fig. 227); (4) John Trumbull, 1790, Thomas Mifflin, collection of the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (Ibid., 318); (5) Charles Willson Peale, 1795, Thomas Mifflin, collection of Independence National Historic Park, Philadelphia [Ibid., 318]; (6) Gilbert Stuart, ca. 1800, Thomas Mifflin, private collection (Ibid., 318; reproduced in Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, facing page 162).
Hunting for food was an accepted Quaker pastime. See Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 209.

Ibid., 141.

Mifflin graduated from College with a BA degree on Thursday May 15, 1760. He then worked in the offices of the Philadelphia merchant William Coleman until February of 1764, when Mifflin left New York for London. He returned in 1765 after spending most of his time in France. See Rossmann, Thomas Mifflin, 5-8; for information on schools, children, and education among the Quakers of 17th- and 18th-century Philadelphia, see Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 64-132.

See Ibid., 143; and Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House, 139-141.

In the early years of the Revolution, Thomas Mifflin’s charm became a source for humor in the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams. John Adam’s reference to “your Friend Mr. Mifflin,” and Abigail’s use of statements such as “Major Mifflin you know I was always an admirer of,” indicates a partiality for Thomas Mifflin. Abigail was not alone in finding him charming, as evidenced in this account she sent her husband of Major Mifflin’s success with the ladies of Boston: “My compliments to Mrs. Mifflin, and tell her I do not know whether her Husband is safe here. Belona and Cupid have a contest about. You hear nothing from the Ladies, but about Major Mifflin’s easy address, politeness, complaisance &c. &c. Tis well he has so agreeable a Lady at Philadelphia. They know nothing about forts, intrenchments &c. when they return [from visiting the American headquarters in Cambridge,] or if they do they are all forgot and swallowed up in his accomplishments.” John Adams to Abigail Adams, Philadelphia, 7 October 1774; Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, 10 December 1775; Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, 2 August 1775; Adams Family Correspondence, Vol. I, December 1761-May 1776, ed. L. H. Butterfield et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963), 165, 336, 271.


As described by William Penn, Quaker marriage was built upon the “Foundation of Unity with the Lord, by his own Spirit, & therein one with another. . . . [Quakers were called by] the Invisible Word of God’s Power, that in the beginning made them . . . Male & Female, to joyn them together, & of twain, to make them one flesh {Yea w’th is more} & one Spirit.” “RIGHT MARRIAGE as it stands in the LIGHT and COUNCIL of the LORD GOD,” in The Papers of William Penn, Vol. I, 1644-1679, ed. Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, 232-237 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 233, 235. On the Quaker “union of souls,” see also Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 162.
An “inward light” guided Quakers in their determination of who and when to marry. To be wedded “in Unity,” consensual partners needed the approval of parents and monthly meetings. While civic or religious marriage ceremonies conducted outside the Meeting might be legal, only those marriages that occurred under the sanction of and within the Meeting were holy. Quaker belief in marriage’s ability to enhance a couple’s piety led the faithful to marry after they were mature enough to participate fully in their local Meeting. This produced older brides and grooms, with the average age of 22.8 for Quaker women and 26.5 for men. On colonial Quaker marriage, see Frost, *Quaker Family in Colonial America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 51-66.

Richard Hill to Hannah Hill, 25 September 1752 (Quaker Collection, Haverford College); quoted in Frost, *Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 156; see also Ibid., 162.

For examples of courting problems and disasters in 18th-century Philadelphia, see Frost, *Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 163-168.

Sarah died in the Mifflins’ Market Street home on August 1, 1790 after an illness of six months. Thomas never remarried. Although the Mifflins were childless at the time of Copley’s painting, the couple eventually had two daughters. See Egle, *Pennsylvania Women*, 127; and Jacob Hiltzheimer, diary entries of 1 August 1790, 14 September 1791, 8 August 1790, in Parsons, *Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, 162, 171, 163.


See Frost, *Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 177-178.


Drinker mentioned Thomas Mifflin only a few times: August 26, 27, 29, 1797; January 1, 2, 1799; and January 20, 1800 (*The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. II, 956-957, 1126, 1268).
72 Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 126, 129. Although works related to devotion, theology, and the faith predominated, Friends stretched “useful reading” to include a wide range of topics (Ibid., 209). For examples of Philadelphia merchants who provided their daughters with a broad education, see, Ibid., 125-127; for the colonial Quaker education in theory and practice, Ibid., 3-149.


74 Richard Hill to Rachel Wells, 22 February 1759, Guliema M. Howland Manuscript Collection, Quaker Collection, Haverford College; quoted in Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 175. When wine merchant Richard Hill moved to Madeira for business reasons in 1739, he left his children with a married daughter in Philadelphia and maintained contact through letters of advice. For subordination of wife to husband, see George Fox, The Works of George Fox, (Philadelphia: 1831), vol. XII, 89; vol. XIII, 113; quoted in Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 175.


76 On the legal situation of women in the colonial period and early republic, see Marylynn Salmon, Women and the Law of Property in Early America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986).


The Boston Gazette, like society in general, erased female existence as independent, individual subjects in pre-Revolutionary Massachusetts. In a detailed account of a fatal boating accident (21 June 1773), the newspaper included the following list of casualties: “Mr. William Ward and wife, Mr. Diggacton and wife, Mr. John Kimball and wife, the widow of Mr. Eleazer Giles, a daughter to Dr. Fairfield’s, one other woman, and the wife of Mr. John Becket, boat-builder.” Of the ten people dead by drowning, only the three men have independent identities. See Susan Dion, “Women in the Boston Gazette, 1755-1775,” Historical Journal of Massachusetts 14 (June 1986): 93.


At least some women recognized this “dependence” as a polite behavior rather than a necessity. In the 1770s Sarah Eve and two female friends ventured out by foot to see the troops. Although they intended to encounter male relatives, the Quaker girls found themselves on the Philadelphia commons without an escort. Eve suffered “great mortification” that only eased when they located their “guardians” among the crowds of people watching the soldiers. Despite her momentary chagrin, Sarah Eve concluded “It is certainly more from custom than real service . . . that the gentlemen are so necessary to us Ladies.” Eva Eve Jones, ed., “Extracts from the Journal of Miss Sarah Eve,” The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 5 (1881), 203; quoted in Carole Shammas, “The Female Social Structure of Philadelphia in 1775,” The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 107 (January 1983): 78-79.

includes women married to farmers and merchants, see Waciega, “A ‘Man of Business’,” 40-64.

82 See Crane, “The World of Elizabeth Drinker,” 15, 5; and Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 209.


83 On gardening and eating as “innocent Divertisements,” see Robert Barclay, Apology, Prop. XV, sec ix, Writings, II, 540-41, in Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House, 135. Gabriel Thomas, a Welshman who joined Penn’s colony in 1681, published an account of the province which includes a description of the Philadelphia gardens of a wealthy Quaker merchant: “There are very fine and delightful Gardens and Orchards, in most parts of this Countrey; but Edward Shippey (who lives near the Capitol City) has an Orchard and Gardens adjoyning to his Great House that equalizes (if not exceeds) any I have ever seen, having a very famous and pleasant Summer-House erected in the middle of his extraordinary fine and large Garden abounding with Tulips, Pinks, Carnations, Roses, (of several sorts) Lilies, not to mention those that grow wild in the Fields.” Thomas’s “Edward Shippey” was the Philadelphia Quaker Edward Shippen. Gabriel Thomas, An Historical and Geographical Account of the Province and Country of Pennsylvania; and of West-New-Jersey in America ..., (London: A. Baldwin, 1698), in Narratives of Early Pennsylvania West New Jersey and Delaware 1630-1707, Albert Cook Myers, ed., 307-352 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 332; see also Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House, 135.

84 Mrs. Anne Grant, Memoirs of an American Lady: With Sketches of Manners and Scenery in America As They Existed Previous to the Revolution (London: 1808; reprint, New York: Research Reprints, 1970), 39. Mrs. Grant continues: “A woman, in very easy circumstances, and abundantly gentle in form and manners, would sow, and plant, and rake, incessantly. These fair gardeners too were great florists: their emulation and solicitude in this pleasing employment, did indeed produce ‘flowers worthy of Paradise.’” Ibid., 40-41; see also Staiti, “Character and Class,” 61.

85 John Penn, journal entry April 1788, published in Pennsylvania Magazine 3 (July 1879): 288-289; quoted in Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 197-198. Penn indicated, in addition, that Mifflin “took us around some of his improvements, and I rode with him to

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various points of view which commanded the town of Reading and the circumjacent hills and valleys. He farms about twelve hundred acres, and has a Scotch farmer who conducts the business. One hundred of meadow-land he waters." Ibid.

Visiting friends and acquaintances for breakfast was common during the Mifflins’ time. The diarist Jacob Hiltzheimer of Philadelphia mentions the Mifflins numerous times, and wrote of breakfasting with them both in their home outside Philadelphia and in Reading. For an example, see entry of 31 January 1782, in Parsons, Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, 48.

Christopher Marshall, a wealthy patriot disowned by his Quaker Meeting for military activities, compiled a lengthy tribute to his wife that reveals what running a household actually involved: “To do her that justice which her services deserve by entering them minutely would take up most of my time, for this genuine reason how that, from early in the morning till late at night, she is constantly employed in the affairs of the family, which for some months has been very large, for besides the addition to our family in the house [is] a constant resort of comers and goers who seldom go away with dry lips and hungry bellies. This calls for her constant attendance not only to provide, but also to attend at getting prepared in the kitchen, baking our own bread and pies, meat, &c., but also on the table. Her cleanliness about the house, her attendance in the orchard, cutting and drying apples of which several bushels have been procured, add to which her making of cider without tools, for the constant drink of the family, her seeing all our washing done, and her fine clothes and my shirts, all which are all smoothed by her, add to this her making of twenty large cheese, and that from one cow, and daily using milk and cream besides her sewing, knitting, &c. Thus she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness, yea, she also stretched out her hand . . . to her needy friends and neighbors. I think she has not been above four times, since her residence has been here, to visit her neighbors, nor through mercy has she been sick for any time, but has at all times been ready, in any affliction to me or my family, as a faithful nurse and attendance, both day and night.” Extracts from the Diary of Christopher Marshall Kept in Philadelphia and Lancaster, During the American Revolution 1774-1781, ed. William Duane (Albany, New York: J. Munsell, 1877), 157-158, 202-203, 223, 233, 258-259, 279-280; quoted in Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 176.

Despite the Quaker woman’s modest protestation of ignorance, Drinker actually knew and understood a great deal about finance and her husband’s business. As a housewife, she paid the servants and settled all the bills. She also regularly borrowed money herself and pressed others for repayment. Further, when Pennsylvania incarcerated Elizabeth Drinker’s merchant husband in 1778 for his refusal to bear arms or take loyalty oaths, responsibility for his business affairs fell to Elizabeth. She also hounded Pennsylvania officials into releasing him. See Crane, “The World of Elizabeth Drinker,” 5-7. See also Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 178; Susan Branson, “Women and the Family Economy in the Early Republic: the Case of Elizabeth Meredith,” Journal of the Early Republic 16 (Spring 1996): 47-71; Waciega, “A ‘Man of Business’,,” 40-64; and Wulf, “Assessing Gender,” 201-235.
"While walking along Front Street I met George Mifflin, who took me to Joseph Morris's to see his brother the General, who had come in from the Falls, but we learned that he had gone on the river to skate, in which exercise, by all accounts, he is very expert." Jacob Hiltzheimer, entry of 31 January 1782, in Parsons, Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, 48; see also Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 11.


Thomas Mifflin participated in the 1769-1770 agreement; see Charles S. Olton, Artisans for Independence: Philadelphia Merchants and the American Revolution (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1975): 27-67. Mifflin remained a favorite among the mechanics (artisans) for the remainder of his life. When Pennsylvania elected Mifflin its first Governor, Benjamin Rush complained that his support was "acquired by the basest acts of familiarity with the meanest of the people. He avoided the society of gentlemen, and cherished that of the mechannicks." 12 October [1790?] Letters and Thoughts, collection of the Ridgway Branch of the Library Company of Philadelphia; quoted in Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 197. See also Olton, Artisans for Independence, 34-56).

An advertisement by Alexander Rutherford informed "such ladies of Philadelphia, as are resolved to distinguish themselves by their patriotism and encouragement of American manufacturers, that he makes and sells all sorts of worsted shoes, of all sizes, as neat and cheap as any imported from England." Rutherford Advertisement, The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser, 20 June 1765; cited in Olton, Artisans for Independence, 27.

In a letter describing the political situation in Philadelphia and his own behind-the-scenes maneuverings to make things happen, Mifflin explained, "My Situation in Life
& Connections make it Necessary that my Name be suppressed.” Thomas Mifflin to Samuel Adams, 21 May 1774, Sam Adams Papers, New York Public Library; quoted in Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 21.

93 In Mifflin’s first term, the yearly Pennsylvania Assembly met three times: for a few days in late fall to organize and appoint committees, for several months in mid-winter to do the necessary work, and in early fall to tidy their business and prepare for the election of the next Assembly. See Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 12-13.

Writing about the elections for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, John Adams indicated that “The Elections of the last Week in this City, prove this. Mr. Dickenson was chosen almost unanimously a Representative of the County. The Broadbrims [Quakers] began an opposition to your [Abigail’s] Friend Mr. Mifflin, because he was too warm to the Cause. This instantly alarmed the Friends of Liberty and ended in the election of Mr. Mifflin, by Eleven hundred Votes out of Thirteen, and in the Election of our Secretary Mr. Charles Thompson to a Burgess with him. This is considered here as a most compleate and decisive Victory in favour of the American Cause. And it [is] said it will change the Balance in the Legislature here against Mr. Galloway who has been supposed to sit on the Skirts of the American Advocates.” John Adams to Abigail Adams, Philadelphia, 7 October 1774, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. I, 165.

94 Thomas Mifflin, Pennsylvania Gazette, 26 April 1775; quoted in Rawle, “Sketch of the Life of Thomas Mifflin,” 110-111; see also Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 40. For the importance of Mifflin’s role in rousing Pennsylvanians to arms, see also United States Army Center of Military History, Thomas Mifflin, 3.


96 Thomas Mifflin to Jonathan Mifflin, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 20 July 1775. Quoted in Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 45. Eventually Mifflin would serve as the American army’s first Quartermaster General, display courage on the battlefield, and reach the rank of major general.

97 Minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Department of Records, Philadelphia; quoted in Bauman, For the Reputation of Truth, 244. I have not yet found information about whether Sarah also faced disownment. When the Philadelphia Meeting of Sufferings met in January of 1775, they dealt with the problem of Quaker involvement in the movement toward independence from Britain. The Meeting printed and distributed an official statement of support for the King and opposition to both the Continental Congress and the “Insurrections, Conspiracies & illegal Assemblies” it had spawned. For the first time, the Meeting of Sufferings also instructed local Meetings to discipline members involved with the Congress and related actions. Following normal Quaker procedure, if the effected Friends failed to humbly admit their guilt and publicly condemn their own actions, they would be disowned. In the following months, the Philadelphia Meeting admonished Whig members, including Benjamin Marshal, Owen Biddle, Joseph
Wetherill, and Thomas Mifflin. When these men refused to repent, they were disowned, and proclamations to that effect read in meetings and posted publicly in Philadelphia. See Christopher Marshall Diaries, 30 December 1774, 2 January 1775, collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; "To our Friends & Brethren in these & adjacent Provinces," "To the Monthly & Quarterly Meetings of Friends in Pennsylvania & New Jersey," "The Testimony of the People called Quakers given forth by a Meeting of the Representatives of said people, in Pennsylvania and New Jersey held at Philada the twenty fourth day of the first Month 1775," Minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 5, 19, 24, first month 1775, in Philadelphia Meeting for Sufferings Minutes; referenced and discussed in Marietta, Reformation of American Quakerism, 223; and Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 41. For Quaker discipline, including admonishment and disownment, see Marietta, Reformation of American Quakerism, 3-31.

98 "Walked a little about Town. Visited the Markett, the State house, the Carpenters Hall where the Congress is to Sit, &c.—then call’d at Mr. Mifflin’s—a grand, spacious, and elegant House" (John Adams, Tuesday, 30 August 1774, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. II, Diary 1771-1781, L. H. Butterfield, ed. [New York: Atheneum, 1964], 115). Thomas Mifflin served as a delegate from Pennsylvania until he entered the military and turned down his election (Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 29-30).

99 Sarah Mifflin to an unknown correspondent, quoted in Egle, Pennsylvania Women, 127. Other than "At the commencement of the War of the Revolution" and "to a friend in Boston," date, recipient, and present location of the letter are not provided.


101 Weekly boat service eased the trip to Newport, where over ninety Philadelphians summered between 1767 and 1775 (Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 13).
entry in John Adam’s diary in mid-July describes his first meeting with Thomas Mifflin. The brief record explains the Mifflin connection with Boston, comments positively on Mifflin’s personality, and ends with a suggestive hint that the two men talked about politics: “Drank Tea at Dr. Coopers with Mr. Adams, Mr. S. Elliot, Mr. T. Chase, and with Mr. Miffling [Mifflin], of Phyladelphia, and a French Gentleman. Mr. Mifflin is a Grandson, his Mother was the Daughter, of Mr. Bagnall of this Town, who was buried the day before Yesterday. Mr. Miffling is a Representative of the City of Phyladelphia—a very sensible and agreeable Man... Mr. Miffling is an easy Speaker—and a very correct Speaker.” John Adams, “July 16, 1773” [possibly Thursday, July 15], Diary and Autobiography, vol. II, 84.

Rebora et al., John Singleton Copley in America, 318; Rossman, Thomas Mifflin, 12-14.

Prown, Copley in America, 131.

For changes in the presentation of husband and wife in American colonial portraits, see Margareta M. Lovell, “Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-images,” Winterthur Portfolio 22 (Winter 1987): 247-51. Although Copley’s wealthiest patrons were usually loyalists, Whigs, who generally had moderate incomes, commissioned 70% of Copley’s portraits between 1771 and 1774. The Mifflins’s estimated yearly income of over £1000 was unusual among the Whigs and placed them in the top 22% of Copley’s patrons by wealth. The Mifflins also commissioned one of the largest (60 ½” x 48”) portraits, for 97% of Copley’s American paintings were 50” x 40” or smaller. It also appears to be the only painting by Copley of people from Philadelphia. For a statistical analysis, see Prown, Copley in America, 131, 134; 127, 136.

The furnishing appear in other works by Copley, and seem to have been studio props. The table-top fringe loom, however, is unique to the Mifflins’ portrait.

Thomas Mifflin sits in a splat-back Boston Chippendale side chair, perhaps of mahogany, with an over-the-rail leather seat upholstery that is anchored and decorated with a single row of closely spaced brass tacks. Leather from goat, calf, or seal skin, was used most often when upholstering chairs. Leather colors ranged from off-white to brown, and could be extended with dye to produce red or black. Leather also might be waxed (Jobe, “Boston Upholstery Trade,” 69-72, 83, 85; on Quaker furniture, see Pointon, “Quakerism and Visual Culture,” 418).

Copley shows Miles Sherbrook and Thomas Mifflin wearing informal frock suits often worn by the young. Made of a light wool cloth and featuring a small collar, the frock coat fit tightly but was less stiff than more formal attire. See Ribeiro, “‘The Whole Art of Dress’,” 112.

I assume his hair is powered because at the time of the portrait, Thomas Mifflin was only thirty years old.
109 Despite a prevalent belief otherwise, the testimony of Meetings in both England and Philadelphia shows that the use of buttons to fasten Quaker clothing was acceptable. The problem arose with entirely decorative buttons. For Philadelphia “superfluous button” use, see note 39 above. See also minutes from the 1698 Aberdeen Quarterly Meeting on the use of buttons on men’s clothing: “W(ee desire their) Coats may be buttoned to the tope, . . . Let all superfluous buttons and blindholes be put away, And no buttons further down then needs for fasning their Coats.” “A Testimony Given forth by the Quarterly Meeting in Joy Unity of both Men and Women’s Meetings,” 28/v/1698, records of the Aberdeen Yearly Meeting, ref. CH 10/3/4, Scottish Record Office; quoted in Kendall, “A Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress,” 61. Kendall supplied words in brackets for illegible areas in the text by comparison with a transcript printed in the Journal of the Friends Historical Society, 8 (1911): 78, 79.

110 The fabric of Mrs. Mifflin’s chair appears to be a dark Prussian blue brocade tinted with some white, darker for leaves. The color of the wood resembles the dark red glow of mahogany. The chair’s textile is probably a variety of worsted, a closely woven fabric made of tightly twisted long wool threads. Worsted wool formed the most popular textile in colonial Boston. The most fashionable varieties were damask (the most expensive) and moreen (the newest, introduced to the colonies in 1765). John Hancock owned a wool damask easy chair, and other Bostonians exhibited their wealth by ordering upholstery employing damask of silk or a silk-wool mixture. See Jobe, “The Boston Upholstery Trade,” 67-69.


112 Copley’s painting of the fabric as it falls into the shadows beneath the table suggests the presence of a decorative stitching down the center of the skirt.

de Montebello” from before 1829, a Damask known as “Madame Hardy” whose
cultivation is dated to 1832, and Centifolia “Blanchefleur” developed in 1835.


The yellow blossom is fading into brown and its petals are indistinctly painted, qualities which contribute to the difficulty in identifying it with certainty. Two varieties of Marigold were grown in the late 18th-century garden: Tagetes and Calendula, which arrived earlier. The blooms of both have long been associated with the sun, and both plants were highly valued for their medicinal qualities. Hildegard of Bingen is attributed with naming Calendula “Mary’s Gold” in dedication to the Virgin Mary, and the plant was used extensively as a medicinal and culinary herb beginning in the Middle Ages. Double petal varieties were popular ornamental plants, and Calendula cultivars were grown both in the garden and as indoor container plants. With the later introduction of a second “Marygold” represented by Tagetes erecta (African marigold) and Tagetes patula (French marigold). Calendula officinalis became known as “Pot marigold.” Both Tagetes and Calendula varieties were extremely popular garden plants despite their reputation for strong scent. Monticello had Calendulas in 1764, and both Tagetes erecta and Tagetes patula were added later. Only Calendula officinalis is recorded at Mount Vernon. For the history of Tagetes and Calendulas, see Alice M. Coats, Flowers and their Histories (New York and London: Pitman Publishing Co., 1956), 239-241, 317; Botanica’s Annuals and Perennials, (San Diego: Laurel Glen Press, 1999), s.v. “Calendula,” “Tagetes”; and Leighton, Early American Gardens, 336-338. For Marigolds in colonial America, at Monticello and Mount Vernon, see, respectively, Ibid, 184; Leighton, American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century, 455; and Griswold, Washington’s Gardens, 168.

Violets were among the earliest garden flowers, and Viola odorata, a native to Britain, was one of the most popular garden plants in colonial America from its introduction in the 17th century. Its sweet scent made it popular for posies and corsages such as that worn by Sarah Mifflin. For symbolism, see Coats, Flowers and their Histories, 269-273; and Robinson, Country Flowers, 64; for history, see Leighton, American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century, 486; and Idem, Early American Gardens, 186.

The story of Sarah Mifflin posing twenty times for the hands alone came from Rembrandt Peale (Rembrandt Peale, “Reminiscences, Exhibitions and Academies,” Crayon, 1 [1855], 290; quoted in P.S. [Paul Staiti], text for catalog no. 80, in John Singleton Copley in America, 318-320). Dinnerstein interprets this excess as an indication
of Copley’s concern with the politically linked subject ("The Industrious Housewife," 108). Although the story is apparently taken as gospel by those who write about this painting, it should be pointed out that Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860) is recounting in 1855 a conversation he had with Sarah Morris, who died in 1790. This means the conversation took place at least 65 years earlier, when Rembrandt was at most twelve years old and the memory of Copley, via the double portrait, was a living challenge to his father’s Philadelphia art business.

Sarah Mifflin’s table-loom is producing thread fringe. Normally, the looped threads would be cut only when the fringe is finished. Close attention to Copley’s painting reveals feathery ends on the threads instead of loops. This suggests he painted from used fringe rather than that which Mrs. Mifflin fabricated. For a photograph of actual thread fringe (c. 1760-1790), see Jackson, “Beyond the Fringe,” 135, fig. 121.

For an analysis of the politicization of weaving in relation to this painting, see Dinnerstein, “The Industrious Housewife,” 109-113.

For an interpretation of this painting as an example of an empowered female interacting with the world, see Stebbins, “An American Despite Himself,” 90.

This might raise the question of whether Copley desired Sarah as a love interest. Even if the rose were red rather than white, I believe the answer would be unequivocal—no.

For Quakers on gardening, see page 170 above, and Frost, Quaker Family in Colonial America, 209. For more on the competition between art and nature in a discussion which includes a cultivation as a revelation of God’s handiwork, see Claudia Lazzaro, “The Visual Language of Gender in Sixteenth-Century Garden Sculpture,” in Refiguring Woman: Perspectives in Gender and the Italian Renaissance, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 71-113.
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CHAPTER IV
MARY CASSATT’S STUDY OF A
WOMAN WITH A FAN

Introduction

The previous chapter focused upon John Singleton Copley, an eighteenth-century American painter who struggled to achieve success as gentleman and artist among the merchants and artisans of colonial America. This chapter moves forward a century and turns to Mary Cassatt, an American woman who escaped from the established canons of painting to embrace the new perspectives offered by the Impressionists in Paris. The chapter will culminate in the analysis of a series of exhibition images in which Cassatt used her friend Mary Ellison as a model. These paintings, pastels, and prints were created after the artist’s monumental decision to reject traditional styles and subjects, and several of the works were among those exhibited by Cassatt at her debut with the Impressionists in 1879. After focusing on images of Ellison which depict her at the theater, the chapter’s investigation will conclude with a related painting, exhibited in the 1879 show as Study of a Woman with a Fan and now known as Portrait of a Lady (Figure 4.1). As images of women created by a woman in a society that equated woman with spectacle, Cassatt’s representations of Mary Ellison should form a fertile field for the application of an expanded Lacanian Gaze theory.

Mary Cassatt and The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

Mary Stevenson Cassatt was born to Katherine Kelso Johnston and Robert Cassatt in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania in May of 1844. The fourth of five children who survived infancy, Mary Cassatt was the younger of two daughters in a family that produced no other known artists. Nevertheless, she developed the desire to succeed as a professional artist, and in 1860 began her studies at the age of sixteen by attending a premier American artistic institution: the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Instituted in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy enabled Philadelphia to hold its own as an
artistic center. Indeed, in the years following the Civil War, the Academy presented opportunities rare in the United States. Its galleries displayed original works and European copies as well as plaster casts for students to study and copy. In addition, the Academy held an annual juried exhibition of contemporary artwork that drew submissions from across the United States and Europe.

Amateur art studies were thought to be appropriate for unwedded girls since, in addition to developing good taste, knowledge of the arts improved their abilities to make polite conversation and create a gracious and inviting home environment. To this end, the Pennsylvania Academy offered its female students the chance to dabble in the arts before fulfilling their destinies as wives and mothers. Young lady art students were not expected to be career-minded, and taking artistic pursuits beyond dilettante status was not entirely proper. Yet when Mary Cassatt began her studies by enrolling in drawing, painting, and anatomy classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, she and her friends viewed art as a vocation. Fellow student Eliza Haldeman wrote bluntly of their serious studies and professional knowledge as being different from that of “amateur” students. As early as 1860, the year Mary began her studies at the Academy, her older brother Aleck Cassatt warned their father that Mary’s studies would soon take her to Europe.

Although the Pennsylvania Academy accepted both male and female students, like most art schools in the nineteenth century, it offered them separate classes and different opportunities. One mainstay in the Academy’s professional curriculum was drawing from plaster casts and replicas of antique figurative sculptures. Women gained greater access to this process in 1856, when the Pennsylvania Academy’s Board of Directors protected public sensibilities by ordering that “a close fitting, but inconspicuous fig-leaf be attached to the Apollo Belvidere, Laocoön, Fighting Gladiator, and other figures as are similarly in need of it.” This cloaking made it possible for men and women to view the antique statuary at the same time. Previously, women visiting the galleries were restricted to special “Ladies’ Days,” when they might view the bare plaster bodies without the corrupting presence of living men. Now women gained less restricted
access to the Academy’s galleries, and began drawing from the casts in the Antique Class.

Although the exhibition halls were co-ed when Mary Cassatt attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the early 1860s, not all classes were open to her and her fellow “Lady students.” Artists of both sexes viewed and discussed together the art on display, made detailed renderings of plaster casts of antique figurative sculpture, and worked side by side when copying paintings from the Academy’s collection. However, a vitally important component of the professional art curriculum remained open only to the Academy’s male students: the life drawing classes where young artists drew from draped and nude models. Cassatt’s friend and fellow student Eliza Haldeman explained their response to this deficiency in their education:

We young ladies of the Academy are getting up a life class. Although not from the nude. The arrangement is this. We are going to take an hour four days in the week, and one of us take turns to sit while the others draw. We will have the modelling room for our life class and have it so fixed that no one shall disturb us during our working hour. I think it will be of great advantage to us. My turn to sit comes third on the list.6

This indicates that the students knew the importance of life drawing, were determined to practice it, and were assertive enough to gain Academy approval for the solution they found. And although the Academy protected its female students from such a risqué and potentially licentious activity as drawing from nude or draped models, the Pennsylvania Medical University opened its anatomy classes to all Academy of Fine Arts students in 1860. The bravest of the Academy’s female students joined their male colleagues in viewing the complete dissection of human corpses.7 Since the vocabulary in Eliza Haldeman’s letters home indicates she studied anatomy, it is likely that Mary Cassatt—known to be more bold and aggressive than her friend—did so as well.

The Pennsylvania Academy’s gallery of European Art contained mostly copies and lesser originals, so copying as a mode of instruction whetted rather than satisfied a student’s appetite for the real thing as embodied by European collections, studios, and institutions. Although it often began in the United States, professional American art training usually culminated with study in Europe. France, in particular, offered the
chance to study in the studios of internationally renowned artists. As the center of the western art world, Paris beckoned with both the École des Beaux-Arts and the related Salon.

Frustrated with the limited opportunities available to her in Pennsylvania, twenty-one year old Mary Cassatt joined the exodus of American art students to Europe. She did so despite strong opposition from her father, who responded to her desire for European training with the statement: “I would almost rather see you dead.” Mary held firm in her desire to study abroad, and by 1865 was in Paris with the approval of her father, the financial backing of her parents, and the supportive company of her mother. Katherine Cassatt stayed in Paris long enough to see Mary and her friend Eliza Haldeman comfortably settled before returning to Pennsylvania, and she visited her daughter only intermittently during the following years. Even Katherine Cassatt’s support was tempered, however, for she encouraged her daughter to pursue portraits as a more accessible and monetarily rewarding direction, advice that an ambitious Mary resisted. For Mary Cassatt, portraits were “pot-boilers” dedicated to likeness rather than art, and it was art—great art—that she intended to create. Haldeman noted the disparity between the artist’s goals and her family’s hopes in 1867:

[Mary] said she wanted to paint better than the old masters. Her Mother wants her to become a portrait painter as she has a talent for likenesses and thinks she is very ambitious to want to paint pictures.

For the most part, however, the Cassatts left Mary to her own devices, seeming to trust her to do as she needed to become a successful professional artist, and to behave in a manner proper for a genteel young lady. Mary Cassatt’s strength of character, self-confidence, and commitment to the arts are highlighted by her success in gaining art training in France, and she remained in Europe until forced home by the Franco-Prussian war in August of 1870. Her time in Pennsylvania was brief, and in late 1871 Cassatt again traveled to Europe. This time she stayed.
Art in France

The Republic of France regarded art as an important factor in the disparate development of its people as Frenchmen and Frenchwomen. At their highest levels, the fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture were serious, publicly-oriented creative and intellectual pursuits best suited to men. In contrast, the practical arts as embodied in the designing of a decorative and genteel home environment were considered best suited for women. Despite this culturally embedded gender-linked bias, the number of professional women artists increased in late eighteenth-century France.

Art Education: the École des Beaux-Arts, Private Ateliers, and Paying Academies

The state-funded École des Beaux-Arts offered the most prestigious traditional tract for gaining a French education in the visual arts. The École fostered tightly painted, highly representational figurative artwork employing a subdued palette to convey moralistic, mythological, and historical narratives that were intended to transcend the reality of everyday life by lifting observers into the lofty realm of Fine Art. This style dominated the international art market. Prospective students competed to win entry to the École, passed rigorous examinations as they worked their way through the established courses, won prizes for outstanding pieces, and acquired the background and art-establishment contacts that enabled them to excel in the official exhibition format, the Salon. Triumph at the Salon meant an international reputation, and brought an artist fame and sales.

Since images of the human body dominated art from the École, skilled figure drawing was a necessity for artists. Until the end of the century, the École regulations, supported by French law, prohibited women from attending classes in the state-funded school. Those who by choice or necessity sought instruction beyond the walls of the École des Beaux Arts—a group which included both native Frenchwomen and foreign artists such as Mary Cassatt—could find it in the loosely organized ateliers or private studios of acclaimed painters, some of whom accepted women students. Although they
segregated male from female students, these studios often offered both groups the opportunity for life drawing.

Beginning in 1863, the École housed a tripartite painting program that grew from the establishment of three official ateliers of instruction, each under the direction of a celebrated painter: Alexandre Cabanel, Jean-Léon Gérôme, or Isadore Pils. These influential artists also taught in their own studios outside the École, and often conducted separate ateliers for male and female artists. Gérôme accepted Mary Cassatt as a student in his private atelier in 1866, less than a year after her arrival as an art student in Paris. Although she did not remain with him long, Cassatt listed Gérôme as one of her instructors on several of her Salon submissions. Mary Cassatt also studied with the academic painter Charles Chaplin in Paris in 1866; with the genre painters Pierre Edouard Frère and Paul Constant Soyer at Ecouen in 1867; with Thomas Couture at Villiers-le-Bel, near Ecouen, from May 1868 to April of 1869, and again in the summer of 1874; with the Frenchman Charles Bellay in Rome in 1870; and with Carlo Raimondi of the Parma Accademia in 1872. These experiences provided Cassatt with a decent background in academic painting. In addition, non-matriculated art students who bore the appropriate letters of introduction from known artists and diplomatic consuls were permitted to attend École lectures on art and aesthetic issues, and it is possible Cassatt availed herself of this opportunity when in Paris. Cassatt had traveled to Europe determined to make a name for herself as a painter; and as a student, she immediately began working in and using the French Academic system in hopes of obtaining glory at the Salon.

A few of these private ateliers developed into “paying academies” (académies payantes) and offered students the additional alternative of an organized instructional studio. Since these private schools were often run by recognized masters who also taught at the École des Beaux-Arts, they remained philosophically linked to the state sponsored École despite their perceived independence. The academy founded by Rudolphe Julian in 1868 was unique among the paying academies in treating its female students seriously, and in providing both men and women with an education similar to that found in the
Since internal competitions at the Académie Julian were open to all of its students, women as well as men had the chance to build reputations as prize-winning artists. In addition, the Académie not only held figure drawing classes in segregated ateliers for men and women, it also offered its female students the unique opportunity to work from lightly draped or even nude models. Women students paid dearly for such educational opportunities, for even the moderately priced and fairly equitable Académie Julian doubled the fee for its female students.

The Académie Julian was at the forefront of a growing trend to offer female students the opportunity to work from models. As a student of Charles Chaplin, Eliza Haldeman wrote home in 1866 about having “a wonderful old man for model”; she further explained that when Mary Cassatt heard they “have models all the days,” she also entered Chaplin’s atelier. Mostly, this meant working from partially or completely clothed models. Even this limited approach departed radically from the traditional art instruction for women, which either entirely eliminated drawing from models, or offered a piece-meal approach that concentrated on individual limbs and never the whole body. Aware of the deficiency in their education, female students drew the whole body whenever possible, and even hired models themselves. While students in Europe, Mary Cassatt and Emily Sartain, a friend and fellow art student, drew completely nude female models and drew and painted from both semi-clothed and costumed males. To augment the opportunities offered by the various artists who accepted her into their ateliers, Mary Cassatt also sought out and hired models on her own. Supplemental figural work helped to overcome instructional deficiencies, and allowed Cassatt to develop compositions suitable for submission to the Salon.

Showing Art: The Official Salon and the Alternatives

Late nineteenth-century Paris viewed the artist as a professional and his or her products as consumer goods. The salons, both official and independent, supported this view by introducing the work of artists to prospective patrons. Shops and galleries run by
dealers and auction houses marketed artwork year-round, and supplemented and reinforced the exposure and acclaim artists achieved through the annual salons.

Work submitted to the official Salon was expected to fall within the style and content parameters of the academic tradition exemplified by the training offered to men at the École des Beaux-Arts. The two institutions were so closely related that artists who directed ateliers of instruction at the school frequently served as members of the Salon jury, where they privileged their own students. Since the École accepted only male students for most of the nineteenth century, women submitting work to the Salon did so from a less secure position. In addition, the paintings by men usually obtained the best placement on the exhibition walls and were treated more seriously in the printed reviews. With these advantages, it is not surprising that male artists also won more awards and sold more work than their female colleagues exhibiting in the same Salon shows.

Writing to Eliza Haldeman, Mary Cassatt explained her own work's rejection from the 1869 Salon:

Melle. Bourge was also refused on both of hers, both infinitely better than last years, but Mr. Frère got one in for her. So you see they are not so very just after all; Mr. Gerome was very kind to me for when I heard that I was refused I went to him but alas! it was too late, he told me if I had come twenty four hours sooner he would have got my picture through!

Cassatt experienced the bias directly and did not like it. Salon acceptance meant playing by the prescribed rules of style, subject, and social networking, in a game where women had a built-in handicap and the quality of a painting did not necessarily determine its success. Throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s, the official Salon dominated the French art world and rewarded those artists who excelled within the École tradition.

During those same years, both male and female artists began actively seeking and creating alternative exhibition opportunities, and Paris experienced an explosion of art shows as new venues opened to challenge and diversify the hegemony of the Salon. For professional artists needing to make a living from their work, or wanting at least to recoup studio costs, exhibitions made possible the sales necessary for survival. Private associations formed and dissolved as artists like Cassatt pooled their resources and presented their own work collectively to the buying public in arenas that offered artists
control over how and when their own work was presented. Picture dealers proliferated, and Cassatt was among those artists who sent work to galleries and dealers in both France and America. Joining a cercle or gentleman’s club provided amateur and professional artists additional opportunities to exhibit within the often exclusive environments of the club itself, but such groups excluded women. As the number of exhibitions increased, the petits Salons of groups like the Independents (Impressionists), whose member artists were bound loosely together by shared ideas, vied for the public’s attention in competition with more formal societies epitomized by the highly successful Société des aquarellistes (Society of Watercolorists). Mary Cassatt was not blind to the opportunities offered by these private associations, and as her patience with the official Salon system frayed, her interest in alternate venues and galleries increased. She eventually exhibited as a member of two such groups, showing first with the Independents in the late 1870s and later with the Society of Painter-Printmakers.

“Feminism,” Art, and Women in Contemporary Society

The socially prescribed and disparate roles of men and women in nineteenth-century France were linked to a popular assumption that the sexes had distinct nervous systems and brain structures. While the physiology of men expedited originality, logical thinking, and creativity; the lesser brains and fluid nervous systems of women facilitated imitation, intuitive responses, and emotional sensitivity. The France of Cassatt’s time still based its social and legal order on the Napoleonic Code, which classified women as minors and placed them under the supervision and control of men. A husband owned and controlled money, property, children, and wife; and under law, the latter two exercised independence and power only through his approval. For married women, obtaining legal equality within the family environment was concomitant with monetary independence and control over her children, and therefore formed the heart of many reform movements begun by nineteenth-century French feminists.

The term “féminisme” (“feminist”) meant several things in nineteenth-century France, and did not necessarily cover all the people who supported the advancement of
women's rights. In addition to someone who struggled for political, social, and legal equality for women, "feminist" might mean possessing a discriminating recognition of, and admiration for, the excellence of a French woman's inherent "feminine" nature: refined, delicate, and perceptive. With their feminine qualities, women were appropriate subjects for the arts, and might even become dilettantes in the arts themselves. The perceived link between woman, feminine, aesthetic, and appearance was so strong that even a male artist might become a feminized "feminist" as he contemplated female models during the creation of an artwork.

By the 1880s, politically oriented feminists in France had brought the question of women's rights into the language of contemporary life. Among the issues under discussion were the education of women and their entry into the liberal professions of medicine, education, and art. Legally excluded from the state-supported education of the École des Beaux-Arts, denied participation on Salon juries deciding admission and awards, and barred by society from joining the bourgeois gentlemen's clubs (cercles) with their members-only exhibition opportunities, women artists found themselves marginalized in the vital public exhibition processes that led to professional acclaim, prominence, and sales. Women protested against and strove to overcome this institutional discrimination in many ways. One of the most important steps in their quest for equality as artists was the formation in 1881 of the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs (Union of Women Painters and Sculptors). Membership in the rapidly growing Union offered women their own network of support and, beginning in 1882, the opportunity to exhibit in the annual Salon des femmes (Women's Exhibition). In addition, the Union vocally supported the art of its members, raised the profile of women artists in France, and lobbied vigorously for admission of women to the École des Beaux-Arts.

When women sought equality within a social environment that defined them as naturally aesthetic, the notion of "women's art" became multivalent. While advocates for advancement used women's art as proof of innate intellectual and creative equality, others argued that the derivative nature of the art in such shows demonstrated women's
limited capacity. Even conservative male critics, who perceived organized feminism as a
danger to family and Republic, upheld the arts as an appropriate arena for feminine
accomplishment—as long as the ladies did not take it too far. Since belief in the inherent
inferiority of female intellectual and creative abilities justified a sexual hierarchy in
family, society, and the arts, the idea that women artists might possess the potential for
creative genius rivaling that reserved for men within the École tradition threatened the
suppositions upon which French society was structured.

Gendered Artists and Gendered Art: Masculine and
Feminine Painting

The conservative publication La Famille used paintings by women artists on its
covers as a representation of “acceptable” professional women at a time when the issue of
women’s rights was beginning to attract public attention. This professionalism was not
necessarily, however, that of artists in the great fine art tradition. By featuring “mother
and child” images by renowned painters like Virginie Demont-Breton, La Famille re-
 feminized women artists by linking their art with their roles as wives and mothers. Used
this way, the success of women artists bolstered the patriarchal status quo by visually
reinforcing woman’s traditional family-oriented role. Speaking for the French
government on the issue of women’s education and the École des Beaux-Arts, Charles
Dupy distinguished clearly between the “fine” art appropriate for men, and the
“decorative” art suitable for women:

women’s artistic tendencies would be oriented in a more appropriate, a
more useful and a more practical manner, both for her and for us, if they
were directed, not toward that which is called the fine arts but toward the
decorative arts which have not yet, in this country, developed to a
desirable standard.

As a craftsperson and “a kind of artist,” the woman educated in this practical aesthetic
direction could then go on to fulfill her family-oriented role as wife, mother, and
decorator of an elegantly beautiful French home. A woman wishing to retain social
respectability while refusing to abandon her professional—and therefore public—goals,
had to achieve her aims in a manner compatible with this established ideology. The
writings of *Union des femmes* president Virginie Demont-Breton epitomized this balance, for she preserved woman’s “feminine” role as wifely helpmate and mother even as she lobbied to push the boundaries described by Charles Dupy.

As we have seen, nineteenth-century Parisians believed that men and women had different temperaments and intellectual potentials that caused them to receive and process the world in distinct ways. Endowed by French society with a “masculine” character and its related qualities of intelligence and rationality, a nineteenth-century Parisian man was, by his very “nature,” predisposed to the comprehension, planning, originality, and even genius necessary for the creation of great Salon paintings. This 1888 description makes this perceived intellectual potential clear:

Men’s genius provides them with a tendency to go beyond themselves, a desire to enter into a direct connection with things, to seize them to oneself, in their truth, in their reality, in their character. They suspect, outside of themselves, the existence of a world of forms and ideas which they are forced to apprehend and understand. To these two exercises of the mind, they bring more curiosity, more impartiality than passion.\(^{35}\)

When the same author turned his attention toward the French women of Cassatt’s time, he perceived self-centered emotionalists predisposed toward subjective reactions and intuitive impulses rather than reasoned deliberation:

It is not the same with women who never know anything but themselves, who exist in an adorable childish incapacity to ever go beyond themselves, from their prejudices, from their impressions, from their hates, from their loves . . . . They have no idea of logical order, of sequence, of the absolute value of ideas; they substitute all of this with the order and sequence which pleases them most, they recognize no value in events or ideas except in so far as they affect them: they are impressionists, I tell you, in history, in morality, in literature, in grammar, in logical analysis, in mathematics, in chemistry and, consequently in painting.\(^{36}\)

A woman’s “feminine” nature was understood to endow her with impulsiveness, receptiveness, sensitivity, tenderness, and intuition; in short, she was an “impressionist” beguiled by surface appearances and the immediacy of her own daily existence. While these qualities were well suited to the duties of a mother and wife, they differed from the linear rationality, grasp of abstract ideas, and active intelligence associated with publicly-oriented men. In the words of another contemporary Frenchman, “There is a distance
between the putting together of a bodice and the composition of a painting, between the toilette and a work of art, that cannot be overcome by these women’s brains.” Taken to their polarized extremes, gender-linked cultural presuppositions about physiology, intelligence, and character, constructed a situation in which a woman artist’s “natural” femininity limited her to appreciation and surface replication, while masculinity empowered her male counterpart with the ability to invent and create.

Since the act of painting is linked to the act of sight, Parisian critics expected to see essential character differences revealed through the contrast between the masculine norm of male artists’ works and the anomalous appearance of female artists’ feminine paintings. If she became too skilled in the Beaux-Arts tradition, a woman’s paintings might be castigated as derivative, and her carefully developed technique as disloyal to her own impulsive and emotional feminine nature. Contrarily, if a woman included a strong, family-oriented moral message, she might be lauded as a true artist who upheld both the tenets of her craft and of her feminine sex. Mme Léon Bertaux, the first president of the *Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs*, even argued that women artists who pursued a traditional academic style would preserve the artistic heritage of France and the social stability of the nation. This was a radical notion, however, and for the most part women painted flowers, still lifes, and possibly images of women and children. Further, since women were viewed as domestically-oriented “impressionists” rather than rationalists, a loose, subjective, and immediate style was seen as more appropriate for their paintings. In the words of one male critic:

Many [women showing work at the *Salon des femmes*] even succeed in assimilating our [male] habits of vision; they know marvelously well the secrets of design and of colours, and one could consider them as artists, if it were not for the artificial impression which we receive in regarding their pictures. One feels that it is not natural that they should see the world in the way in which they paint, and that while they execute pictures with clever hands they should see the world with masculine eyes.

From the perspective of this critic, the gender-linked character of the artist mandated both the way in which that artist saw the world, and the style with which he or she translated that vision onto the canvas. In addition, paintings by women were expected to display an
essential "femininity" quite different from the norm of academic painting, and to depict only the lesser genres and perhaps scenes taken from their own domestic lives. A woman who painted skillfully in the "masculine" style of the École des Beaux-Arts drew censure for being untrue to her own womanly nature, and her paintings were criticized as clever, false, and derivative.

Ideally, a nineteenth-century woman left the masculine fine arts, like painting and literature, to the men for whom those arts were best suited, and remained true to her own nature by engaging in the one true and comprehensive "feminine" art—fashion. As the fine art of painting was seen to embody the masculine character of its creator, so did the high art of fashion externalize the feminine and aesthetic nature of Parisian women:

Fashion is women's literature. Dress is the expression of her personal style. By dress she conveys the outward expression of her taste, of her skill, and even of her aesthetic individuality . . . . Dress is, therefore, for women, the highest of the arts, the art containing all others. It is not only the expression of characteristic style . . . . but it is her palette, her poem, her theatrical setting, her song of triumph . . . . If a man has the right only to clothe himself, woman has the right to ornament, to embellish herself, and, in the natural adornment of her grace and beauty, to introduce a little brilliance into the dullness of modern life. 41

Since the beautification of self and environment formed the one true feminine art, a woman who enhanced her own natural grace and beauty through adornment was thought to be following the natural inclination of her character. Fabrics and jewelry were the paints of her palette, her home environment was the stage she designed, and her appearance was the "song of triumph" through which she ornamented the world. In a sense, a woman was her appearance:

All that adorns a woman, all that serves to give lustre to her beauty is part of herself . . . . Woman is . . . above all a general harmony, not only in her deportment and in the movement of her limbs, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast and iridescent clouds of stuffs in which she enwraps herself, which are like the attributes and the pedestal of her divinity . . . . What poet would dare, in painting the pleasure caused by this apparition of a beauty, to separate woman from her costume? Where is the man who, in the street, in the theatre, or in the park, has not enjoyed, in the most disinterested manner, a cleverly composed toilette, and carried away with the impression of it an inseparable picture of the beauty of her to whom it
belonged, making thus of the two—of the woman and her dress—an indivisible whole?^2

This description by Charles Baudelaire highlights the inseparable nature of a woman and the fashionable semblance she assembled for the world. Through grooming and dress, a well-bred woman demonstrated her personal taste, artistic skill, and individual feminine excellence. Within a patriarchal society that valued conspicuous consumption, the beautiful and expensive appearance of a respectable wealthy woman constituted her true value and allowed her to symbolize the financial success of her father or husband. Together, the social and familial expectations created a situation in which the feminine art of fashion merged artist and the canvas. Wrapped in a crafted semblance that the world viewed as a material part of her, and transformed into a beautiful spectacle in the eyes of the world, a woman became her own socially acclaimed artwork.

Viewed as a woman, and therefore “other” within the norm of male artistic practice, the successful woman-as-artist presented both her persona and her work to the eyes of a viewing public and to a critical press quick to censor and castigate her for anything that trespassed on the domains of “masculinity.” Not only did a woman painter grapple with the idea of “feminine” paintings, the French conflation of woman with appearance turned her into a spectacle that competed with the appearance of her own paintings. While a man might choose to exercise his creative individuality through the visual arts, theater, music, or even poetry, a woman had one true path to artistic excellence—fashion—an art of personal display so closely entwined with her identity as feminine that she was rarely perceived except through its lens. In this environment, a woman’s paintings were not automatically read and judged as art, but as anomalous paintings-by-women. As such, they were expected to exhibit her innate femininity. Seeking recognition as a serious professional while retaining both her respectably and her essential “feminine” nature, a French artist who was a woman dealt with issues her male colleagues did not face.
Mary Cassatt: Life and Art in France

Life as an Artist in Paris

By 1875, Cassatt was ready to leave her itinerant student days behind and concentrate on building a professional reputation. Paris became her new home, and she designed her studio and living spaces to be visually pleasing “pictures,” much like the approach taken in her paintings. In 1876 May Alcott recorded her experience of visiting Mary Cassatt in her combined studio-apartment, a comfortable and elegant environment where a group of American women gathered for tea:

[we ate] fluffy cream cakes and chocolate, with French cakes, while sitting on carved chairs, on Turkish rugs, with superb tapestries as a background, and fine pictures on the walls looking down from their splendid frames. Statues and articles of vertu filled the corners, the whole being lighted by a great antique hanging lamp. We sipped our chocolat from superior china, served on an India waiter, upon an embroidered cloth of heavy material. Miss Cassatt was charming as usual in two shades of brown satin and rep.

Through tapestries, statues, paintings, and carved furniture, Cassatt surrounded herself with aesthetic objects that reflected her international travels, her social background, and her artistic character. As we have seen, it was commonly accepted in nineteenth-century France that personal adornment and domestic decoration best suited a woman’s artistic aptitude, and Alcott’s description affirms Cassatt’s success in this “feminine” art. The artist also created an atmosphere in which her own paintings—presumably hanging among the “fine pictures on the walls”—were contextualized as art.

Madame Marie Del Sarte’s respectable boarding school had been Emily Sartain’s base in Paris, and Cassatt visited her friend there. Now it housed several other young women who became important for Cassatt as she established herself in the city: Anne, Louise, and Adeline Elder from New York, their friend Mary Ellison from Philadelphia, and May Alcott from Massachusetts. Louise and May were particularly impressed with Cassatt, and Louise Elder later recalled of her first meeting with the artist: “I felt then that Miss Cassatt was the most intelligent woman I had ever met, . . . . It seemed to me [that] no one could see art more understandingly, feel it more deeply or express themselves more clearly than she did.” With an expanding group of friends
who shared her American heritage and interests in the city and the arts, Cassatt had a
direct line into the social world of upper-middle class and wealthy young ladies in Paris.
Unlike Haldeman and Sartain, most of these new friends were in France to acquire social
polish and cultural refinement rather than an art education. Hence they were more
interested in appreciating and owning paintings than they were in making them.

After 1874, both the content and the style of Cassatt’s paintings began changing
as she sought subjects in the Parisian environment and the realization grew that her own
artistic beliefs differed from those espoused by the Salon. Previously Cassatt had favored
costumed scenes like the macho bullfighters and flirtatious women she painted in Seville;
but then she had enjoyed the freedom of being a self-confident artist and tourist in a
foreign and appreciative land. Now she began turning away from Italian and Spanish
genre subjects, and she mostly eliminated men from her public paintings. Perhaps
influenced by increasing pressure from her family in Philadelphia, she also began
painting portraits as a way to pay for her studio costs. This was difficult for Cassatt, for
as we have seen she abhorred the whole idea of portraiture. She needed to resolve the
problem of making “likeness” into “art.” By regarding her Parisian environment as a
foreign land full of decorative natives, she combined genre with portraiture to produce a
marketable product that retained artistic integrity.

Cassatt had developed a loose brush handling and a bright color palette during her
study trips to Italy, Spain, and Northern Europe; and she now became vitally aware that
her style had developed away from the look of mainstream academic painting. To Emily
Sartain, who painted in and admired the somber-toned and tightly resolved style of the
École and Salon, Cassatt’s paintings seemed pleasant in their color and periodically
excellent in their depiction of light, but overall fatally careless and unresolved. She
found the lighter palette particularly disturbing, and described Cassatt’s 1874 Salon
painting of a red-headed woman titled *Ida* as “a washed out affair.” Mary Cassatt
herself began doubting the style she had created:

> When I came to live in Paris after having painted in Rome & other places,
the sight of the annual exhibitions, quite led me astray. I thought I must
be wrong & the painters admired of the public right.
To be truly successful in the official art world of France, like her American compatriot Elizabeth Gardner, Cassatt needed to adjust her style and to network and curry favor within the system itself. Although Cassatt’s record of inclusion at Salon shows was good, her paintings had not won awards or generated critical acclaim in the Parisian press. Acceptance alone would not provide the triumph necessary for true prosperity, nor would it satisfy the desires of someone who aimed “to paint better than the old masters.” In addition, Cassatt found even her status as a Salon artist threatened in 1875, when the jury accepted her painting of a young girl entitled Portrait of Mlle E. C. but refused a portrait of Cassatt’s sister Lydia for its light palette. Angry, the artist darkened the background on the rejected work in order to conform to the academic style, and resubmitted the portrait of Lydia to the Salon of 1876—where it was accepted along with a second painting, Portrait of Mme W. Then came the Salon of 1877, where Cassatt suffered the humiliation of having both of her entries refused.

Cassatt needed to make a decision about the future direction of her painting. On one side were the École des Beaux-Arts and the Salon with the powerful weight of tradition that they represented; on the other were the artistic freedom and uncertainty offered by a rising number of “petite salons” organized by dissenting groups of artists like the Impressionists. Alternating between self-doubt and increasing criticism of the academic style, Cassatt wavered over which path to take. She had never been strong in her praise of the academic system, even when the Salon accepted her paintings. As early as 1873, her “severe and sweeping” criticism had appalled Emily Sartain, who wrote home that Cassatt “is entirely too slashing,—snubs all modern Art,—disdains the salon pictures of Cabanel Bonnat and all the names we are used to revere.” Further, Cassatt needed only to look in the windows of Paris picture dealers to see the liberated art made outside the confines of traditional academic painting. Cassatt’s first encounter with the work of Edgar Degas occurred in 1875 as she walked by an art dealer on the boulevard Haussmann. The pastels so enthralled Cassatt that she—then a mature artist of thirty-one—returned repeatedly. “I used to go,” she later described, “and flatten my nose against the window and absorb all I could of his art. It changed my life. I saw art then as
I wanted to see it." Degas' work embodied the possibilities denied to an artist trying to succeed within the Salon system. This was art as Cassatt felt it could and should be, an art in which Cassatt could believe. Following her 1877 rejection by the Salon, Degas asked Mary Cassatt to join the Impressionists in their next exhibition. Accepting the invitation, she never submitted to the Salon again.

The year 1877 also heralded a change in Cassatt's living situation, for Robert and Katherine Cassatt moved in with their daughter Mary permanently. They were joined by Lydia, their oldest daughter, who had visited Mary several years earlier and was the subject of the portrait the Salon both rejected and accepted. This consolidation of households was an expected step for American and French families of the Cassatt's social class. By having both unmarried daughters live with them, Katherine and Robert Cassatt could reduce expenses, function as chaperones, and receive care as they themselves aged. With her family's arrival, Mary Cassatt acquired a traditional home life as well as willing and convenient models. However, she also gained increased pressures to succeed. For over a decade her family had helped fund her education in France, and now they wanted to see the results. For monetarily-oriented Robert Cassatt, who had not wanted his daughter to come to France to study art in the first place, this meant at least enough sales to finance the studio and its expenses. As he explained to his son Alexander:

Mame [Mary], is working away as diligently as ever, but she has not sold anything lately & her studio expenses with models from 1 to 2 francs an hour! are heavy. Moreover I have said that the studio must at least support itself. This makes Mame, very uneasy, as she must either make sale of the pictures she has on hand or else take to painting pot boilers as the artists say—a thing that she never yet has done & cannot bear the idea of being obliged to do. Still pressing their daughter to become a straight portrait painter, the elder Cassatts could now observe and comment upon her progress in person. The achievements of Alexander, whose meteoric rise within the Pennsylvania Railroad was a source of family pride, must have increased the pressure Mary felt to succeed professionally. Tensions culminated in 1878, when Robert Cassatt refused to provide his daughter with more monetary help. Although Mary Cassatt had always contributed to studio expenses through sales and
commissions, for the first time she assumed total financial responsibility. This occurred as she prepared to debut with the Impressionists. The paintings she presented would validate both Degas’ invitation and her own decision to pursue a self-defined, independent style with the Impressionists. In addition, instead of the one or two paintings needed for Salon submissions, Cassatt now faced—for the first time—the task of producing numerous quality paintings. With an increased stress on the importance of sales and less money to pay for models, Americans in Paris, especially those from her home state of Pennsylvania, must have seemed an obvious source for patronage.

A First Painting of Mary Ellison

Among the Americans boarding with Mme Del Sarte was a young Philadelphian named Mary Ellison, who wanted a portrait of herself painted by her friend Mary Cassatt. Her father, Rodman Barker Ellison, soon commissioned one at her request. The result was the painting entitled Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering, signed and dated on the lower left with “M. S. Cassatt, Paris 1877” (Figure 4.2). The use of Cassatt’s middle initial in 1877 seems a lingering reminiscence of her student days, when she exhibited as “Mary Stevenson” and then as “Mary Stevenson-Cassatt.” In the late 1870s Cassatt dated her work intermittently, and added the location even less often. However, for Americans like Mary Ellison, such an inscription would have functioned as a further commemoration of her time in France.

Little biographical information is available about Mary Ellison. Her father, Rodman Barker Ellison, was a principal in the successful international woolen and cloth business known as John B. Ellison and Sons. Mary was probably born in 1856, making her twenty-one when the portrait was painted. She lived in Paris for a number of years, and stayed at Mme Del Sarte’s with her friends the Elder sisters for at least part of that time. Presumably, Mary Ellison’s lengthy stay in Paris was meant to provide her with enrichment and polish, for there is no indication that she came to study the making of art. Although Cassatt’s correspondence does not mention her, Ellison became a member of
Mary Cassatt’s inner circle of friends and continued to visit the artist’s studio after the portrait had been completed.

In *Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering*, Cassatt composed a seemingly straightforward half-length composition with Ellison centered and slightly angled into the picture plane. Ellison sits straight-backed against a tall expanse of blood-red upholstery, either a sofa or a settee, that extends off the painting to her left. Above her is the murky dark background favored in Salon-style portraiture, and the darkness creeps into the red on Ellison’s right and left. Against this darkness, perky brown-haired and black-eyed Mary Ellison sits in a pool of light that emphasizes her pale blue dress, lacy white fichu, and cream-colored needlepoint canvas. Evident in slightly “prettified” form are the bow lips, blocky nose, and straight eyebrows found in other paintings of Ellison. Her flushed skin unites the light and dark areas and helps to unify the composition. Cassatt brought the red of the background into the fichu’s pink ribbon and again into the triangular, stitched areas of the gros point needlework. According to Ellison’s daughters, the needlepoint was a prop that satisfied Cassatt’s desire for a pose that emphasized Mary Ellison’s hands. As sewing, the gros point also symbolizes proper female behavior. Although the partially stitched canvas curves over and completely obscures Mary Ellison’s left hand, her raised right hand holds the needle and pulls green thread tightly to complete a stitch. Distracted from her work, she smiles slightly as she lifts her head to look toward the external viewer. Her face looks happy, excited, even delighted. As described by Mary Ellison’s daughter, this painting shows a “young girl... [who is] vital, enthusiastic.” This wording suggests that the portrait accentuates Ellison’s femininity, an interpretation supported by her occupation within the image, and by the compositional emphasis placed upon her pale blue dress and white fichu. As presented by Cassatt, Ellison is engaged in the womanly artistry of needlework, and dressed and posed to display the feminine “high art” of fashion.

Closer attention to this painting, however, shows some unexpected things are happening in Cassatt’s arrangement of the composition. The horizontal sofa back awkwardly continues the line of Ellison’s eye level, creating a subliminal anchor for her
lively outwardly-directed look. The straight-on view of the sofa back, indicated by its placement parallel to the top and left edge of the canvas, is counteracted by the angled view of the sofa’s arm which cuts across the lower left edge of the painting. This red arm creates a barricade between the external viewer and Ellison. Ellison’s own body is turned slightly to the viewer’s right, in an angle that falls somewhere between the straight back of the sofa and the sharp diagonal of its arm. This construction cages Ellison in the sofa even while it leaves her with no place to sit. In addition, the modulating bright and dark reds of the sofa inexplicably continue in Ellison’s lap, pool underneath the needlepoint canvas, and are picked up again in the sofa at the right edge of the painting. This encircles Mary Ellison with a red-black halo. She seems not to be sitting on the furniture, but rather in it, in a pose completely independent from its support. Finally, Ellison has turned her raised head only slightly, creating an angled view of her face even as her eyes are directed out to the viewer. In this situation she can neither embroider comfortably nor meet the external viewer directly, face to face. Cassatt has placed her actions in limbo, a position which underscores the artificial nature of the situation and contributes to an odd stiffness in Cassatt’s rendering of Ellison’s pose, making it very much seem to be a pose. As a commissioned portrait painted in the traditional mode, Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering appears to be a product of the need to make money, and of the artist’s dual attempt to conform to the academic style and to accepted notions of femininity. This may explain the sense, provided by this painting’s composition, that Cassatt is fighting with her work even as her sitter appears delighted with having her portrait painted.

Mary Ellison Embroidering was painted during a year of personal and artistic transformations for Mary Cassatt. As we have seen, in 1877 Cassatt was once again living with her parents, whose presence must have increased the urgency for monetary success. Moreover, this was also the year in which Mary Cassatt renounced the Salon and embraced the Independents. Cassatt later wrote of her liberation:

Finally I could work with an absolute independence without being concerned with the ultimate opinion of a jury. I already knew who my true masters were. I admired Manet, Courbet, and Degas. I hated conventional art. I began to live.63
Branded by the press the "Impressionists," Degas' loosely structured band of artists soon would welcome Cassatt and provide her with friends and colleagues united in their passion for a non-traditional art. In addition, the trio of painters Cassatt references—Manet, Courbet, and Degas—all created works related to modern life. For the first time, Cassatt herself began truly exploring and composing images of contemporary women, rather than recording them in academic portraits. Within this investigation is a group of images in which she used her friend Mary Ellison as a model.

The work Cassatt created for the Independents' salons caught the attention of the press. In consequence, she gained monetary success, public acclaim, respect, and even more importantly for her, a permanent place among the artists and literati of France. The consideration shown to Cassatt's 1879 and 1881 Independent salon pieces by her artistic peers and the art critics in the Parisian press finally earned her respect at home, and Robert Cassatt began basking in the glory of her success:

> I sent you [Alexander Cassatt] sometime ago a number of newspaper notices of Mame's [Mary's] exposition and promised to send more— I have a lot of others but there has been so much of it that we all cry "too much pudding;" So I spare you any further infliction . . . Mame's success is certainly more marked this year than at any time previous. . . . The thing that pleases her most in this success is . . . the fact that artists of talent & reputation & other persons prominent in art matters ask to be introduced to her & compliment her on her work & & She has sold all her pictures or can sell them if she chooses—

Cassatt had finally earned her father's respect for her artwork. The attitude displayed by Robert Cassatt in the above letter to his son contrasts with that of a few years earlier, and must have contributed to an easing of family tensions over the financial success of Mary Cassatt's paintings. In addition, his reference to Cassatt's interaction with other artists in Paris indicates that Mary Cassatt had earned a place with artists in the art world beyond the Salon. Further, Robert Cassatt's gleeful comment about sales suggests that her studio was not merely self-supporting, but a commercial success. Mary Cassatt's debut with the Independents quieted the doubts at home, provided her with financial freedom, and made her part of an environment that valued artistic autonomy. She was now free—within the

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limits of socially respectable “femininity”—to pursue her own investigations, and to go where her painting took her.

Cassatt and the Gendered Spaces of “Modernity”

In Paris during the 1870s, wealthy bourgeois women both consumed and displayed luxury goods. Magazines oriented toward the woman of leisure proliferated, and offered both entertainment suggestions and up-to-date fashion plates. Wealthy Parisiennes kept pace with constantly changing styles and patrolled the offerings of couturiers like Worth and the contents of Paris’s new department stores. In a sense, these women were themselves luxury items whose role as spectacle allowed them both to embody the upper-class ideals of conspicuous leisure, and to function as visible signs for the success and wealth of their husbands and fathers. Thorstein Veblen explained the phenomena succinctly in 1899:

It has in the course of economic development become the office of the woman to consume vicariously for the head of the household; and her apparel is contrived with this object in view. It has come about that obviously productive labor is in a peculiar degree derogatory to respectable women, and therefore special pains should be taken in the construction of women’s dress, to impress upon the beholder the fact (often indeed a fiction) that the wearer does not and can not habitually engage in useful work. Propriety requires respectable women to abstain more consistently from useful effort and to make more of a show of leisure than the men of the same social classes.

An upper-class woman displayed her family’s wealth and status not only by purchasing for her household, but also by engaging in activities that exemplified “leisure” in the eyes of society. In addition, using the “art” of dress, she fashioned a semblance that indicated she, herself, was a luxury item that need not, even could not, work productively. In a society that values conspicuous leisure,

the ideal requires delicate and diminutive hands and feet and a slender waist. These features, together with the other, related faults of structure that commonly go with them, go to show that the person so affected is incapable of useful effort and must therefore be supported in idleness by her owner. She is useless and expensive, and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength.
This ideal of passive and spectacular femininity conforms to the nineteenth-century French belief that men’s and women’s physiological structures provided them with distinct, gender-linked characters, roles in society, and ways of seeing and being in the world. The difference between Great Art and Fashion epitomized this distinction. Fashion, self-adornment, and decoration fit a woman’s feminine character and formed her “natural” palette, poem, theater, and song of triumph. Societal emphasis upon the way a woman dressed and presented herself turned her into a mirror for her family’s status in the commerce of leisure. In combination with other women, or attended by male escorts, a Parisienne went forth into certain environments to be seen and appreciated, just as she herself viewed and judged the presentations put forth by others.

Mary Cassatt partook of this life of spectacle and entertainment, a world where women both looked and were seen. She invited friends to afternoon tea, hosted and attended dinner parties, and frequented the more public spaces of the theater and the Opéra. In nineteenth-century Paris, upper middle class women reserved an afternoon each week to be “at home” for guests, who generally stayed no longer than thirty minutes and arrived and left at their own convenience. It became fashionable to adopt the English custom of afternoon tea, and in these “salon” visits, friends, acquaintances, and relatives were served tea and light refreshments, including sandwiches and cakes. This provided a practical and elegant bridge between the mid-day meal and an evening dinner that might be served as late as eight or nine o’clock. Both men and women attended these social occasions, and a gracious hostess did not indulge in needlework while entertaining her guests, since conversation and social interaction formed the primary focus of all involved. May Alcott’s description of tea at Mary Cassatt’s, and Cassatt’s own paintings, indicate that tea was a fashionable event for their circle in Paris. Although Mary Cassatt corresponded and socialized with fellow impressionists, she did not confine herself to an insular artistic world. She entertained the writers Stéphene Mallarmé and George Moore and knew the politician Georges Clemenceau. From her earliest days in France, Mary Cassatt also forged friendships in the French music world. She continued these connections; and as her family settled in Paris, they frequented the theater and opera.
As the premier location to see and be seen, the theater presented the most popular art in Paris during the late 1870s. For an expensive annual subscription, theaters offered their patrons a private box or loge. With annual costs that might run to thousands of francs, only the most affluent people in Paris could afford the luxury of this semi-private but highly visible space. The mirrored, gas-lit setting of the theater box allowed the wealthy to display their elegance and watch their peers in an environment protected from the general population. Since the fashionable appearance of wives, daughters, and sisters represented the family’s wealth and social standing, men customarily sat in the shadowy back of the loge where their presence would not distract attention from the women they accompanied.

Although the theater box was itself part of the public theater, contemporary perception of its semi-enclosed environment made it inherently private compared to the tiered seating and the public concourses. Women treated the loge rented by their families as a domestic space, and received and entertained visitors as if they were in their homes. The largest and most expensive theater boxes were equipped as salons and contained seating for up to six people. It was not uncommon for groups of women to sit in a loge without male escorts. In fact, so great was the perceived connection between the theater box and the home salon, that respectable women who sat in a loge could attend the theater alone. In contrast, a woman seated in the open and public areas of the theater, like the balcony or orchestra, needed to be accompanied by a male relative in order to preserve her respectable reputation.

Going to the theater or opera epitomized the world of conspicuous leisure, for by its very construction the loge formed the perfect stage for the premier feminine art of dress and personal adornment, and reaffirmed its occupants’ position as public spectacle. In addition, the boxes functioned as private balconies, offering clear views of the floor below, the stage, and the occupied loges on the other side of the theater. To an audience that included her peers, a woman’s appearance and demeanor demonstrated her own worth and status, while her decorative beauty simultaneously introduced “a little brilliance into the dullness of modern life.” Speaking of sketches by Constantin Guys,
whom he revered as the epitome of an artist of the new modern life, the poet and art critic Baudelaire described theater boxes as elaborate frames around living portraits:

[the artist] shows you, in the diffused brightness of a playhouse, some young girls of the best society, receiving the light with their eyes, their jewels, and their shoulders, and sending it back again. They are resplendent, like portraits in the box which serves them as frame. Some are grave and serious, others, fair and heedless. Some expose with aristocratic unconcern their precociously developed necks and shoulders; others show with frankness their boyish figures. They hold their fans to their teeth, and have a vague or fixed look; they are theatrical and solemn like the drama or opera to which they give themselves the air of listening.71

Attending the evening performance together, bejeweled young women in shimmering gowns customarily sat at the point of maximum visibility, the front of the loge. In this location, there was nothing to impede the view of their feminine beauty. Ornamented with gilt and backed with mirrors, loges formed expensive packaging that framed and emphasized the appearance of the women they contained, and allowed the audience to view them from all sides. As exemplars of contemporary beauty, young women in such settings became living art themselves, and formed appropriate subject matter for artists who were concerned with encapsulating the basic truths of modern life. Even as women gave tangible form to "femininity" through their display of aesthetic refinement and delicacy, the artists who perceived, appreciated, and painted their feminine qualities might themselves be seen as féministe.

As we have seen, space in upper-class Paris was gendered. Private, domestic, and interior areas were feminine, and as such the province of the "respectable" woman; public, commercial-social, and external territories were masculine, and controlled and populated by men. Although working women of necessity frequented the streets of Paris, a bourgeois woman's actions were confined by mores of acceptable behavior.72 Since a female without escort signaled availability, a well-dressed woman walking or sitting in public by herself might be mistaken for a prostitute. Hemmed in by escorts, chaperones, and impractical clothing, an upper-class Parisian woman could not freely traverse the public spaces of the city.73 However loges, as partly enclosed, physically and
economically exclusive places within the public arena of opera or theater, offered the wealthy elite a chance to be physically separate even as they participated in the public display. This unique blending of private and public space offered women the opportunity to take part in the spectacle of modern life as viewers, as well as objects. Within the interior spaces of the theater box, women chaperoned each other and participated in the masculine and public space of Paris even as they enacted the feminized art of spectacle.

Although Mary Cassatt maintained the conventions of feminine social decorum for a woman of her social class, she viewed her artistic life differently. Defining herself as a modern artist rather than a woman artist, Cassatt believed her own work was best seen with and evaluated against her peers, both male and female. Cassatt neither supported separate spheres in the arts nor permitted her own work to be shown in exclusively “female” venues like that soon to be offered by Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs. In addition, as an unmarried American woman in Paris, Cassatt enjoyed more liberty than a married or native Frenchwoman. The French viewed English and American women as inherently more “masculine” and therefore less “feminine”—less vulnerable, less delicate and womanly—than native Frenchwomen. Although her status as a respectable women kept her from frequenting the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes in its unofficial status as the heart of the Impressionist group, Mary Cassatt lived and worked within easy walking distance of the Café and the studios near its location on the place de Pigalle. Irish writer George Moore remembered the frequency with which the group of Impressionists met Cassatt: “She did not come to the Nouvelle Athènes it is true, but she lived on the Boulevard Extérieur; her studio was within a minute’s walk of the Place [de] Pigalle, and we used to see her everyday.” Between 1878 and 1884, the Cassatts rented a Paris apartment at 13, avenue Trudaine. This location was less than half a mile east of the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes. In addition, in 1882 Mary Cassatt also established her own studio on the place de Pigalle. Despite her social positioning as a respectable upper middle class woman, she was by no means isolated from her colleagues.

Being a well-read if new member of the Independents, Mary Cassatt was certainly aware of the importance her colleagues placed on content that dealt with modern life.
As a condition of difference, Modernité not only separated present from past, but also embraced a distinct and new attitude toward and experience of contemporary life. This view of modernity was encapsulated in an essay by Charles Baudelaire entitled “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (“The Painter of Modern Life”) and published by Le Figaro in 1863:

Modernity is the transitory, fugitive, contingent half of art, the other half being the eternal and the immutable. There has been some sort of modernity for every ancient painter; most of the beautiful portraits left to us by the past are . . . perfectly harmonious because the costume, the head-dress, and even the gesture, the look and the smile (each period has its own deportment, look and smile) form a whole of complete vitality. You have no right to despise or to set aside this transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so frequent . . .

. . . In a word, if anything modern is to be worthy to become antique, it is necessary to extract from it the mysterious beauty with which it is involuntarily endowed by human life.78

For Baudelaire, if the abstract side of the beautiful was eternal, immutable, and inhuman, the particular side was relative, and manifested itself through “the morals and aesthetics” of a distinct culture and time period.79 As an ethos of present-day life, culturally specific notions of beauty infused life at all levels, and manifested themselves in the comportment and fashions of the people. Only by accessing the lived essence of contemporary life, could artists capture the human side of beauty and create paintings that stood the test of time. As we have seen, the poet found one type of this living beauty when the framing provided by theatre boxes turned decorous young women into living portraits.

However, modernity involved more than the selection of a contemporary subject; it also necessitated a new way of painting. To capture “the mysterious beauty” of lived experience, a painter of modern life should abandon antiquated ideals based upon past notions of beauty and art, and instead depict “impressions” of his contemporaries in their own clothing, habitats, and costumes:

Woe is him who studies the antique for anything but pure art, logic, and general method! As a result of plunging too deeply into it, he loses the memory of the present; he renounces the value and the privileges furnished by actual occurrences; for nearly all our originality comes from the impression made by Time upon our sensations.80
Here Baudelaire sets the “modern” painter firmly against the canons of academic painting. Instead, he proposes that the painter of modernity create a new style of painting capable of capturing the painter’s own impression of the transitory and fugitive nature of life in the rapidly changing, constantly moving city.\(^1\) Broken surfaces, sketchy brushwork, and attention to shifting patterns of light were among the approaches investigated by artists interested in “modernity,” and became associated with paintings by artists in the group Cassatt had recently joined, the Impressionists.

In the literature and art of the nineteenth-century Parisian avant-garde, the solitary \textit{flâneur} who anonymously strolled the city’s public spaces served as the ultimate symbol of Modernity and the modern city.\(^2\) Among the artists Cassatt most admired, the work of both Degas and Manet had long been concerned with investigating the spectacle of the \textit{flâneur}’s public Paris. The \textit{flâneur}, however, had always been masculine in theory and male in actuality, and Mary Cassatt was very much a woman of her time and social class. A respectable woman could not frequent the Cafés, dance halls, and brothels of “modern” Paris, nor could she paint on street corners or hire prostitutes as models.\(^3\) And, of course, the independent and solitary sauntering and looking enjoyed by the \textit{flâneur} was antithetical to the woman’s major public activity: shopping for her household. If Cassatt still wanted to paint “better than the masters”—whom she now identified as Manet and Degas—she would need to tackle “modern” subjects without being a \textit{flâneur}. She would need to negotiate representations of a feminine modernity.

Berthe Morisot, a founding member of the Impressionist group, also attempted to form a feminine modernity of subject with her paintings and drawings of the Parisian suburb of Passy. As an upper-class bourgeois, Morisot followed the social conventions of society while developing her own artistic talent and identity. She lived a different experience than that of Cassatt, who obtained some freedom as an American in France. Focusing almost exclusively on women, Morisot concentrated on their domestic activities and environments. While she might show women viewing the distant city skyline from suburban parks, or preparing to leave home for an event like the opera, Morisot never depicted women in the public spaces of Paris. Instead, she investigated the private,
feminine spaces of Passy. As we have seen, nineteenth-century French art was viewed through gender stereotypes, and a woman's art was expected to embody her feminine nature. As an intuitive shallow record of bodily sensation, paintings by women were expected to appear spontaneous, emotional, impressionistic, and decorative, so the broken surface created by Morisot's rapid and fluid brushwork appeared appropriately feminine. Her works were also viewed with approval by critics who thought a female Impressionist should concentrate on genre subjects drawn from the proper and socially acceptable world of her own upper-class home. Blinded by their own gender bias to the depth and radical nature of her paintings, reviewers acclaimed Morisot's artwork as quintessentially feminine in both style and subject.

In contrast to the contemporary perception of Morisot's work as feminine, Mary Cassatt's understanding of form, attention to linearity, and constructed compositions provoked charges of "masculinization," for contemporary critics equated form with masculine, and movement with feminine. Even female friends like May Alcott saw Cassatt's work as unexpectedly strong for a woman:

Miss Cassatt . . . being very lively and a woman of real genius, she will be a first-class light as soon as her pictures get a little circulated and known, for they are handled in a masterly way, with a touch of strength one seldom finds coming from a woman's fingers. In nineteenth-century Paris, "genius" was a term reserved for men. By describing Cassatt's paintings as masterly and unusually strong for a female painter, and by characterizing the artist herself as "a woman of real genius," Alcott attributes to Cassatt talents rare for a woman. Even Degas, who is reputed to have said of Berthe Morisot, "she makes pictures the way one would make hats," recognized the masculine quality of Cassatt's images. He told her, "I will not admit that a woman can draw like that." Although Degas tied the French artist explicitly to the woman-feminine-decorative gender bias prevalent in France at the time, Cassatt, whom he viewed as "this distinguished person whose friendship I honour," received a backhanded complement that both reinforced and denied her woman-feminine status. Thus, among her
contemporaries, Mary Cassatt was credited—and criticized—for possessing an unusual “manly” vision.

With her “masculine” style of painting growing stronger by the year, Cassatt began seriously turning her attention toward a “modern” subject—the people around her. This use of family and friends as models was not new for Mary Cassatt. As we have seen, during her studies at the Pennsylvania Academy in the early 1860s, Cassatt both posed for and drew fellow “lady students” like Eliza Haldeman. With her family’s permanent arrival in Paris, Mary Cassatt began painting her mother and sister Lydia. As the subjects of her paintings and prints, they appeared alone in gardens and in interiors, reading, drinking tea, and stitching tapestry. Cassatt also made images of her friends in Paris. Although she depicted men, most of her drawings and paintings focused on women, and Mary Ellison was among those she used as a model. With these works, Cassatt explored contemporary settings and women lit by modern light in compositions that investigated the constructed and composed nature of painting itself. Her work was viewed with respect by Degas, who commented:

[Mlle Cassatt] whom you know for a good painter, [is] at this moment engrossed in the study of the reflection and shadow of flesh or dresses, for which she has the greatest affection and understanding, not that she resigns herself to the use of only green and red for this effect which I consider the only salvation, etc. etc. etc.

With the phrase “only green and red,” Degas references not just the subject matter, but the artistic nature of Cassatt’s explorations. His approval of her explorations of contrasting colors in conjunction with contemporary fashions and lighting can be seen in his possession of an 1879 pastel by Cassatt in which the predominant colors are a lime green and vivid red. Cassatt’s work from the summer of 1879 provoked praise from the often critical Degas, who wrote to a fellow Impressionist and art collector that Cassatt’s work “looks very well in the studio light. It is much stronger and nobler than what she had last year.” Cassatt’s masculine technique and modern subjects combined to produce “noble” paintings, an accolade more commonly applied to masculine rather than feminine efforts. Unlike her more conventional portrait works, Mary Cassatt created these “art” paintings with the Impressionist shows in mind—composing them for public
exhibition in groups with other "modern" paintings, rather than for display in the restricted spaces of a home. This was a difficult task, for she needed to compose paintings that retained the feminine qualities and respectability of her models without diverging into portraiture. Further, the masculine salon public of Paris would judge through gendered eyes the success and appropriateness of her paintings both as art and as paintings-by-a-woman and, by extension, the same viewers would evaluate both the artistic and feminine accomplishments of Cassatt herself.

In addition to creating strong, and therefore "masculine," images of friends and family in artworks meant for public exhibition and sale, Cassatt began to produce work that explored woman's place within the male domains of active vision and public space. This direction is epitomized in her representations of theater boxes that contain women who turn their opera glasses out onto the audience. Moving from domestic interiors to the semi-public venue of the loge formed an important step in Cassatt's artistic development. The loge offered a socially acceptable environment that highlighted a woman's decorative value as a "living portrait" even as it offered her the opportunity to become an active viewer within the spectacle of modern life. However, as part of the theater, the loge was a semi-private space within an inherently public arena. When Cassatt began taking her sketchbook to the theater, she crossed another barrier created by her status as woman-artist, and began to make art in a quasi-public space. Since the loge operated as a threshold between the public and the private, Cassatt could use its environment as a stage for investigating the place of contemporary woman within the spectacle of modern life.

Defending her vision against a reviewer in The New York Times who described her mural for the Woman's Building of the Chicago Exposition as "The Modern Woman as glorified by Worth," Cassatt explained her own understanding of "modern woman" in 1892:

of course I have tried to express the modern woman in the fashions of our day and have tried to represent those fashions as accurately & as much in detail as possible. I took for the subject of the central & largest composition Young women plucking the fruits of knowledge or science . . . I have tried to make the general effect as bright, as gay, as amusing as
possible. . . . I reserved all the seriousness for the execution, for the
drawing & painting. . . . An American friend asked me in rather a huffy
tone the other day 'Then this is woman apart from her relations to man?' I
told him it was. Men I have no doubt, are painted in all their vigour on the
walls of the other buildings; to us the sweetness of childhood, the charm of
womanhood, if I have not conveyed some sense of that charm, in one
word if I have not been absolutely feminine, then I have failed.97

Here Cassatt equates “Modern Woman” with intelligence, femininity, and the spectacle
of high fashion; characteristics she quickly separates from the superfluous and public
“vigour” of men as seen in the other buildings. “Woman” remained quiet, sweet, and
charming; and her femininity continued to be associated with children and fashionable
display. Although this appears to conform to the Parisian notion of “woman,” there are
two important differences. First, Cassatt’s women are intelligent, self-sufficient subjects
who expand their intellectual horizons by acquiring knowledge and science in an
effortless way. The second difference can be understood when Cassatt’s statement is
placed within the context of Baudelaire’s “modernity”:

The heroism of modern life surrounds and presses upon us. . . . There is no
lack of subjects, nor of colours, to make epics. . . . The . . . true painter . . .
will . . . snatch its epic quality from the life of today and . . . make us see
and understand, with brush or with pencil, how great and poetic we are in
our cravats and patent-leather boots.98

This passage calls for painters to create epics that describe the heroism of modern life;
further, it suggests they do so by painting their contemporaries in the particular fashions
of their own day. In view of Cassatt’s knowledge of the art world, her mural of “modern
woman” was likely a response to the idea espoused in this earlier description of the
“heroism of modern life.” From this perspective, Cassatt’s attention to the details and
particulars of contemporary woman’s fashion becomes a declaration of her subject’s
modernity. In addition, as we have seen, Cassatt also added rationality and intellectual
power to the traditional feminine qualities of grace and charm. Feminine and fashionably
dressed, yet self-sufficient and intelligent, Cassatt’s women are epic and heroic modern
subjects in the manner described by Baudelaire. Finally, Cassatt’s explicit separation of
the amusing and charming effect of an artwork about contemporary women from the
successful communication of that content through the serious work of painting and

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drawing, clearly shows Cassatt’s awareness that she stood in two worlds: the feminine
domain of the artist and her subjects as women, and the masculine realm of high art.

Cassatt and the Negotiation of a New Femininity

In the nineteenth century, Mary Cassatt’s dual position as a respectable upper-middle class woman and an ambitious fine artist necessitated that she juggle internal and external definitions, and re-fashion possibilities to fit her own goals and desires. Cassatt’s goal “to paint better than the old masters” was difficult to achieve in a society quick to define her as woman and therefore limited in creativity, intelligence, and originality. She worked to become a successful artist, and as such, struggled with social definitions and prohibitions which positioned her as feminine and limited her to the subjective art of personal fashion.

When Cassatt joined the Independents and turned her back on the Salon, she also directed her professional path in a way that provided her with optimal freedom. The “Impressionist” style of painting that gave the Independents their popular name was associated with feminine qualities, for it appeared subjective, intuitive, spontaneous, and decorative. Consequently, although artistic peers identified the drawing, form, and composition inherent to Cassatt’s work as “masculine,” within the context of an “Impressionist” show, other viewers could concentrate on the painterly surface of her work and read “femininity.” As an American in Paris who worked among a group of relatively non-traditional painters, she obtained some leeway in the construction of an aberrant and modern femininity that encompassed the strong and “masculine” style of painting she had developed. In addition, with her public exhibition pieces, Cassatt began concentrating more and more upon images of contemporary women. Although viewers could still see her subjects as properly feminine, painting her female peers allowed Cassatt to negotiate a feminine modernity. This direction linked her work conceptually with that of her male colleagues, for it countered their exploration of Baudelaire’s call for masculine paintings of modern life.

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Cassatt’s Exhibition Paintings of Mary Ellison

Since the “picturing” involved in the creation of representational painting parallels the “picturing” involved in the subject’s construction of a public and private façade. Cassatt’s paintings might serve as fertile fields for the exploration of an expanded Lacanian Gaze theory. This is especially true of works that the artist intended for public exhibition and composed to contain both women and mirrors. A series of images related to Cassatt’s friend Mary Ellison offers such an investigative opportunity. The following begins with a discussion of images in which Cassatt shows Ellison in the loge, from whose semi-private space she participates as both spectacle and spectator in the public arena of the theater. The understanding provided by these images will then be used to inform the discussion of the related painting Cassatt that exhibited as Study of a Woman with a Fan (Figure 4.1). In conclusion, the chapter will consider Cassatt’s images of Mary Ellison in relation to the cultural and Lacanian Gazes.

When Cassatt debuted with the Impressionists in 1879, images of women at the theater constituted almost half of her mixed-subject contribution, which also included portraits, interiors, and landscapes. Identification of exactly which pieces Cassatt exhibited can be difficult, for she used generic titles and the Impressionists as a whole had the tendency to add and drop works after the catalog for the show had been printed. However, among the works from Cassatt were three of Mary Ellison, and two of those concerned the theater. Cassatt’s selection of theater as a subject was not an anomaly, for her fellow artists shared an interest in the ideas and spaces of modernity. The success of Cassatt’s presentation among the Independents can be seen in the swiftness with which her French peers embraced her new work. Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin, artists who participated in the exhibition, obtained pieces by Cassatt; and Antonin Proust purchased another before the year was out. While Cassatt’s theater images concentrated on loge scenes and women in the audience, adjoining rooms displayed nineteen works by Degas and Louis Forain that featured the orchestra, dancers, and musicians. In addition, the show itself was open at night and held in a building on the avenue de l’Opéra, two conditions that reinforced the connection between visual art, theater, and display.
Ellison at the Theater

Mary Cassatt depicted her friend Mary Ellison in two types of theater scenes, each related to the environment of the loge. Similar facial structure, mousey brown hair pulled back into a chignon, a rather large nose with a straight profile, black eyes, and eyebrows that do not arch, make Ellison a recognizable figure in each of these works. In the first variety of theater image, the artist looks into the loge and presents young ladies against the reflective backdrop of the theater box’s own mirrored backing. This category includes the 1881-1882 painting Women in a Loge (Figure 4.3),101 the related 1881-1882 pastel Women in a Loge (Figure 4.4),102 and the mixed media pastel from 1878-1879 entitled Au théâtre (At the Theater) (Figure 4.5).103 By centering Ellison and her companions against the sparkling and brightly lit reflection of the theater’s interior, these images highlight the linkage of femininity and spectacle by picturing women whose status as objects of beauty takes priority over their own activity of looking. In the second variety, Cassatt changes her perspective and presents the young ladies silhouetted against the open space of the loge front. This can be seen in the 1879 oil painting Coin de loge (A Corner of a Loge) (Figure 4.6)104 and the 1879-1880 lithograph entitled At the Theater (Figure 4.7).105 This time their background is the theater itself, and although the women continue to be decorative and decorous, the artist’s major attention is on their stance as active spectators of either official theatrical event or audience. We turn now to these five works, which will serve as background for our primary focus, Study of a Woman with a Fan.

“Women in a Loge”

In the 1881-1882 oil painting and pastel, both titled Women in a Loge (Figure 4.3, Figure 4.4),106 two young women in three-quarter view sit close enough to be touching as they tilt their faces downward and to the left of the external viewer. Behind them extends the mirrored wall of a loge. The woman furthest back is Mary Ellison, and her companion is Geneviève Mallarmé, the only daughter of Stéphane Mallarmé and
presumably a friend to Cassatt. Cropping creates the impression of closeness and they are elevated in relation to the external viewer, who presumably occupies the other corner of the loge’s bow front. The distance between Ellison and her reflection, which extends off the right edge of the painting, indicates there is a gap between the young ladies and the mirror that suggests they occupy the socially expected front of the box. The mirror also reflects a crystal chandelier and the other side of the theater, where curving floors of balconies and loges contain abstracted but identifiable figures of the audience. Both ladies face the left edge of the canvas and look toward the same location—perhaps the stage—below and to the external viewer’s left. The bright white light that illuminates their bodies and faces seems to come from the area that has attracted their attention, further supporting the idea that they are watching the stage and its brilliant limelight rather than the spectacle of the audience. The following will concentrate on the painting (Figure 4.3), which forms a more unified and visually complete image than the pastel.

Mallarmé sits closer to the external viewer, partly hiding Ellison who further blocks her own torso and the lower part of her face by cradling with both arms an open fan. Fans formed part of a proper Parisian woman’s attire, and could be used to deflect and attract social attention. Ellison’s fan is highly decorated, with bands of gold and yellow at the top and sides framing an expanse of green foliage and two large red and white blossoms. The white background of the fan shimmers and reflects the light like silk and its shape continues the curve begun by Mallarmé’s shoulder. This makes a semi-circular barricade over which Ellison peers. Both women are dressed in virginal white and wear elbow-length white gloves. Although the fan covers the front of Ellison’s torso, her reflection indicates she wears a gown whose neckline comes to just above her shoulders. In contrast, Mallarmé’s gown drops several inches lower to reveal her shoulders and slim upper torso, and she wears a black neckband that emphasizes this expanse of warm white skin. She holds a bouquet of yellow roses, a color repeated in Ellison’s fan, the reflected architecture, and the chandelier. The contrast between Cassatt’s handling of the two women’s postures and actions suggests that while Mallarmé is accustomed to and even perhaps comfortable with her feminine status as spectacle,
Ellison is not. Together, they are a “resplendent” enactment of the “grave and serious … fair and heedless” living portraits spoken of by Baudelaire.

The painting suggests there is reason for this hesitancy, for even as Ellison tries to hide information through her posture and fan, the external viewer can, at least partly, read the hidden spectacle through the mirror reflection. Mirrors bring the cultural Gaze into play because they double spectacle, exhibit hidden aspects, and reveal those who may be examining Ellison. Sandwiched between the audience of the theater, the painter-viewer within their own loge box, and the reflection of the audience in the mirror at their backs, Ellison and Mallarmé are revealed as shaping themselves for the cultural Gaze. The ladies are present as spectacle, surrounded by eyes and reflective surfaces. They are looked at, and visible, from all sides. In contemporary French society a lady’s experience as spectator was subordinate to her presence as an object of beauty, and fashioning and becoming spectacle was a serious vocation. Once again, Baudelaire’s earlier description fits the women in Cassatt’s painting: “they are theatrical and solemn like the drama or opera to which they give themselves the air of listening.” Since the theater provided women with a perfect context in which to display their own feminine “high art” of fashion, the experience of young ladies at the theater was, inherently, about being seen and judged. In a reinforcement of their status as spectacle, the women are linked with their reflective backdrop through the flickering quality of Cassatt’s brush strokes and the repetition of colors and shapes. The decorative surface of the Ellison’s fan, which shimmers with silk and gold in the glittering light of the theater, echoes the loose technique used in the reflection of balcony fronts and chandelier. The fan also contains the boldest brushwork found in either Ellison or Mallarmé. With its linkage to the theater architecture and its anomalous attention from Cassatt’s brush, the fan becomes a marker for the theatrical display of femininity exhibited by the young ladies both within their loge and in the painting itself. As presented in Women in a Loge, Ellison and Mallarmé’s immersion in spectacle can be seen as a representation of the omnipresent glare of the cultural Gaze, which judges the success of their “feminine” art of ornament and categorizes them by the results.
However, Cassatt has qualified the position of the external viewer, a situation which complicates our attempt to assume the power of the cultural Gaze depicted within the painting. Two things contribute to this: the compositional positioning of the viewer’s eye level, and the combined façade with which the artist has endowed the women she paints. The painter linked the figures in *Women in a Loge* together through the appearance of equality and community. Despite Mallarmé’s décolletage and proximity to the external viewer, Ellison is doubled by her reflection; she is also taller, her darker eyes are more emphatic, her head is slightly larger, and the decorative expanse of her open fan more colorful. In consequence, neither woman dominates the image. The painting’s composition turns this equality into unity. The continued arc of shoulders and fan, the parallel positioning of their arms, their bodies, and their white clothing, combine to unite them visually.

Further, despite the closeness suggested by the painting’s cropped composition, Cassatt has provided the external viewer with an impossible eye level only slightly higher than the base of Ellison’s fan. In this position, the external viewer either stands in the air above the ground seats or shares the space of the loge and takes a socially unacceptable seat on the floor. Either way, despite their immersion in the public spaces of spectacle, Mary Ellison and Geneviève Mallarmé form a united façade that remains independent from the external viewer despite their immersion in the public spaces of spectacle. In *Women in a Loge*, Cassatt turned the “masculine eyes” of a painter onto the women she paints, she composed the painting with her own “masculine” style, and she announced her presence as a painter through the conventional placement of her signature, “Mary Cassatt,” in the lower right corner of the painting. However, reaction to Cassatt’s transgressive move into the male province of fine art painting was tempered by her status as an American, her stance with the “feminized” Impressionists, and by her subject matter itself—the upper-class woman’s theater of display. Within the painting’s construction and reception, Cassatt’s “masculine eyes” were further balanced by her own position as a “feminine” woman who painted women friends and social peers in late nineteenth-century Paris.
"At the Theater" ("Au théâtre")

At the Theater (Au théâtre) from 1878-1879 (Figure 4.5) is a combination of pastel, gouache, and metallic paint on tan paper, and offers a vertical, quarter-length view of Mary Ellison. She is dressed in a high-necked pale pink gown, holds a white fan ornamented with flowers and gilt, and looks to the viewer’s right. The fan closely resembles the one shown in Women in a Loge (Figure 4.3). Behind her is the loge mirror, which reflects the illuminated façades and shadowed interiors of the yellow balconies across the theater. The top left corner of the mirror also reflects part of a large chandelier composed of brilliant balls of light and a net of glittering crystals. This reflection references the source for the intense light that enters the work from the left edge and blanches the detail from the fan as well as from Ellison’s shoulder and neck. The mirror also reflects Mary Ellison, and the size and position of her likeness indicate that she sits very close to the reflective surface. Indeed, half of the picture space in At the Theater (Au théâtre) is reflection, an emphasis heightened by the reflective metallic paint on the decoration of the large fan. Cassatt framed the vertical sides of the image with narrow strips of color that add a stabilizing geometric element to a predominantly curved composition. In the band on the viewer’s right, a thin yellow merges into orange, and a wider expanse of fuchsia pink turns to magenta on the left. Ellison overlaps the strip of red. This places her at the front of the shallow space, and suggests that the red might reference the frame of the loge, an architectural element used in A Corner of a Loge (Figure 4.6). In addition, the reflected balconies are visible behind and through this red, a translucency that underscores Cassatt’s attention to reflection and the constructed nature of representation.

Cassatt structured the painting to both suggest and deflect the external viewer’s closeness to Ellison. Cassatt filled the lower picture plane with a close-up view of Ellison and designed the composition so that the external viewer shares Ellison’s eye level. The double scrutiny this implies combines with the predominantly high-key color palette and the soft appearance of the combined pastel and gouache to create a more
intimate work. However, a number of aspects counter the external viewer’s access to this closeness. Mary Ellison once again shields herself with an open fan held against her chest. In a time when décolleté prevailed and “woman” was synonymous with spectacle, her unfashionable high-necked gown supports the idea that this use of the large fan is more defensive than flirtatious. Her expression is serious, even sober, and her look is direct. She clearly and emphatically turns her attention toward, and considers, something or someone other than the external viewer. In addition, although the fan appears parallel to the picture plane, Ellison’s torso is oriented slightly to the viewer’s right, and she has turned her head almost completely in that direction. This creates a progression of planes that angle increasingly toward the right and away from viewer, and subliminally reinforces the psychological separateness of Ellison.

Cassatt’s compositional integration of Ellison with her reflected environment supports this reading. The white half circle of lights in the reflected chandelier echoes the large white semi-circle of the fan. Both of these are related to spectacle, for the metallic paint on the fan is reflective, and the chandelier projects light while its crystals refract it. Between these two are the similar curves formed by the arc of Ellison’s shoulders and the combined silhouette of her hair and its reflection. In addition, the mirror surface displays a triad of downward arcs, formed by the balcony reflections, that counters these upward curves. These too relate to Ellison, for one arc meets her profile just above eye level and the other aligns with her black hair band and the top of her chignon. These compositional interactions tie Ellison to the glittering reflections of theatrical spectacle, and further, they suggest that her appearance is yet another semblance and reflection. Seen in this context, Ellison’s near profile presents a decorative surface similar to that offered by her fan, and she, like the image itself, becomes an artful presentation.

The active and broken quality to the surface of At the Theater (Au théâtre) (Figure 4.5) references its status as a constructed image. The location of Cassatt’s vertical signature supports this reading, for she placed it near the middle of the red band, on a level with Mary Ellison’s throat. This is a highly visible spot for a signature, and
reinforces the artist’s presence as signaled by the visible marks of paint and pastel. This presence is furthered still again by the diversity of surface effects: polished smoothness on Ellison’s spot lit jaw line, smudges and blurring in audiences and balconies, hatched lines in hair and dress, textured dry brush and opacity in the fan, and semi-transparency in the red vertical on the painting’s left edge. The fan in particular deserves attention, for its fully open, highly ornamented surface is unevenly treated and incompletely painted. Pigment varies from opaque to translucent, and is rubbed, scumbled, and brushed onto the surface. The fluid brush strokes Cassatt used to indicate petals and foliage are repeated nowhere else in the image. A further anomaly is offered by the metallic paint used for the gold highlights; as noted above, this addition adds a literally reflective element to the painting. Further, Cassatt left the lower edge of this piece—mostly part of the fan itself—unfinished, allowing large strokes of pigment and even the tan paper itself to stand in fragmented patterns that track the act of making a representation. As we have seen, impressionistic marks like those found in this work held dual meanings in late nineteenth-century France, for they could be read as signs for either the artist’s “femininity” or “modernity.”

In the Lacanian sense, painting is the product of a desire for visual completion, and the inherent composition and surface of a painting manifests the visual re-creation that linked the artist with the visible world on both conscious and unconscious levels. Since an artist is also the product of a particular society and time, artworks may also reveal the ethos of the producing culture. As a woman artist struggling for self-validation and the achievement of artistic independence, success, and modernity, within a culture that defined women as dependent and superficial aesthetic objects, Cassatt dealt intimately with both cultural notions of femininity and artistic modernity. When the marks Cassatt patterned across the surface are read as tracks and traces that both mask and mark her desire, this mixed-media work is revealed as an investigation of representation and the crafting of façades. As suggested by the deflected intimacy and the compositional integration of Ellison and reflection, At the Theater (Au théâtre) addresses the “feminine” art of creating a fashionable semblance, and the resistance and
affimation enacted by women within their position as beautiful spectacle. Ellison’s defensive use of the highly ornamented fan, itself a clear marker for the feminine high art of fashion, combines with her psychological distance from the external viewer in a way that suggests women used self-ornamentation as a defensive shield for their psyches. Further, the fan in particular contains painterly traces that are linked not only with the issues of spectacle, ornamentation, and femininity, but also to Cassatt’s own active presence as the creative artist. In this work, Cassatt subsumed the issue of women as spectacle into a larger investigation that addresses the constructed nature of representation. With its unfinished passages, partial framing, mixed media, surface facture, and the highly visible signature, this work is about façades, self-imaging, and the creation of paintings. In At the Theater (Au théâtre), the artist used Ellison’s image to declare her own prowess with the “masculine” art of fashioning an artistic semblance, and reference her own fusion of feminine and artistic pursuits.

“A Corner of the Loge”

In the 1879 oil painting A Corner of The Loge (Figure 4.6), Mary Ellison is positioned in profile against one corner of the loge frame and looks down and forward, off the left edge of the horizontal painting. A second young woman peers past Ellison to the floor below and holds open a large fan. The fan masks Ellison’s body and creates a barricade continued by the shoulder the other woman turns toward the external viewer. Cassatt divided the composition vertically with the pole marking the edge of the loge. To the viewer’s right is the interior; to the left, the public space of the theater itself, where tiers of balconies create repeating bands of darks and dull yellows. These are in shadow, indicating that the house gaslights have been dimmed for the official performance.

The lower edge of the loge frame effectively separates Ellison and her companion from other spectators within the theater, a distancing reinforced by Cassatt’s technique. Immediately beneath the loge is the open expanse of a balcony, which presents the back view of the closest section of the general audience. However, the loose handling, limited palette, and dim tonality employed for the balcony figures link them with the audience.
across the theater rather than with the ladies in the loge. In contrast, the difference in size between the near and far figures combines with cropping to create a sense of closeness to the external viewer. This nearness is not, however, the intimacy of friendship which can be read into the close grouping of Ellison and her companion. In addition, the curves of the balconies position the external viewer with an eye level parallel with the top of the painting and slightly elevated in respect to the women. Together, eye level and cropping indicate that the external viewer is either standing on the left side of the theater box or seated at an elevated section at its back. The sense of separation created by this positioning suggests that while the viewer accompanies the ladies in the theater box, he or she is psychologically and physically distanced from them. This separateness combines with the viewer’s heightened eye level to suggest Cassatt sees and paints Ellison and her companion through the “masculine eyes” of a fine artist.

Cassatt’s handling of the women’s clothing links them to fashion and spectacle, a situation emphasized by the placement and lighting of their bodies. Positioned against and between near and far shadows, the women’s bodies form a rough pyramidal shape of lit skin and fabric. Illuminated perhaps by light reflecting off the stage below, their dramatic brightness is further emphasized by the shadows at their back. Both ladies wear pale pink dresses that duplicate their flesh tones, and on Ellison, this similarity makes it difficult to see where the fabric of her high-necked gown ends and her skin starts. This ambiguity recalls Baudelaire’s conflation of woman and dress into an “inseparable picture of the beauty . . . making thus of the two—of the woman and her dress—an indivisible whole.”

The decorative, off-the-shoulder dress of the companion offers a visual contrast to Ellison’s appearance, and further links the ladies with the feminine art of high fashion. A cluster of embroidered flowers on the small ruffle at her shoulder, a dangling ear ring, a pale pink puff of blossom pinned to her hair behind her ear, and the fan she holds open and parallel to the picture plane, all relate the companion to feminine ornamentation and fashionable presentation. Further, these areas contain the painting’s loosest, most distinct brush strokes, and so serve as markers for Cassatt’s own presence as artist.
Ellison looks through small opera glasses, which she holds to her face with both hands. As her white gloves catch the light, they create an emphatic white and gray vertical that firmly separates the healthy pinkness of the young ladies from the murky olive-toned shadows of the theater. As the most brightly lit areas in the painting, the gloves stand out sharply against the darker background. This contrast combines with their central placement to emphasize Ellison’s actions. Tilting her head forward, she peers down toward the light source and attentively watches either the official theatrical event of the evening, or someone else in the audience. In this position, Ellison effectively blocks the audience’s view of her face and presents the external viewer with her profile. In addition, as Ellison’s hands and glasses block the light, they create patchy shadows and thin bands of light that fall across her face, forming an abstract pattern that obscures both details and structure. The viewer, and by extension the cultural Gaze, is presented with only half of Ellison’s face, and even that is camouflaged by shadow and light and distanced by a compositional barricade. In addition, the direction of looks within the painting are diffuse. While Ellison investigates something off the edge of the painting, her companion looks past her to the theater below, and the audience members are either indistinct or facing into the picture plane. With everyone’s attention actively engaged and no one looking back at the external viewer, it is harder to objectify someone into an absolute spectacle.

Ellison’s gloved hands and the glasses they hold clearly cross the frame of the loge and overlap the space of the theater. As such, they intercede between the semi-private enclosure of the loge and the public expanse of the theater. By blocking the face, they further privilege Ellison’s action as spectator over her position as object of spectacle. In their liminal placement within the composition, Ellison’s gloves and glasses work together to preserve the decorous privacy of the loge and to reference Ellison’s interaction as an empowered spectator in the public spaces of the theater. In addition, since the lenses magnify, opera glasses offered the opportunity to focus upon and evaluate specific views of events and people at a distance that offered relative anonymity. They are tools that intensify the act of looking, and in a sense mirror, in minute form, the
action of the cultural Gaze. Even more clearly, however, the glasses reference the active vision and creativity enacted by Cassatt’s eyes and hands in her role as artist.

The disunion of looks within the painting creates a general atmosphere of specularity in which those who see are also objects of critical visual attention. Within a cultural context which defined women as objects of beauty who embody culturally defined notions of decorative femininity, the emphasis Cassatt placed on the act of sight in Corner of a Loge indicates a concern for the visible which reaches beyond the limits of the painting itself. The painting addresses the nature of viewing in French society and, in particular, how that viewing constructs feminine identity. Cassatt’s own equivocal relation to the prevalent conflation of “woman” with visibility and femininity—a situation complicated by her existence as a woman, an artist, and a painter of women—can be seen in the composition itself. The external viewer is elevated and slightly separated from Ellison and her companion, a position which both privileges and psychologically distances us from the women pictured. In addition, the companion is decorated with fan, flowers, and décolleté, adornments that clearly mark her as ornamental and feminine. These elements also bear clear indications of Cassatt’s presence as artist, for the painter “marked” her act of painting, and the tracks of her “masculine eyes,” on the objects that symbolized the art of high fashion through which women created themselves as objects of beauty. In contrast, Ellison—upon whom the merging of flesh and dress recalls the French conflation of women and dress—is barricaded behind the body and fan of her fashionable companion. A woman would be judged and defined not only by her own appearance, but also by the company in which she was seen. The manner in which the composition uses the fashionably dressed companion to shield Ellison suggests the unity and mutual protection offered to women who accompanied, and chaperoned, each other in the semi-private visibility of the theater loge. Ellison is further shielded by her opera glasses and by the shadows they cast upon her face. In a sense, she is doubly protected both by the façade of fashion created by her companion, and by her own act of looking. In A Corner of the Loge, Cassatt turned the
masculine painter’s “Gaze” onto Ellison, and then constructed a composition that protects her from it, even as Cassatt—and by extension, the external viewer—continues to look.

“At the Theater”

Cassatt further explored Ellison as a spectator in a small lithograph from 1879-1880 that the artist titled At the Theater (Figure 4.7). Here Ellison sits in the curved embrace of a large upholstered chair and looks with opera glasses out over the left edge of the picture plane. Cassatt manipulated the composition to downplay Ellison’s positioning as spectacle, to emphasize Ellison’s act of looking, and to partly exclude and complicate the position of the external viewer.

Restricted to black and white, the print lacks the decorative display of color and shimmering light found in Cassatt’s paintings and pastels of young women in the loge. With this subordination of Ellison’s role as fashionably beautiful spectacle, the print seems even more clearly to be about the act of looking. In addition, light and dark values unite Ellison with the loge and separate her from the brightly lit arena of the theater. Most areas within the loge—Ellison’s hair, arms, hands, high-necked dress, and her chair, as well as the curving edge of the loge’s balustrade—are built of rough crosshatching and sketchily repeated lines. This forms a dark mass that stands in sharp relief against the lighter, less marked background of balconies. However, this apparent separation between Ellison as spectacle, and the theater as location of spectacle, is complicated by a curving compositional integration of Ellison with her environment. As the densest area within the sketchy handling of the far balconies moves down from the top left corner, hatching marks create a dark linear edge that intersects with the top of Ellison’s glasses. This line is subliminally continued over Ellison’s face. A white line begins at the glasses, then continues beneath and parallels the dark line of her eyebrow. The white line is important, for it links Ellison’s eye with the balconies and with the highlight on the opera glasses themselves, and ties Ellison and her active look to the public space of the theater. Further, the white line unites with her eyebrow to create a strong light-dark line that pushes the movement to the right. This direction continues the linear flow, begun by the
balcony, down through the line of Ellison's hair, the back tip of her collar, and the top of her chair. From the right side of the print, the line then bends back to the left along the parallel curves formed by the highlights on her body and the form of the chair. It ends in unresolved brightness beneath her hand at the lower left, where sketchy handling and value create a visual connection with the illuminated theater in the background. The dark balustrade in this corner pulls the viewer's eye in an upward direction and further reinforces this connection. The gentle partial "S" curve begun by the balcony incorporates Ellison's active look and cradles her body; it unites woman with the spaces of modern spectacle even as it downplays her status and role as the spectacle.

Further, throughout At the Theater the direction of the hatching, the placement of curves, and patterning of highlights focus attention upon Ellison's face and opera glasses. The most tightly rendered sections of the otherwise sketchy and densely marked surface are the profile view of Ellison's face and the small glasses through which she peers intently. This detailed handling allowed Cassatt to include a clear gap between the glasses and Ellison's eyes, a separation that further underscores her activity. Cassatt centered the opera glasses between the right and left edges of the print, a placement that reinforces their importance as intermediary between Ellison and the spaces of the theater itself. Presumably, Ellison directs her attention toward someone in the audience across the theater, but because she looks out of the left edge of the picture plane, the external viewer is denied access to what she sees. This exclusion is furthered by the perfunctory way in which Cassatt rendered the tiered balconies behind Ellison, for the presence of the audience within them is completely obscured. The positioning of Ellison's arms intensifies her active look, for the arms form angular anomalies in a composition built of curves. Indeed, the most emphatic and eye-catching angle within the composition is that of Ellison's right arm, which bends sharply to hold the small glasses in front of her eyes. This bend is accentuated by the way Cassatt uses the architecture to place the external viewer's eye level. According to the curves of the balconies across the theater, the horizon line falls slightly above Ellison's right elbow. Compositionally, Ellison is not
just united with the theater, she is integrated, and even empowered, as an actively looking spectator.

Cassatt manipulated the composition not just to distance, but to physically and psychologically exclude the external viewer from the space occupied by Mary Ellison. The arm closest to the external viewer bends at the elbow and rests against the chair, supporting the tilt of her body and forming a linear barricade between Ellison and the viewer. Her left hand completes this partition by dangling a small and incompletely drawn oval object, perhaps a flat rather than folding fan, a bouquet of flowers, or a handbag. Compared to the defensive position of the fan in Women in a Loge (Figure 4.3) and the cloaking action of the fans in At the Theater (Au théâtre) (Figure 4.5) and A Corner of a Loge (Figure 4.6), this At the Theater (Figure 4.7) presents an unusually relaxed Ellison who is so caught up in her action as spectator that she appears oblivious to the external viewer’s presence. The baluster reinforces the distancing of Ellison, for its dark mass cuts across the lower left corner of the print and emphatically locates the viewer outside the space of Ellison’s loge. The viewer’s position is further displaced by Ellison herself, who appears to lean comfortably and gracefully against the chair arm closest to the external viewer as her body is tilted up and forward in relation to the background. This action creates an exaggerated perspective in which the viewer looks down on an area that is above the architectural horizon line. In a further complication, Ellison’s head counters the gentle arc of her body, for she holds it upright and slightly forward in a position parallel to the picture plane. This tilt emphasizes Ellison’s act of looking, and makes her head seem alert and active atop the softer curves of body and chair. However, the position of Ellison’s head also indicates that the external viewer shares her eye level. Compositionally, we simultaneously look up, down, and straight ahead at Ellison, who remains oblivious to our presence as viewers. This situation seems to link the presumed viewer even more firmly with the cultural Gaze of nineteenth-century Paris, even as it disembodies the actual viewer. At the Theater provides a psychologically disjointed yet compositionally unified visual experience that excludes us from Ellison’s space.
As we have seen, in other loge pictures Cassatt used open fans as defensive shields to protect Ellison from the cultural Gaze and the masculine eyes of painter and viewer. However, the accessory Ellison carelessly holds in this At the Theater is not being used defensively. If it is a handbag, an item not previously seen in images of Ellison, it introduces a new note of personal and economic independence into the only theater image in which she is not protected by an open fan. In any case, the ambiguity created by incompletion references Cassatt’s own authorial presence and sceptic desire in a manner similar to that of the most tightly rendered sections of the print, Ellison’s face and her opera glasses. Further, the fashionable accessory is positioned so that it touches the balustrade, an architectural and compositional element which separates and links the semi-private space of Ellison’s loge with the public space of the theater. This connection between an object of fashionable virtue with the theater architecture references the dependence of both Ellison and Cassatt, as women in nineteenth-century Paris, upon the defining cultural Gaze. As an incompletely rendered and disarmed shield, the object also privileges the women’s interaction with the public space into which Ellison assertively looks.

Opera glasses symbolized looking and being seen as a conscious act, as a decision. When Cassatt provided her women with opera glasses, she showed them controlling the power of visibility. Opera glasses allowed the users to select what to look at, what to ignore, and when to be seen. At the least, they reference intellectual curiosity and the acquisition of knowledge through active sight; in their magnifying capacity, they also suggest references to science and rational inquiry. Integrated into, yet separate from, the theater’s spaces, graceful in her relaxed elegance yet not a colorful spectacle, Ellison is presented as an active spectator in the spaces of modernity. She is an intelligent and independent individual, a “modern” woman whose status relies less on the condoning look of spectators within the audience and more on her own poise, attitude, and intelligence. The casualness of her pose, her solitary position within the composition, the manner in which she appears to ignore the cultural Gaze, all of these contribute to her air of leisurely self confidence and control. In other images of Ellison at the theater, we have
seen her self-consciously aware of the external Gaze, or looking from behind the customary façade of feminine fashion. In the lithograph entitled *At the Theater*, Cassatt swung the balance firmly in the direction of woman as an independent and self-possessed human being who acts as a spectator of, rather than decorative object within, modern life.

**Developments in these Preliminary Loge Paintings**

With Cassatt’s “art” paintings of Mary Ellison, there is no immediate semblance of individual separateness like that provided for a portrait client, instead, woman and environment are united and revealed as spectacle for the cultural Gaze. Simultaneously, the external viewer is subliminally blocked from successfully appropriating that Gaze and its power. In the first type of loge picture, mirror images capture the gaslight chandeliers as well as the colorful, curving tiers of balconies and loges that encircle the theater space and contain other audience members. In images of this type, Cassatt shows the young ladies actively presenting the fashionable semblance they have created. She both encapsulated women as spectacle and commented upon their positioning as such. The compositions of the painting *Women in a Loge* and the mixed media *At the Theater (Au théâtre)* link women to the mirrored reflection of their innately theatrical environment. These images recall contemporary explications of dress as the ultimate and comprehensive feminine art, a woman’s “palette, her poem, her theatrical setting, her song of triumph.” Cassatt’s inclusion of a mirror instead of the loge frame emphasizes the constructed nature of self-presentation, and her brush reveals women in loges as living self-portraits.

The same compositions that presented the women as self-constructed objects of beauty also created barricades which excluded or complicated the external viewer. This treatment is especially true of Mary Ellison, for Cassatt repeatedly used an open and ornamented fan to protect Ellison. Since fans formed fashionable accessories which could be used to attract and deflect attention, they symbolize not only a woman’s status as object-of-beauty, but also her appropriation and manipulation of “femininity” as both a
lure and a shielding mask. Ellison poses defensively behind a fan in Women in a Loge and At the Theater (Au théâtre), and is protected by the fashionably ornamented body and fan of her companion in A Corner of a Loge. In these images, the open fan coordinates with the compositional distancing and even displacement of the external viewer to balance the authorial power of the “masculine eye” that Cassatt, as artist, turned onto the women she painted.

In later life, Cassatt explained her view of “modern woman” as being fashionably and gracefully feminine, and well-educated and actively intelligent. This is what she begins to bring together in the second variety of loge image, where Cassatt shows her friend Mary Ellison using opera glasses in the active pursuit of visual knowledge. As a transitional representation, A Corner of a Loge merges the woman’s status as a self-constructed spectacle with her interaction as spectator. This conflation allows Cassatt to portray woman as simultaneously seen object and viewing subject. Finally, in the lithograph At the Theater Cassatt presents Ellison as a self-possessed and independent being whose own self-confident individuality protects her as she performs within the visual arena of public modernity. So comfortable is she with her role as fashionable spectacle that she ignores it, the viewer, and the cultural Gaze, to pursue her own act of looking.

Taken together, the images of Ellison at the theater address the nature of viewing in a society that defined and categorized a woman according to the façade she presented. In nineteenth-century France, women of Cassatt’s social class altered their appearance and transformed nature daily by practicing the feminine art of dress and ornamentation; they were to be objects and not active subjects in the theater of modern life. Through their investigation of woman’s placement in and interaction with the socially controlled arena of representation and viewing, the images reveal Cassatt’s own equivalent position. She was a “feminine” woman in a society that defined women by appearance, a professional Independant artist whose masculine eyes and abilities were framed by a feminized impressionist style, and a painter whose technical skill revealed the possession of a fine artist’s “masculine eyes.” The Ellison series provided a means for the artist to
explore the interrelated issues of looking and being seen, fashion and painting, spectacle and spectator, and her own possession of masculine and feminine qualities. Further, the emphasis Cassatt placed on mirrors, gloved hands, opera glasses, fans, and especially mark-making, can be read as subliminal references to her own dual status as a fine artist and a woman. This suggests that Cassatt used the art of fashion and woman’s active self-presentation as a metaphor for the constructive and creative process of painting itself. The increasingly active look exhibited by Mary Ellison within the images discussed above parallels the painter’s own growing assurance as Cassatt merged the cultural notions of a fine artist’s “masculine eye” with that of a woman’s “femininity.” Gaining confidence from their skilled construction and manipulation of socially acceptable masks, the women Cassatt paints, and Cassatt herself, became actively visible as independent desiring subjects.

“Study of a Woman with a Fan”

In the above paintings, Cassatt constructed representations that investigated women as actively created spectacle and as active spectator. All of these images located her friend Mary Ellison in the liminal space of the loge, where she presented herself to multiple looks that included those of the artist and her heirs in visuality, the external viewers. Two of these four images, the 1878-1879 mixed-media pastel entitled At the Theater (Au théâtre Figure 4.5) and the 1879 oil painting entitled Corner of a Loge (Coin de loge) Figure 4.6), were among the works Cassatt exhibited in her debut exhibition with the Impressionists. This show included another painting of Mary Ellison which does not place its subject at the theater, yet relates in content and iconography to the works which do. This was catalog no. 48, the circa 1878 painting then titled Étude de femme avec éventail (Study of a Woman with a Fan) (Figure 4.1).112 A background mirror, an open fan, and the subject herself—Mary Ellison—are among the elements held in common by this 1877 painting and by the loge scenes Cassatt painted between 1878 and 1882. Although the title of Study of a Woman with a Fan protects Ellison’s identity with anonymity, the painting itself clearly depicts her distinctive physiognomy. The sense of
individuality created by Cassatt’s attention to the uniqueness of Ellison’s face may explain why the painting is now referred to as Portrait of a Lady and Miss Mary Ellison instead of Study of a Woman with a Fan. Earlier, this chapter discussed the idealized representation of Mary Ellison offered by the 1877 portrait entitled Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering (Figure 4.2), and then the theater images which present Ellison as spectacle and active viewer participating in the modern space of the theater. In its use of Ellison as a model, its status as not quite portrait, and its incorporation of mirror and fan, Study of a Woman with a Fan seems to stand between these two image varieties.

In the oil painting Study of a Woman with a Fan (Portrait of a Lady) (Figure 4.1), Cassatt presents a vertical image of Mary Ellison sitting in the corner of a small upholstered sofa or a large chair. Ellison herself fills about fifty percent of the painting’s surface and is shown at slightly more than half-length, with the lower edge of the painting cropping her body just below her lap. Both Ellison and the furniture on which she sits are positioned against a dark, mirrored wall which reflects her head, the curved back of her seat, and the top of a tall porcelain vase. While the mirror angles into the canvas on the external viewer’s right, Ellison and her sofa are turned slightly to the left. Together, these positions create the offset reflection of Ellison’s head that forms one of the peculiarities of this image. Although Cassatt modified the reflection of the sofa to obscure these angles, they create room behind Ellison for the vase, which extends up the right side of the painting and partly overlaps the gilt frame of the mirror. An ambiguous feathery globe tops the vase and echoes the shape and size of Ellison’s head. At this point, it is helpful to recall two things. First, the nineteenth-century French association of women not only with fashion, but also with the creation of a pleasing interior environment; and second, May Alcott’s description of Mary Cassatt’s own skill with these feminine high arts. From this perspective, the objects surrounding Ellison function as markers for her own, and perhaps the artist’s, femininity. In addition to Ellison’s dress and fan, a list of such objects of womanly virtue would include the upholstery on the sofa, the mirror with its gilt frame, and both the porcelain vase and the ambiguous article de vertue which caps it. The latter globe-shaped object is constructed of bold, arching
brush marks of creamy white and gray that are ornamented with smaller strokes of bright, reddish-orange vermilion and black. Since this article de vertue is placed in the mouth of the tall vase, it touches Ellison’s hair and firmly echoes the shape of her head, two circumstances that strengthen its connection with the woman Cassatt has portrayed.

Next to Ellison herself, the largest object within Study of a Woman with a Fan is the mirror, which serves as a backdrop for Ellison, allows the external viewer to see her from both sides, and relates the painting both to the loge works and to other works with domestic settings. In contrast to the theatrical settings, however, here the mostly empty and shadowed space of the mirror reflects neither the artist-as-external-spectator nor the room itself. The mirror’s darkness and its limited reflection contrast with the visual plentitude and light found in Cassatt’s loge paintings of Mary Ellison. As we have seen, in works such as Women in a Loge (Figure 4.3) and At the Theater (Au théâter) (Figure 4.5), Cassatt used mirrors as highly reflective backdrops which surrounded her subjects in visibility. The loge mirrors reveal not only the women on display, but also the architecture of the theater, the watching audiences, and the chandeliers that illumine the spectacle. These mirrors unite women with the public spaces and exhibitions of the theater by merging the feminine reflection with that of the theater itself, and retain the women’s respectability by doing so within the semi-private space of the loge. However, the blankness in Study of a Woman with a Fan sets up a contrast between the mirror, with its modified partial reflection and large black expanse, and the environment within which Ellison sits. The limited reflection groups Ellison with her immediate surroundings even as it makes the setting itself more private.

Cassatt used partial reflection in clearly domestic paintings containing mirrors, most notably in the 1878 painting of her mother that she entitled Portrait of a Lady, a work now known as Reading “Le Figaro”. The mirror in Reading “Le Figaro” reflects only Katherine Cassatt’s right hand and her newspaper. The remainder of the mirror’s surface is filled with a patchy middle-dark gray that harmonizes with the upholstery and contrasts with the warm cream of the walls and Mrs. Cassatt’s white dress. This gray contributes to the painting’s light palette of colors and helps create a sense of brightness
which contrasts with the traditional Salon style rejected by Cassatt, but harmonizes with
the tonality found in many Impressionist paintings. Further, Mary Cassatt’s selective
doubling of *Le Figaro* within this minimal gray reflection emphasizes the act of reading
and, by extension, her mother’s intelligence. The partial reflections found in Reading
“*Le Figaro*” and *Study of a Woman with a Fan* suggest that the latter also depicts a
private interior, although in the second work the reflections contain less obvious
iconographic content. With the painting of Cassatt’s friend, the mirror is dark, and light
neither enters nor reflects from the surface. This tonality continues on the reflections, for
with the exception of the white line of Ellison’s jabot, reflections are subdued. The
shadowy expanse lowers the painting’s overall tonality, and the mirror’s dark neutrality
does, at least superficially, echo that found in academic portraiture and in Cassatt’s own
*Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering*.

The furniture also provides clues to Mary Ellison’s environment. Although the
size of the object on which Ellison sits is indeterminate, the curve along its top indicates
that it is not very large. Whether it is big chair or a small sofa, its deeply-tucked, well-
padded upholstery bears an indistinct floral pattern composed by curving strokes of green
stems and leaves, and feathery wisps of red flowers. A few large highlights indicate that
the surface has a slight sheen, and the khaki background of the fabric has an olive tinge
that compliments the greenish palette of the painting. With slight alternations in color
and design, furniture of this type can be found in other works by Cassatt that depict
domestic interiors. A similar pattern of leaves, stems, and blossoms appears in the
print entitled *Interior: On the Sofa* from 1880, and both the color and pattern resemble the
upholstery in Cassatt’s 1878 painting of her mother, *Reading “Le Figaro”*. Although
large enough to seat two women and painted with a red floral pattern on white, the sofa in
Cassatt’s 1879-1880 painting *Tea* also has an over-stuffed appearance and a scalloped
back that resemble Ellison’s seat. These similarities place Ellison in a domestic setting,
and by association, reference that setting as Cassatt’s own home.

In *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, the appearance of a limited palette is the
product of lively brushwork and the sophisticated play of red against green. The
painting's surface is a thin brocade of daubed and streaked brushstrokes applied over an expanse of partly scumbled paint, a technique that produced a decorative surface effect enhanced by the interaction of muted vermilion and golden green. This broken handling increases the impression of changeable light and shadows. The incomplete coverage created by rapidly applied paint even reveals the dark surface of the primed canvas, a situation particularly apparent along the lower edge. In contrast, passages like the blank mirror reflection at the top of the painting offer a thin expanse of scumbled marks that is modulated by subtle variations in color rather than physical paint texture. Excepting the mirror and the object de vertue, Cassatt has woven the surface with contrasting strokes of red and green. These complementary colors interact optically in patches of pure pigment, mute each other in mixtures, and add a lively variety to the surface through superimposition of both scumbled and impasto brush strokes. The dominant golden green appears with pink in the fabric of Ellison's day dress, with orange and blue on the sofa upholstery, and is modified by blue and juxtaposed with red on the vase. When the painting is viewed closely, the vermilion bows amid the lacy ruffles ending Ellison's three-quarter length sleeves provide a vivid contrast with the green; seen from a distance, the vitality is subdued. The floral pattern of the sofa and the vermilion flourishes in article de vertue repeat the bows' orange-red color of the bows on Ellison's sleeves. Although they now appear subordinate to a predominant greenness, these touches of contrast are important, and Cassatt emphasized them by providing Study of a Woman with a Fan with a vermilion frame during the 1879 Impressionist exhibition.\textsuperscript{114} As we have seen, Degas commented upon Cassatt's artistic investigation of nuanced green and red through images that dealt with "the study of the reflection and shadow of flesh or dresses" in the fleeting light of contemporary life.\textsuperscript{115} From this perspective, Cassatt's orchestration of color in Study of a Woman with a Fan should be taken as a deliberate exposition of her talent in the masculine art of painting scenes from modern life. Further, the creation and use of brightly hued frames whose colors harmonized with the individual palettes of the artworks they enclosed allowed Cassatt to connect the "masculine" composition of a painted representation with the "feminine" creation of an interior space.
At the same time, the "fine art" aspect of this work, stated explicitly by Cassatt with the word "Study," transcended the boundaries of private feminine space and allowed the painting to function in the public and masculine arena of the art exhibition hall, where both artwork and artist would be judged and evaluated by a critical public.

Light enters the painting from the viewer's left and rakes over Ellison, highlighting her right side and casting shadows on her left. Her face separates into areas of light and shadow along the division created by her nose, and the right side of her face and the white jabot she wears around her neck receive the most light. In contrast, surrounding areas appear lit with a dimmer, dustier, golden light. This is epitomized by her right shoulder, which is close to the illuminated skin of her face and the white lace around her neck, yet seems to soak up a pale creamy light rather than reflect it. A moderately bright light also strikes portions of the feathery article de vertue behind Ellison's head and the white lace on both of her sleeves. Lessened in intensity, light follows the inner line of her left sleeve, picks out gold highlights on the fan, and embellishes folds and patterns on the upholstery. As noted previously, the mirror and its reflections evince little light. Within the shallow space of the room itself, however, the subtle warmth of Cassatt's lighting creates a quiet atmosphere and harmonizes with the muted tawny green of Ellison's dress and sofa. Overall, the lighting and tonality express the sense of the golden light of late afternoon in a dim interior.

As in the theater images, curves and rounded forms dominate the composition of Study of a Woman with a Fan and integrate Ellison with her surroundings. Most obvious is the similarity in form and shape between Ellison's head and the article de vertue to her right. More subtle, and therefore perhaps more effective, is the horizontal, gently scalloped line of the sofa back and its reflection, which both curve slightly up and down as they cross the canvas. The flow of this movement continues through Ellison, for her shoulder picks up the line of the sofa and takes it down the right side of the painting to the sofa's own arm. Ellison's joined hands allow the line to flow back up her other arm in a movement that circles her torso. The larger arc created by the unity of sofa and shoulder is repeated in smaller form at the top and bottom of the fan, and reversed in the
line of Ellison’s own hands and forearms. These curves contrast with the straight lines at the edges of the fan. In addition, Cassatt extended the right and left edges of the fan so that its shape overlaps and breaks the looping movement followed by the viewer’s eyes. The surface of the open fan deflects the intimacy implied by the focus on Ellison’s body, for it extends from her lap more than halfway up her torso and forms a protective barrier between the viewer and Ellison.

The upper right section of the gilt frame forms one of the few straight lines and true verticals within the painting, and its geometry changes when the frame reaches Ellison’s head. Cassatt bends the frame to align with the inner edge of Ellison’s left arm, creating an undulating vertical that extends down the right side of the painting. Interestingly, it is with the slight forward tilt of Ellison’s head that Cassatt creates the painting’s only other true vertical, for the blocky highlight along Ellison’s nose echoes in smaller form the line of the unmodified frame. The repetition of this vertical subliminally links woman with gilt mirror frame, which then functions as a decorative object of feminine virtue. The upright movement created by these verticals is balanced by the scalloped horizontal formed by the top edge of the upholstery and the band of its reflection. As noted above, Cassatt modified the reflection. As painted, it forms a fairly even band across the sofa top. This horizontal line is also echoed by a smaller one, this time created by the unusual placement of Mary Cassatt’s signature as it hovers against the seat back. Together, the pairing of long and short verticals and horizontals form a subliminal geometric structure for a painting mostly built of soft curves and rounded forms.

Ellison’s clothing, posture, and fan contribute to the expressive quality of the painting. The late afternoon atmosphere suggested by the painting’s lighting is further supported by Ellison’s high-necked day dress. This garment is sewn of heavily textured fabric with a mottled light olive and cream weave flushed with pink in the light and red in the shadows, and ornamented by a lace jabot at her neck and vermilion ribbons amid lace at her sleeves. Ellison rests her left elbow on the arm of the sofa and leans back into the corner, twisting slightly at the waist. This pose creates a diagonal with her torso that
places her head to the right and her lap to the left of the painting’s vertical center. In contrast to the angle of her body, Ellison’s head tilts slightly forward. She holds her arms tightly against her sides and her hands meet in her lap, where they cradle an open fan. In this pose, Ellison appears self-contained and contemplative. As we have seen, fans formed part of a proper Parisian woman’s attire, and Cassatt used them as ornamental feminine objects in other exhibition images where Ellison appears. In Corner of a Loge (Figure 4.6) and At the Theater (Au théâtre) (Figure 4.5), the decorative surface of an open fan not only references femininity, but also functions as a barrier between Ellison and the “masculine eyes” of the artist. Cassatt’s use of fans as shields suggests that the façade created by dress, accessories, and comportment, forms an ornamented surface that protects a woman’s psyche. The plain surface of the fan in Study of a Woman with a Fan partly counters this trend toward the deflective quality of decoration, despite the emphasis placed on the fan by its placement upright and centered on Ellison’s lap. Although streaks of light tan indicate the ochre surface is reflective, which suggests gilt ornamentation, in this domestic setting the fan has an overall plain appearance that complements the subdued expression of Ellison and her environment. While Ellison appears relaxed, she is neither extroverted nor happy. The downward tilt of her head and mouth, the inclination of her spine, and her rounded shoulders, all suggest thoughtful introspection and even melancholy. Although the placement of the fan combines with Ellison’s posture to indicate that this fan also forms a barrier between the masculine eyes of the artist and Mary Ellison, in Study of a Woman with a Fan Cassatt has painted neither a decorative fan nor a decorative woman.

The manner in which Cassatt painted Ellison’s face decreases the appearance of portraiture. The filigree of brushwork is diminished but present, and the style falls between the tightness used in the profile of her right cheek and the loose brushwork visible over most of the canvas. In addition, the face contains less lively color and diminished value contrasts when compared with the rest of the painting, a difference that holds true even for the lit areas of Ellison’s bare forearms and hands. Although they heighten the psychological effect of her expressively pale face, the shadows around
Ellison’s eyes reduce the contrast between her light skin and her dark pupils, and so help to unify and soften her features. Cassatt also subdued the painting’s “portrait” quality by linking Ellison’s face to other elements within the painting. The most obvious instance of this is the placement of Ellison’s head between its own mirror reflection and the _article de vertue_ that echoes its size and shape. In addition, her mouth subliminally continues the contour of her shadowed shoulder, the line formed by her eyes relates to the reflected sofa back, and the edge of the hair curving across her forehead almost merges into the reflection of her collar. These connections link Ellison with the mirror and integrate her more completely into the environment of the painting. Repeated shapes, tone, and color contribute to an overall sense of harmony, and reinforce the painting’s expressive and impressionistic qualities. These technical and compositional elements subordinate the face within the painting as a whole, help produce a composition with no dominant focal point for the viewer’s eyes, and lessen the suggestion of portraiture created by the artist’s attention to her model’s distinctive features. In _Study of a Woman with a Fan_, Cassatt integrates Ellison into her environment without the figural emphasis of portraiture or the sumptuous decorative surfaces used in her loge paintings. This creates an expressive image that, at most, only hints at the social construction of woman as beautiful object, and so sets it apart from other paintings of Mary Ellison.

When Baudelaire’s descriptive definition of woman—“a general harmony” of “deportment,” “movement,” and “costume”—is used to compare this image of Ellison with the one appearing in the commissioned portrait, _Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering_ (Figure 4.2), the unique characteristics of _Study of a Woman with a Fan_ become even more clear. The staging of Ellison in the portrait highlights her femininity, for she wears a light blue dress and lacy white fichu whose brightness are emphasized by a bright red settee and dark empty background. She is also physically active, for she pauses in the middle of a stitch to turn her attention to the viewer. The portrait presents an energetic, lively, and feminine young woman who directly addresses the outside world. In contrast, in _Study of a Woman with a Fan_ the closed circle of Ellison’s arms combines with her rounded shoulders and tilted head to create a more private and solitary posture. As
Ellison directs her attention inward, her movement is psychological and intellectual rather than physical, and her feminine role as ornament has been assumed by the environment and its objects of virtue. She is no longer the prized ornament around which the painting works. Here deportment, movement, and costume harmonize with the overall design, and the relationship between woman and environment is one of accord rather than contrast. In *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, Cassatt translated the “general harmony” of femininity, associated by Baudelaire with a modern woman’s fashionable presentation, into the masculine sphere of fine arts. The resulting painting merges gender qualities to create the sense of deep psychological introspection in a quiet domestic atmosphere.

“Study of a Woman with a Fan” and the Gaze

When investigating a painting through Lacanian Gaze theory, anomalies in paint handling and unusual signature placement can signal traces of the painter’s own creative desire. Within the filigree of impressionistic brushstrokes which weave the surface texture of *Study with a Woman with a Fan* are two tightly painted areas: the profile of Mary Ellison’s brightly-lit cheek, where the linear edge of thick paint stands out clearly against the softer handling of the sofa reflection; and her reflection within the mirror, where the paint handling is both more “resolved” and less layered. Although painted more loosely than these sections, the dark expanse of the mirror itself also exhibits fewer color modulations and less visible brushwork than Cassatt used for Ellison and her interior environment. This allows over half of the mirror to read as a blank, flat surface. The technique used for most of the painting, however, is one of broken and fluid individual strokes and daubs of paint that interlace and stand in moderate relief against the otherwise flat surface. This creates a general “impressionistic” surface with an active physicality that fractures everything within the painting—including Mary Ellison herself. As noted above, a tighter technique was used for the surface of the mirror and the line of Ellison’s cheek. These controlled areas are balanced by portions of the fan, mirror frame, vase, and *article de vertue*, items for which Cassatt used her loosest and most abstract paint handling. Since the culture of nineteenth-century France conflated “impressionist”
and "femininity," the exaggerated impressionistic treatment of these items is important. Cassatt’s painting technique highlights their status as "feminized" objects that represent the ornamental and decorative presentations crafted by women engaging in the feminine “high arts” of home decoration and fashion. In Study of a Woman with a Fan, composition and painting style deflect Ellison’s status as an object onto her environment, where articles associated with the womanly arts represent her feminine worth. This transferal parallels the manner in which the fashionable façade presented by the women in the loge paintings functioned to project woman-as-spectacle for, and protect woman-as-individual from, the cultural Gaze. Further, as noted above, Cassatt placed her signature on the back of the sofa upon which Ellison sits. This is an unusual place for any artist to sign a work. If the written “Mary Cassatt” is taken to indicate the painter herself, then the placement of the signature functions as a metaphorical representation of unity between artist and model. In a unique act of solidarity, Cassatt has marked her place and taken a seat beside her friend.

Unusual signature placement arose earlier in relation to an image of Ellison in a loge, At the Theater (Au théâtre) (Figure 4.5). In this mixed-media pastel painting, the artist inscribed her name vertically in a red band framing the left edge of the composition. However, Study of a Woman with a Fan (Figure 4.1) is less clearly about the fashioning of self-image and the creation of painted representations than is At the Theater (Au théâtre). In the latter work, the range of surface effects provided by the mixed-media joins with unfinished passages and highly visible mark making to reveal and track the artist’s creative process. This lively surface then combines with an exceedingly structured composition to create a strongly composed image in which Cassatt explored the constructed nature of representation as practiced in the masculine fine art of painting. The “artistic” nature of the image is further emphasized by the highly visible placement of Cassatt’s vertical signature in the red band along the painting’s left edge. Here the artist’s investigation expanded from a study of women enacting the protective rituals and displaying the deflective façades of the feminine high art, to encompass a questioning of both the masculine fine art of painting and the nature of viewing in nineteenth-century
Paris. In *At the Theater (Au théâtre)*, Cassatt used Ellison’s image to merge feminine and masculine artistic pursuits, and to state her own skill with fashioning dual representations within a restrictive society. Although the composition of *Study of a Woman with a Fan* is structured to unite Ellison and her environment and the brushstrokes do vary in a manner that highlights particular areas, the painting as a whole is less emphatically structured than the theater picture. Further, in the domestic scene the homogeneity of the oil paint surface combines with its greater finish to create a more resolved image. When Ellison appears in the semi-private space of the loge in *At the Theater (Au théâtre)*, Cassatt manipulates her image to address image creation. When the same model appears in a private and domestic space in the painting *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, the artist’s treatment becomes more subtle. Although both images merge masculine and feminine qualities, the domestic scene is less obviously about the constructed nature of the representations created by both women and artists.

In *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, the elimination of reflections in the mirror does not obliterates the cultural Gaze, for the composition’s conflicting viewpoints provide the artist and external viewers with privileged information. As in *Women in a Loge* (Figure 4.3), the mirror presents a back view of Ellison, this time with the addition of a disembodied stance “above” Ellison. Moreover, *Study of a Woman with a Fan* places its action within a domestic space, an interior feminized in accordance with French cultural beliefs. Among the ornamental objects with decorative roles are the gilt frame of the mirror and the *article de vertue* that tops the vase, and these items absorb for Ellison the onerous burden of her own specularity. As we have seen, Cassatt fashioned her own living and painting environments into works of environmental art which were exposed to, and evaluated by, the cultural Gazes of female friends. At the same time, she participated in the traditions of feminine domesticity by hosting tea parties. With the additional context of her parents and sister Lydia, Cassatt extended her social activity to include teas and dinner parties attended by men and women. This transformed the domestic environment into an arena where men as well as women scrutinized the feminine deportment, fashion, and space created by women like Mary Ellison and Cassatt herself.
However, in *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, the absence of a second person’s reflection combines with the conflict between the viewpoints offered by Ellison and the mirror to cloak the presence of the cultural Gaze. This suggests that the external viewer assumes rather than innately possesses the cultural Gaze; and further, that the interior spaces of femininity which women construct act as masks that partly deflect the defining power of society. Despite the elevated position taken by Cassatt while painting, she seems to declare a feminine solidarity with Ellison.

Cassatt constructed the composition to conceal her position as the original external viewer and to complicate the relationship between objects and their reflections. On the simplest level, she is not visible in the reflection, and the blank expanse excludes the external viewer. Since the mirror itself is angled in relation to the picture plane, it is possible Cassatt placed herself in a location where she would not be visible while she painted. However, her manipulations in *Study of a Woman with a Fan* go further than this. Given the relationship between the painted objects and their reflections, the eye level of the external viewer is approximately where it should be if we stood in the dim space of the room with Ellison. Despite the familiarity implied by the eye level, public spectators have little substance in the introspective world of this quietly expressive painting, and Ellison ignores us completely. From Cassatt’s selected viewpoint, the positioning of Ellison, her seating, and the mirrored wall create a confusing web of angles, which Cassatt fused together during the act of painting. Without the clues offered by architecture, wooden furniture, or even a second piece of the molding from the mirror’s own frame, there is no linear perspective. Spatial orientation becomes difficult to read. This ambiguity makes it possible for the relationship between the rectangular picture plane and the painting’s organization, with its subliminal verticals and horizontals, to assert a “straight-on” view over both the painted objects and the painted reflection. When this happens, the viewer receives contradictory information about his or her position in relation to the painted image. It is easy to overlook this, for the dominance of Ellison’s own forward pose supports the composition’s structural imposition. However, if the surface of the mirrored wall paralleled the picture plane, the viewer would need to
stand past the left edge of the painting in order to see the reflection of Ellison that Cassatt has painted. As in the theater images, the resulting clash of information complicates the external viewer's position. Ellison's posture, the position of the open fan, the partially reflective mirror, and the painting's composition combine to separate the viewer—and the masculine eyes of Cassatt-the-artist—from the space inhabited by Ellison. Given the prevalent French view of feminine intelligence, this separation between Ellison and the external viewer could be interpreted as a way to emphasize the radical nature of Ellison's introspection. For highly intelligent and ambitious Mary Cassatt, however, the idea of "modern woman" was synonymous with both fashionable beauty and intelligence. Even as her position as an artist separated her from the woman she painted, the bonds of friendship and burdens of femininity connected her to Mary Ellison. Within the painting, this dual relationship is symbolized by the barring of artist and the external viewer from Ellison, even as Cassatt marks her presence beside and solidarity with Ellison through the placement of her signature.

In *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, Mary Cassatt depicts her friend Mary Ellison trading her feminine role as spectacle for the masculine activity of profound thought. The manner in which Cassatt integrated Ellison into the painting's quiet atmosphere and stable composition supports the seriousness of her meditative activity. Although her body is turned forward, Ellison looks off the canvas to the external viewer's left and ignores the presence of the external viewer. In addition, the slight inclination of her head means she looks both straightforward and down. Ellison's connection with her surroundings through color, lighting, and brushwork, combines with her self-contained posture and particularized appearance to suggest that she inhabits an environment in which she feels at home. Further, her downward glance indicates her attention is not directed outward, into the space and toward the external viewer, but inward. This hinders attempts to perceive her as a feminine ornament on display. The composition also thwarts attempts to objectify her, for Ellison's feminine role as spectacle has been displaced onto objects within her domestic environment. Even the presence of Mary Cassatt, as friend and artist, is deflected through the defensive position of the fan and
partial reflection of the mirror. Further, Ellison’s introspection is very different from that believed innate to the shallow, stupid, and self-centered woman of the gendered French ideal, where “femininity” meant “adorable childish incapacity” and precluded any rationality or deep thought. Instead, Cassatt has painted a self-composed individual engaged in, and comfortable with, deep contemplation.

The mirror holds an important place within the painting. Through its function within the composition’s underlying structural grid, the mirror frame indicates stability and order. As a framed surface that reflects and represents, it can be linked to semblance and the construction of self-identity. In addition, Cassatt firmly connects the mirror to her model by modifying the frame when it reaches Ellison. This association is strengthened by the stylistic similarity between Ellison’s carefully rendered reflection and her tightly painted cheek. Further, here a non-reflective blankness—so different from the sumptuous reflections in the loge paintings—masks most of the mirror surface and stands apart stylistically from the “impressionistic” filigree that covers most of the painting.

When the subtle brushwork Cassatt used for the mirror is allied with the idea of a partial reflection, the surface separates from the room environment and from the external viewer. This privileges the connection between Ellison and the mirror, and indicates that the mirror is the metaphoric screen upon which she inscribes her own identity. The mirror’s order and stability now allude to strength and firmness of character, qualities divergent from the prevalent views of “femininity.” From this perspective, the darkness surrounding Ellison’s reflection implies a deep and melancholic contemplation of the constraints society places upon a woman’s self-imaging.

Study of a Woman with a Fan is not simply a representation whose consideration of domestic space balances the publicly oriented loge paintings. As an exploration of the introspective individuality of Mary Ellison, the painting involves the meditative and intelligent facets of femininity, qualities usually cloaked by the projection of fashionable but theatrical façades. Even more daringly, paint handling and composition combine to prioritize the relationship between Ellison and her mirror reflection, a situation which suggests that Ellison, rather than the viewer or the cultural Gaze, has constructed the
semblance we see. Undisturbed by the “impressionist” surface glitter of femininity, Cassatt merges her own feminine and masculine qualities to join Ellison in a quiet meditation whose very act sets them apart from the cultural constructs which seek to restrain them.

The Paintings, the External Viewer, and the Gaze

In nineteenth-century France, the sumptuous constructions of painting and fashion manifested a “Take a look at this!” quality for the audiences that consumed them. Through the richness of surface, color, and image, they offered visual food for the hungry, even “lustful,” eye of the restless modern viewer. Traditionally, the façades presented by painting and fashionably dressed woman were illusions that lured external viewers into believing the truth of what they saw. However, with Cassatt’s work, careful attention to the surfaces shows that the visible “truth” is, itself, a faceted surface whose planes reflect aspects rather than a seamless reality. Cassatt’s images do not offer the illusionary façade of trompe-l’oeil painting, with its mirror-like illusion of reality. Nor are these frozen, Lacanian “photo-graphs” of the visual totality offered by women, who were conflated with their clothing and surface ornamentation by contemporary viewers. Instead, with their mirrors, fashionable façades, and fractured surfaces, Cassatt’s images of Mary Ellison reflect the constructed nature of “picturing” itself—whether it be the construction of a “toilette” or a painting.

Within the context of genteel nineteenth-century society, women had a separate high art, an art that also involved the creation and framed presentation of images. A nineteenth-century women did not come into the world fully blown in all her elegance, beauty, and poise. She constructed an autographic “picture,” taking herself as a canvas on which to practice the art of dress, ornamentation, and fashion. Even more was at stake for the individual in this “feminine” art of fashion than in “masculine” arena of fine art, for a wealthy woman was inextricably linked with and inseparable from the self-presentation she created. When a woman placed herself in the forefront of the family loge, she exceeded the shallow limits of Baudelaire’s “living portrait”; for she was a
living *self*-portrait, engineered and constructed for that specific environment. She might be a spectacle, but not a passive spectacle. In a socially sanctioned art of self-fashioning, a haute bourgeoise could use her “femininity” as a mask to play with construction and possibilities.

Cassatt’s work does not present a point-by-point correspondence between what she viewed in the world and the image of that world which she presented on the canvas. Indeed, in the architecture of her room interiors she turned linear perspective—a traditional spatial tool of “masculine” fine art—inside out. In the images we have considered, Cassatt repeatedly used vestiges of linear perspective to manipulate balcony tiers, room corners, loges, and mirror reflections in ways that unsettle and even displace the external viewer. Within these equivocal spaces, Mary Ellison then functions, to various degrees, as both source for a look and as object of the inhuman cultural Gaze. Here there is no monolithic, unmoving eye, and the viewer’s vantage point is multiple vantage points, shifting and changing with the kalidescopic spectacle of modern life. Within this immersion in specularity, the feminine art of fashion and the masculine art of composing a unified pictorial composition were two paths which connected with the world and pulled the appearance of contemporary life together into a unified pictorial form.

However, the painter positions the external viewer, and by extension herself, in an ambiguous position relative to the women she paints. As we have seen, in composition after composition Cassatt manipulates the external viewer in such a way as to preclude access to the spaces occupied by Mary Ellison. This reinforces the socially prescribed “privacy” and makes the women unobtainable for all but distanced visual appreciation. Moreover, Cassatt was also an upper-middle class woman and a friend to those she painted; and as such, she formed part of the domestic and semi-private social environments she depicted. This complicates her images, for Cassatt, as original external viewer, also distanced herself and her own “masculine eyes” as painter from the spaces she was socially compelled to inhabit. Even the domestic space of *Study of a Woman with a Fan* shows the staging that both displaces and positions artist and the viewer.
relative to its subject. In the images containing Mary Ellison, women are concurrently
distanced and close, inaccessible and present, surface façade and individual subject.

In the non-portrait images featuring Mary Ellison, the women Mary Cassatt
pictured do not look out of the picture plane to address and engage the external viewer
directly. Because of this, they never assume the position of cultural Gaze in relation to
Mary Cassatt and her heirs in spectatorship, the viewers of her images. Instead, these
“pictures” are very much about women’s positioning within the culturally governed give-
and-take of seeing and being seen, and as such they might have been perceived
differently by men and women in nineteenth-century Paris.

A nineteenth-century haute bourgeoise was a woman whose social worth and
identity were inescapably bound to appearance and self-presentation. This would have
filtered her perception of Cassatt’s images of Mary Ellison. On a superficial level, such a
viewer would have seen images of her peers; women like herself, who used dress,
ornament, and deportment in the creation of a “given-to-be-seen” façade that manifested
their social status as leisure objects. If she approached the works from an artistic
perspective—whether it be as artist of fashion or artist of paint—she might have seen
beyond the surface presentation. If so, she would have recognized, either consciously or
unconsciously, that Cassatt’s images dealt with the constructed nature of representation,
and that the images referenced women’s creative potential and provided them with the
power to see and not just to be seen. In many ways, a woman viewing Cassatt’s images
of Mary Ellison came face to face with the “making oneself to be seen as” that constitutes
the self-satisfaction of the scopic drive.

Men viewing Cassatt’s work in nineteenth-century Paris would have seen the
familiar topic of women as spectacle made immediate through the artist’s use of
contemporary settings and fashions. The layers of broken color combined with the
interplay of brushstrokes on the surface of Cassatt’s paintings and mixed media pastels
would have reinforced the linkage between subject and decoration. This association
helped the images to read as appropriately feminine for a “woman artist,” as did the
“impressionist” and therefore “feminine” way in which Cassatt applied the pigment. In
addiction, the environments, demeanors, and diverted looks of the women within the images are entirely appropriate for the social context of the artist and her subjects. Had they been conversant with the language of the visual arts and able to see past Cassatt’s status as a “woman-artist,” male spectators also might have recognized that these images deal with the constructed nature of artistic representation and are, on one level at least, about art itself. The use of woman as a metaphor for painting would have seemed natural to such viewers. Simultaneous with this surface conventionality, however, the compositions, postures, and viewpoints in the images of Mary Ellison hinder the spectator’s assumption of the cultural Gaze and qualify the static positioning inherent in appreciation of woman as visual object. As we have seen, Cassatt’s compositions do not offer the external viewers an unequivocal position of visual mastery. This subliminal subversion would not have been as familiar, and a nineteenth-century Parisian man sensitive to the painting’s nuances might have found himself inexplicably and unexpectedly uneasy, out of place, and not quite secure in his status as viewer.

The ambiguous position of the external viewer may reflect Cassatt’s own equivocal character within a highly segregated society. In a culture with deeply divided, gender-linked spheres of activity and behavior for men and women, paintings with sketchy brush strokes, decorative color effects, and broken surfaces were viewed as appropriate products for a woman painter’s “impressionistic” and “feminine nature.” Among the rising avant-garde, however, this style of painting also fit Baudelaire’s call for a new manner of painting that was capable of capturing “the mysterious beauty” of contemporary life—a subject exemplified by the beautiful appearance of women. Since the modern city involved movement and change as well as spectacle, a painter of modernity could employ broken surfaces and sketchy brushwork to capture “impressions” of shifting light and changing fashions of dress and deportment. This is what Cassatt did in the images of Mary Ellison. As the products of an American woman who painted in France from a position as a “modern,” Cassatt’s paintings embrace two exceptional artistic directions. Her style possessed the underlying compositional strength and grasp of form French eyes classified as “masculine,” yet the subjects and situations
she selected to paint, and the way she presented them, evoked the changing surfaces and lights of modernity.

With her technical facility, Cassatt saw and drew with a “masculine eye”; in her status as “modern artist,” she selected subjects drawn from daily life; and as a respectable, if foreign, woman, she was limited to “feminine” subjects presented in socially appropriate ways. In a further complication, many of her models were also her peers and friends, and so could not be easily positioned as submissive in her own presence. In addition, Cassatt’s own explanation of “modern woman” blends masculine and feminine qualities into an individual who exhibits expanded intellectual capacity within the deflective shell of a fashionable, graceful, and charming nature. For Lacan, “masculine” and “feminine” provided some of the strongest masquerades with which a subject could play on the cultural screen and work against the defining cultural Gaze, and mimetic painting offered artists a similar opportunity. Cassatt’s paintings might be viewed as explorations of this masking process, “feminine” in superficial appearance but subversive in their construction and subliminal content. From this perspective, Mary Ellison becomes a thematic alter ego allowing the artist to deflect the cultural Gaze and explore topics and styles of interest to her, not as a “woman artist,” but as a painter who also happened to be a woman.

Conclusion

Representational painting answers to and is a construct of both the cultural Gaze and the Lacanian Gaze of the scopic drive. As a conscious product created by a subject to be experienced within a certain context, painting contains images and forms understandable within the painter’s social environment; a painting “pictures.” For a painter to succeed publicly and commercially, he or she must create images that are palatable to the art critics and purchasing public. For the ambitious artist, success may mean suppressing personal issues and desires. The extent of Cassatt’s professional achievement demonstrates that on the surface, her works did not challenge commonly held assumptions about the place and nature of men and women in contemporary society.
Suppression is not elimination, and the dual nature of representational painting allows it to function as both a conscious semblance of social reality, and an unconscious exploration of that reality's constructed nature. In this way, Cassatt's art images of Mary Ellison show "modern woman" as self-created spectacle and as an active spectator within the public spaces of the theater, and as an individual subject within the private spaces of the home. A painterly painting is a constructed surface of excess, and it simultaneously forms and escapes the "picture" it creates. This seems especially true of the images in which Mary Cassatt used Mary Ellison as a model.

As a blended action of eye and hand whose direction is often unconscious, the act of painting manages, at least in part, to escape verbal codification by the Symbolic. As the act of painting answers the painter's desire for visual unity, painting becomes the objet a, the Gaze for which the scopic drive searches. Since painting is a creative act, autographic traces of that objet a are unconsciously encoded in the surface during the painting process. These marks form the "filigree," specific to each painter and each painting, through which the external viewer accesses the Gaze and sates his or her own hunger for visual completion. It was in this exploration and "selection of a certain kind of gaze" that Cassatt created a series of works which explored the faceted nature of "feminine modernity." In the process, she modified femininity to encompass the active, questioning looking that deflected Mary Ellison's—and by extension, her own—status as spectacle.

When Cassatt painted actual women from her own social class, the situation complicates and enriches the works she produced. Exhibition images of Mary Ellison in particular show that the women Cassatt painted were subject to multiple layers of display. Women constructed appearances and presented themselves to peers and society within a social environment where they were seen and reflected upon from all sides; they positioned themselves under Cassatt's "masculine eye" as friend and artist as she painted and drew them posing in drawing rooms, loges, and studio; and they were captured forever in a representation to be viewed and criticized in the exhibition and purchased by strangers. In combining genre and portraiture, Cassatt used titles like Study of a Woman
with a Fan and At the Theater to preserve the anonymity of her models, underscore the work’s status as an art work, and reference the spaces of modernity. In some ways, Cassatt’s use of social peers necessitated compositions and presentations that also insured her own reputation. Primary in this preservation of lady-like behavior was Cassatt’s manipulation of where and how she represented their acts of looking. It should be clear from the works discussed above that in Cassatt’s images of Mary Ellison, she as a woman never looked directly at the external viewer. Since eye-to-eye contact between men and women often signaled a woman’s sexual availability, the diverted visual attention pictured by Cassatt reinforced her model’s respectability. As we have seen, some of Cassatt’s images even feature women—especially Mary Ellison—with downcast eyes holding fans in front of their faces. Fans alternately defend Ellison from the external viewer, and reinforce the linkage between the fan and woman as created decorative façades. This highlights the dual nature of the images, which often function as both pictures of modernity and investigations of the art of painting.

At this point it might be valuable to remember the contemporary French gender-linked definition of woman as feminine. The extent to which Cassatt transforms nineteenth-century opinion can be seen by comparing Study of a Woman with a Fan with the view expressed by the great priest of the moderns, Baudelaire:

[Woman is] the being . . . through whom artists and poets compose their most delicate gems . . . she is the glitter of all graces of nature condensed in a single being . . . a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and enchanting . . . All that adorns woman, all that serves to give lustre to her beauty, is part of herself; and the artists who have devoted themselves particularly to the study of this enigmatic being dote as much upon the mundus muliebris as upon woman herself . . . What poet would dare, in painting the pleasure caused by the apparition of a beauty, to separate woman from her costume? Baudelaire’s woman has no identity other than spectacle. A “stupid” and inhuman statue of surface glitter and stardust whose nature is pre-composed and dependent upon physical beauty and fashionable clothing, she is a being who is only when she is seen. In contrast, Cassatt has painted the internal experience of women who act within and react against this specular world. Consequently, the artist’s images depict active, thinking, seeing

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subjects with depth and personality. On the surface, the situations selected by Cassatt for
the images containing Mary Ellison follow the traditional association of women with
sumptuous display and femininity. However, the manner in which Cassatt posed her
models and manipulated her compositions produced images that undermine the static
placement of woman as an object for scopic enjoyment. These women use the surface
glitter of womanly virtue as a shield to deflect the cultural Gaze while their own behavior
takes on masculine characteristics. Exhibiting a "direct connection with things," and
recognizing and apprehending the external and masculine "world of forms and ideas,"
Cassatt's women demonstrate the curiosity and intelligence that were hallmarks of the
male "genius."

In the Lacanian sense, Cassatt shows women participating in the
construction of their own façades and using the cloak of femininity to deflect attention
from their own human intelligence and rationality.

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Cassatt found modern compositions and
modern content in the environment around her. She turned her painter's eye on the
domestic and public spaces of the upper-class women in Paris. In Cassatt's Impressionist
work, women are not simply spectacles waiting to be appreciated as strange objects of
femininity and decorative surface beauty. These are fully rounded people, active both
within and beyond the limits of their status as spectacle. Practicing the feminine art of
self-fashioning, Cassatt's women "make themselves to be seen as" rather than passively
embodies the innate and inhuman beauty of Baudelaire's description. Taken together,
her Impressionist paintings show the embodied experiences of living women — as happy,
shy, introspective, and delighted — who exhibit intelligence and creativity as they inhabit
and enjoy the spaces of modernity. By painting her friends residing in rather than
decorating the spaces of their lives, she reached beyond the façade and painted modern
women in their intelligent, individual subjectivity.

Judith Barter has written that the combination of generic titles and obscured faces
in Cassatt's domestic images of women, like Study of a Woman with a Fan, create
images that fall "between portraiture and genre, making these experiences universal
rather than specific and emphasizing activities rather than personalities." In its
consideration of images of Mary Ellison, this chapter has come to a different conclusion. Cassatt certainly painted the universal, but she did so by concentrating on the individual. Even when the women Cassatt pictured are no longer identifiable, the artist’s attention to the characteristic facial features and habitual postures and dress of her models indicates her attention to their existence as individual subjects. When she depicted women’s attitudes and activities—thinking in the private space of a parlor, hiding behind fans, or actively using opera glasses at the theater—she shows family, friends, and peers living their lives and inhabiting their spaces. These are specific rather than generic “modern women.” and part of the power and attraction of these images comes from the connection and empathy between the model and the artist.

In addition, when Cassatt paints a woman, she pictures a woman who sees. These are not the vague, abstracted, off-into-space looks of the ideal superficial feminine; rather they are look looks—not Gazes, but human actions of thought and consideration. The world of Cassatt’s images is peopled with individual subjects sharing equally in the joys and agonies of spectacle and specularity; of looking and being looked upon. In Study of a Woman with a Fan, as in other images of her friend Mary Ellison, Cassatt painted the experience of a woman as a thinking, feeling, intelligent individual subject. For whatever reason—from Cassatt, from Ellison, or arising in the interstices between femininity and painting—the introspection and muffled melancholia in this painting capture the presence of an individual woman as a subject, an embodied presence that continues to connect with modern viewers today.
Figure 4.1: Mary Cassatt, Study of a Woman with a Fan, ca. 1878

Also known as Etude de femme avec éventail, Portrait of a Lady, Woman with a Fan (Femme à l’éventail), and Miss Mary Ellison. Oil paint on canvas, 33 ¾ x 25 ¾”, signed center left: “Mary Cassatt”. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, cat. no. 80; Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 9.

Source: Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 9.
Figure 4.2: Mary Cassatt, Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering, 1877

Oil paint on canvas, 29 ¼ x 23 ½”, signed on the lower left: “M.S. Cassatt, Paris 1877”. Private Collection, Ithan, PA. Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 48; Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, cat. no. 2.

Source: Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, cat. no. 2.
Figure 4.3: Mary Cassatt, *Women in a Loge*, 1881-1882

Also known as *Two Young Ladies in a Loge*. Oil paint on canvas, 31 ½ x 35 ¾”, signed on lower right: “Mary Cassatt”. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 121; Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 20.

Source: Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 20.
Figure 4.4: Mary Cassatt, Women in a Loge, 1881-1882

Also known as Two Young Ladies in a Loge. Pastel and gouache paint over aquatint and soft-ground etching on off-white wove paper, 11 ½ x 8 ¾", signed on lower right: "M C". Cincinnati Art Museum. Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 120; Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 21.

Source: Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 21.
Figure 4.5: Mary Cassatt, *At the Theater (Au théâtre)*, 1878-1879

Also known as *Young Lady in a Loge Gazing to Right*. Pastel with gouache and metallic paints on tan wove paper, 25 ½ x 21 ½”, signed vertically on the left edge: “M. Cassatt”. Private Collection, Boston. Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 72; Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 19.

Source: Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 19.
Figure 4.6: Mary Cassatt, A Corner of the Loge, 1879

Also known as Au balcon, In the Box, A Corner of a Loge. Oil paint on canvas, 17 x 24”, unsigned. Private Collection. Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 62; Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 44, fig. 1.

Figure 4.7: Mary Cassatt, *At the Theater (Au théâtre)*, 1879-1880

Lithograph on paper, 11 7/16 x 8 3/4", signed and inscribed on lower right margin: “To Mr. Avery with my best compliments / this early & only attempt at lithography / Mary Cassatt / Paris / May 1891 / 5 proofs stone effaced”.


Notes


In 1878 a Cassatt painting entitled *Portrait of a Lady* was included in an exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. A small drawing in a student publication satirized the work. This rough rendition shows a lightly dressed woman with dark hair seated against a dark background and looking directly out at the viewer. The accompanying caption reads “J’adore les yeux noirs, moi” (I adore black eyes, myself). Lindsay (Ibid.) sees this as a drawing of *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, and so dates the painting to 1877. However, Cassatt also painted a portrait of Ellison that was both definitely completed by 1877 and intended for Philadelphia. I believe the work exhibited in Philadelphia as *Portrait of a Lady* was more likely the actual portrait, *Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering*, for the following reasons: the caption’s stress on “black eyes,” the image’s inclusion of a look which engages the external viewer, and perhaps even more importantly, its omission of the easily drawn and easily satirized fan. This conclusion is also supported by stylistic considerations, for *Study of a Woman with a Fan* has more in common with other images of Ellison which Cassatt created as exhibition pieces in the years 1879-1882. Consequently, this chapter dates *Study of a Woman with a Fan* to ca. 1878. Both *Study of a Woman with a Fan* and *Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering* will be discussed in full below. For the student drawing, see *L’Académie pour rire*, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia (22 April–2 June 1878); in Lindsay, *Cassatt and Philadelphia*, 18, fig. 18; and Ibid., 18-19.

2 For a timetable of Cassatt’s life that includes people, places, paintings, and events, see Wendy Bellion, “Chronology,” in Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, 328-352.

3 Arranging, taking part in, and even modeling for, single-sex clothed life drawing classes and attending co-ed anatomy classes indicates an involvement that was more professional than amateur in its scope. That Eliza and Mary’s parents accepted and even financed their teenage daughters’ participation in such activities suggests the Haldemans and Cassatts held unusually broadminded views about the abilities and integrity of their daughters. In addition, when visiting the city or attending the Academy, both Mary and Eliza occasionally stayed in boarding houses like that of Miss Howes in Philadelphia.
This also indicates a great deal of self-sufficiency, maturity, and independence for 19th-century teenage girls (Nancy M. Mathews, ed., Cassatt and Her Circle: Selected Letters [New York: Abbeville Press, 1984], 18, 23 n. 1).

However Samuel Haldeman, at least, viewed his daughter’s activities as a temporary anomaly: “You will get married and settle down into a good housekeeper like all married women & send off your paints into the garret! There is a prediction for you, and one founded upon almost universal experience” (Samuel Haldeman to Eliza Haldeman, 2 March 1863; quoted in Nancy M. Mathews, Mary Cassatt: A Life [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994], 58; see also Mathews, Selected Letters. 18; and Mathews, A Life, 59). In the mid 1870s, Eliza Haldeman married Colonel Philip Figyelmesy, a Hungarian army man and diplomat who fought in the American Civil War. Eliza put her art aside for several decades as the couple and their two sons led an international diplomatic life.

When Eliza Haldeman wrote her father about new students at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1861, she assured him that “Miss Cassatt and I are still at the head [in drawing]. . . . We keep pretty near together. She generally getting the shading better and I the form, she the ‘ensemble’ and I the ‘minutia.’ “ A few months later Eliza described another student, whom she and Cassatt taught to make a plaster cast of a friend’s hand, as “one of our amateur students, that is to say she don’t intend to become an artist . . . she did not know the first thing about casting.” Alexander Cassatt’s remark that “In three years Mary will want to go to Rome,” indicates that his sixteen-year old sister had her future art education planned and was communicating her desires to her family (Eliza Haldeman to Samuel Haldeman, Philadelphia, 21 December 1861 and 7 March 1862; in Matthews, Selected Letters, 26, 28; Alexander Cassatt to Robert Cassatt, Dalton Georgia, 17 November 1860; quoted in Frederick Sweet, Miss Mary Cassatt, Impressionist from Philadelphia [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966], 14). In this chapter, the quoted spellings, diacritical marks, and punctuation are as found in the sources.


Eliza Haldeman to Samuel Haldeman, 18 January 1860; quoted in Huber, Pennsylvania Academy, 15.

The Pennsylvania Academy offered its first “Ladies Life Class” in the spring of 1868. A drawing by Emily Sartain of a man bears her inscription “Life class drawing #1 Nov. 15, 1869,” indicating that at the Pennsylvania Academy women were drawing from both male and female models. No such opportunities were offered when Sartain and young Mary Cassatt first appeared on the Academy’s register (Huber, Pennsylvania Academy, 16; Phyllis Peet, “The Art Education of Emily Sartain,” Woman’s Art Journal 11 [Spring-Summer 1990]: 9, 10; and Bellion, “Chronology,” 329).

Professor A. R. Thomas illustrated his anatomy lectures with “actual dissections of the entire subject,” and the Academy briefly considered (but rejected as too expensive) the substitution of a manikin for the corpse in the belief that the former would arouse less
"natural repugnance" among the ladies ([Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts] Committee on Instruction, 12 November 1860; quoted in Huber, Pennsylvania Academy, 13-14).

With her new understanding of human physiology, Eliza Haldeman began giving her father advice: "My health is excellent. I am obliged to walk every day which I suppose accounts for it. I think the same practice would improve your health and by giving the body more strength would increase the action of the mind. Ain't I learning physiology? I just wish I could tell you all the hard latin words I know, the names of the forams fosses fissures fibers and functions, but I will astonish you with these when I come home." Eliza Haldeman to Samuel Haldeman, Philadelphia, 4 February 1860; in Matthews, Selected Letters, 24.

Mary Cassatt's propensity for impetuous and bold behavior worried Eliza's mother when the girls later studied and traveled together in France, and Mary Haldeman cautioned her daughter: "I hope you will not run any risk of being waylaid or insulted. I fear that you with Miss Cassatt may venture too far, do not rely on her judgment as she has no religion to guide her and from the impulse of a moment you may rush with her into things that may injure you. So my dear child do be careful." Mary Haldeman to Eliza Haldeman, 18 December 1866; quoted in Matthews, A Life, 36.

Although French training provided Americans with the pedigree helpful in their pursuit of monetary success, France also offered a social climate appreciative of the arts. As Eliza Haldeman phrased it, "The difference between Americans and French is that the former work for money and the latter for fame and then the public appreciate things so much here [in France]." Eliza Haldeman to Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Ecouen, 15 May 1867; in Matthews, Selected Letters, 46.

Over 1800 Americans are recorded as studying art in France during the last decades of the 1800s, and Germany and Spain were also popular destinations. See H. Barbara Weinberg, "Nineteenth-Century American Painters at the École des Beaux-Arts," American Art Journal 13 (Autumn 1981): 69.

This is Cassatt's recollection as recorded by her early French biographer, Segard. Interestingly, Segard reflects that this paternal response was "not very American," suggesting that the French viewed Cassatt's professional aspirations as in keeping with her American background. See Achille Segard, Mary Cassatt, Un Peintre des enfants et des mères (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorf, 1913), 5 n. 3; quoted and translated in Matthews, A Life, 337 n. 18.

Cassatt's sister-in-law, Lois Cassatt, who did not like Mary at all, discussed the likeness versus art problem in regard to a portrait of her daughter Katharine: "It is going to be exhibited at the Grossman Gallery in London if it is satisfactory to the artist and her fellow artists here as a work of art. The likeness from this standpoint is, of course, not important. I think Mary has tried her best to make it good in every respect." Lois Cassatt to Katharine Cassatt, 15 March 1888; quoted in Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 143, 65.
iEliza Haldeman to Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Ecouen, 15 May 1867; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 46.

The Republican government of France believed drawing enhanced the ability to think and communicate clearly and logically, and that people trained in art were more likely to be responsible and prosperous citizens. What was taught to, and expected of, students was dictated by Republican belief in the essential “masculinity” of French men and “feminity” of French women. See Tamar Garb, Sisters of the Brush: Women’s Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 23, n. 18.

See Ibid., 83-85. In 1863 the republican government replaced the Academy as controlling agent for the École des Beaux-Arts and directed the school toward the cultivation of artworks that fostered Republican ideals. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between the École des Beaux Arts, painting, exhibitions, male and female artists, and Republican France from 1870 through the century, see Ibid., 19-41.

Not until June 1897 did the concours des places herald the arrival of women students at the École des Beaux Arts (Weinberg, “American Painters at the École,” 69). Women recognized the hypocrisy in the double standard used to deny them admission to the École. Writing for a suffragette journal, the painter Marie Bashkirtseff explained the situation clearly: “You [men] who loudly proclaim yourselves, to be stronger, more intelligent, more gifted than us, you monopolise for yourselves alone one of the best schools in the world where all the encouragements are plentiful for you . . . . As for women whom you call frail, weak, limited, and many of whom are deprived even of the mundane liberty of coming and going by the word ‘propriety’, you give them, by contrast, neither encouragement nor protection.” Pauline Orell [Marie Bashkirtseff], “Les femmes artistes,” La Citoyenne (6 March 1881): 3-4; quoted and translated in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 85. For more on Bashkirtseff, including a Lacanian interpretation of her self-representation, see Tamar Garb, “Unpicking the Seams of her Disguise: Self-Representation in the Case of Maria Bashkirtseff,” Block 13 (Winter 1987-1988): 79-86.

On the dominance of the Paris art scene as embodied by the École and the Salon, see Albert Boime, The French Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century (London: Phaidon, 1971); on the success of independent Academies in France, see Catherine Fehrer, The Julian Academy, Paris 1868-1939 (New York: Shepherd Gallery, 1989); for a discussion of 19th-century American artists (male) linked with the École and ateliers of acclaimed French painters, see Weinberg, “American Painters at the École,” 66-84. For Mary Cassatt and the French Academic system, see Mathews, A Life, 31-32, 41, 57, 107; and Weinberg, “American Painters at the École,” 68. For the artists with whom Cassatt studied, see Bellion, “Chronology,” 329-334.

When Marie Bashkirtseff entered the Académie Julian in 1877, she viewed it as her only option for a serious art education. The Académie was also the choice of the American Elizabeth Gardner, who became an acclaimed artist and Salon success. Gardner married William-Adolphe Bouguereau, an established Salon painter whose

18 Eliza Haldeman to Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Paris, 28 October 1866, in Mathews, Selected Letters, 37-38. A few years later, Haldeman indicated again the importance of models in their artistic training when speaking of a yet unidentified Barbizon painter: “We were at Barbizon last week but she [Mary Cassatt] was not pleased with the Master she intended taking. You can imagine the horror we were seized with on hearing he painted without models, a sort of French Rothermel. Of course he don’t draw well and though a very celebrated painter would not be good as a master on that account. He is one of the best of the Barbizon.” Eliza Haldeman to Samuel Haldeman, Courances, 24 April 1868; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 51.

19 According to a contemporary, a woman art student “studies the head, the arms, the feet, but rarely the nude torso, and the whole figure is absolutely prohibited.” Maria Deraismes, “Les Femmes au Salon,” L’Avenir des femmes, no. 141 (2 July 1876), 103; quoted in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 81.

This limitation is contradicted by the letters of Cassatt’s friends Eliza Haldeman and Emily Sartain, as well as extant drawings by Sartain and Cassatt. As a student in the Parisian atelier of Vital Luminais in the early and mid 1870s, Emily Sartain drew from male models who wore only bulky shorts. Letters from Sartain to her father indicate she was comfortable drawing partly clothed male and female models, which were considered to be “nudes.” She also hired her own models. Complaining of the muscular nature of Parisian models when she sought a “stout” man to pose for the body of a portrait commission her father sent with a photograph of a deceased subject from Philadelphia, Emily explained: “Naturally the majority of models pose nude and therefore have not the corpulence” needed for the posthumous portrait to be a good likeness (Emily Sartain to John Sartain, 31 May, 10 June, and 22 July 1875, in the Moore College of Art Archives; referenced and quoted in Peet, “The Art Education of Emily Sartain,” 11). Parts of Mary Cassatt’s correspondence with Eliza Haldeman, their letters home from France, Cassatt’s correspondence with Sartain, and Sartain’s letters home describing her travels with Cassatt in Europe and their declining friendship, can be found in Mathews, Selected Letters, 22-63, 70-129.
At one point, she lamented: “My great difficulty here is the models can’t find a model, oh! how I regret Spain! All the good models are taken for the winter and of course would rather pose for men.” Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, [Rome], 26 November [1873]; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 123-124.

Art’s status as a commodity is exemplified in this anonymous passage from the journal La Citoyenne: “The legend of the down-at-the heel artist with a threadbare cardigan and smashed up hat, is a good story which doesn’t hold true anymore . . . . In our society, artists are spoiled, honoured and, for the most part, rewarded. Obviously there are some unfortunate ones. It is even possible that there are, alas, those that are dying of hunger. Mme Boucicaut was a rich businesswoman who amassed millions; alongside her, a rich cloth merchant, there is the hawker of bird-seed. They are both businesswomen . . . . Between Meissonier who sells his pictures for 100,000 francs and a poor painter who makes paintings in standard measurements, there is the same difference that we find between the bird-seed seller and the rich cloth merchant” (“Le Salon,” La Citoyenne, no. 132 [May 1888], 2; quoted in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 25). On the business of art in France during the 1800s, see also Ibid., 25-26; Nicholas Green, “Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth-Century,” Art History 10 (March 1987): 59-78; Nicholas Green, “Circuits of Production, Circuits of Consumption: The Case of Mid-Nineteenth-Century French Art Dealing,” Art Journal 48 (Spring 1989): 29-34; and Cynthia White and Harrison C. White, Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993); and Martha Ward, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions,” Art Bulletin 73 (Dec. 1991): 599-622.

In a series of 1880 articles investigating recent Salon shows, journalist Jean Alesson found the Salon juries disproportionately favored the work of male artists both in accepting artwork and in bestowing awards. See Jean Alesson, “Le Salon,” Moniteur des arts, no. 1319 (23 April 1880), 2; “Salon de 1882,” Gazette des femmes, no. 9 (19 May 1882) 65; “Salon de 1877,” Les Gauloises, no. 32 (18 May 1877) 2; “Salon de 1882,” Gazette des femmes, no. 10 (25 May 1882) 73; and “Salon de 1883,” Gazette des femmes, no. 9 (10 May 1883) 67; as cited and discussed in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 26-27.


21 Mary Cassatt to Eliza Haldeman, Beaufort sur Doron, 17 August [1869]; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 62.

24 After renouncing the Salon, Mary Cassatt not only showed with the Independents (Impressionists) in the 1870s and 1880s, but in the late 1880s she exhibited with the Society of Painter-Printmakers. Cassatt’s interest in printmaking was sparked by Degas, in whose studio she made her initial printmaking explorations. She went on to become a masterful printmaker. However, participation by both Cassatt and Pissarro in the Society of Painter-Printmakers was curtailed when the group suffered from nationalistic fervor and proclaimed only French-born artists might participate. See Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 37-38. For more on Cassatt the printmaker, see Nancy M. Mathews and Barbara Stern Shapiro, Mary Cassatt: The Color Prints (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with the Williams College Museum of Art, 1989); Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, Mary Cassatt: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Graphic Work, second edition, revised (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979); and Idem, Mary Cassatt: Graphic Art (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1981).

For exhibitions at cercles, or private gentleman’s clubs, see Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 32-41. For alternatives available to, and chosen by, women artists, see Tamar Garb, “Revising the Revisionists: The Formation of the Union des Femmes peintres et sculpteurs,” Art Journal 48, (Spring 1989): 63-70. For a discussion that focuses upon the Impressionist’s shows but also briefly considers the Aquarellistes, see Ward, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions,” 599-622. On the development of independent picture dealers in Paris and the growth of art as a commodity to be bought and sold within an atmosphere of visual display, see Green, “Circuits of Production, Circuits of Consumption,” 29-34. For the relationship between the Salons des Refusés, the upsurge in exhibition alternatives to the official Salon, and the early Independent/Impressionist shows, see Albert Boime, “The Salon des Refusés and the Evolution of Modern Art,” Art Quarterly 32 (1969): 411-426.

25 Cassatt pursued individual exhibition opportunities and commissions, and at various times had paintings on display in galleries and stores in Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago. In 1870 she consigned two paintings to the New York office of Goupil and Company, a Paris-based art dealer. Unhappy with their representation, she took the works to Chicago in October where they went on display in a jewelry store and were burned in the Great Chicago Fire. She financed her trip back to Europe in 1871 with a commission from Pittsburgh Bishop Michael Domenec, who paid her $300 dollars to paint copies for his city’s cathedral of Correggio’s Madonna of St Jerome and Coronation of the Virgin. Cassatt sent the Coronation from Parma in June of 1872, but never completed the St. Jerome. In June 1874 a gallery on the boulevard Haussmann exhibited
Cassatt’s A Musical Party. She exhibited Tete de femmes (unidentified) at the American pavilion in the Exposition universelle, which opened in Paris in May of 1878. The following month Cassatt sent A Seville Belle, Offering the Panal to the Bullfighter, A Musical Party, At the Français, A Sketch to the Philadelphia art dealer Hermann Teubner; at least two of these paintings were forwarded to the October exhibition sponsored by the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association in Boston, where Cassatt won a silver medal for A Musical Party. Unhappy with Teubner, who at one point had as many as fifteen of her paintings, Cassatt moved her paintings to New York in late 1878. Paul Durand-Ruel, the Parisian art dealer famous for his support of the Impressionists, did not begin acquiring works by Cassatt until 1881. See Bellion, “Chronology,” 330-335; and Lindsay, Cassatt in Philadelphia, 19. On Cassatt’s dissatisfaction with Teubner, see Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, 13 avenue Trudaine, Friday 13 December 1978, in Mathews, Selected Letters, 142-144.


27 See Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 51, 46.

28 Virginie Demont-Breton explained during a banquet speech for the Union des Femmes: “Are not all men essentially feminists? Their most tender and most virile artistic aspirations, the very form of their ideal, are these not born of their love for Woman?” Journal des femmes artistes, no. 77 (May 1898): 2; quoted in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 49. For the various uses of “Feminist” (féminisme) in late 19th-century France, see Ibid., 44, 48-54.

For a contemporary description of Degas as a féminisme, see Hermel, “L’Exposition de peinture de la rue Lafitte,” La France libre (27 May 1886): 453; in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 48-49.

29 Other issues being lobbied for included a woman’s right to file a paternity suit or divorce her husband. Female doctors faced additional problems once they earned their medical degree; designated as minors by French law, women could not sign birth and death certificates. See Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 49, 53, 67, 45. For an example of support for woman’s art exhibitions by a conservative paper, see M. de. F. “L’Exposition annuelle de l’Association des Femmes Artistes,” La Famille, no. 545 (16 March 1890): 167; in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 46.

30 As a contemporary explained, “Almost all the painters and sculptors with any talent belong to one or two of the grands cercles which are well placed, very much on view and which, every year, organise one or more exhibitions, to which crowds of art lovers, dilettantes and society’s élite rush. But the rules of most of these cercles only allow works by their members to appear at their exhibitions and as women cannot belong to these, their works are fatally excluded.” Louis Enault, Henry VI (7 August 1881);
reprinted in *Journal des femmes artistes*, no. 1 (December 1890): 2; quoted in Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 38. For women’s exclusion from *cercles*, see Ibid., 29-30.

31 In contrast to the first show, which included work by the Unions’ original forty-one members, the 1896 *Salon des femmes* exhibited almost 1000 works by 295 of its 450 members. For statistics, see Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 4, who references *Journal des artistes*, no. 5 (2 February 1883): 3; Virginie Demont-Breton, “La Femme dans l’Art,” *Journal des artistes*, no. 28 (12 July 1896): 1513; and *Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs. Catalogue pour l’exposition de 1896* (Paris, 1896).

32 As interpreted by conservative publications like *La Famille*, a woman’s artistic and maternal natures were linked. To this end, the images chosen for the cover included representations of women painters, children, and mothers with children. An example of the latter is seen in the January 6, 1889 issue of *La Famille*, which reproduced *Le Bain* by Virginie Demont-Breton. By using this painting of a mother washing her child, *La Famille* stressed the feminine qualities of one of Paris’s most successful professional painters—in 1894, Demont-Breton would replace Mme Léon Bertaux to become the Union’s second elected president (Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 7, 46-47; and Idem., “‘L’Art Féminin’: The Formation of a Critical Category in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *Art History* 12 [March 1989]: 39-41).

33 *Journal officiel* (Débats parlementaires), 31 January 1893, 306; quoted in Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 97. Charles Dupuy, of the *Ministre de l’Instruction Publique des Beaux-Arts et des Cultes*, spoke for the French government and in opposition to an amendment allowing women to become students at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. He proposed the founding of a separate school where women might learn decorative rather than fine arts.

A speech given by Virginie Demont-Breton to an 1895 *Union des femmes* banquet shows how women themselves couched their ambitions to fit the language and goals of powerful conservative politicians: “The development of our faculties [as artists], far from turning us from our duties [as women], would only strengthen and complete our union with man through the exchange of ideas; it is not therefore only for our happiness that we want our part of progress, it is more for the happiness of he who whilst remaining our protector, must be able to confide in us all his thoughts and aspirations; it is for the future of our children of whom we are the first guides and whom we must be able, at the same time, to direct well in life. It is to enrich the fatherland as much as to aid the development of the forces which we feel inside ourselves and which for so long have been neglected.” *Journal des femmes artistes*, no. 57 (June 1895), 1; quoted and translated in Garb, “‘L’Art Féminin,’” 65 n. 70.


36 Ibid.


The contrasting styles of "academic" and "feminine" are epitomized in the paintings of Elizabeth Gardner, a Salon favorite and an American; and Berthe Morisot, a Frenchwoman who exhibited with the Independents. For the critical reception by contemporaries of work by both artists, see Ibid., 42-44. For the subject matter of women's paintings, see Garb, "L'Art Féminin," 52; and Garb, "Revising the Revisionists," 67. For an excellent investigation into masculine/feminine and related gender linked issues as they arise in the reception and treatment of women sculptors and their work, see Claudine Mitchell, "Intellectuality and Sexuality: Camille Claudel, The Fin-de-Siècle Sculptress," Art History 12 (December 1989): 419-47.

39 It is interesting that as the Union's president and a woman with non-traditional views about the abilities and potential of women, Mme Léon Bertaux held conservative views about art. She perceived the new styles of realism and naturalism as threatening to both the social order and French culture. Her solution to the imminent decline was an elevation of women artists, whose academic paintings would preserve France's glorious cultural heritage. For a discussion of how the Union fostered such a public goal without transgressing gender demarcations, see Garb, "L'Art Féminin," 52-57. Garb also discusses the issue completely in Sisters of the Brush.

40 S. C. de Soissons, Boston Artists: A Parisian Critic's Notes (Boston: 1894), 77-78; quoted in Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 111.


"It grates painfully on our nerves to contemplate the necessity of any well-bred woman's earning a livelihood by useful work. It is not 'woman's sphere.' Her sphere is within the household, which she should 'beautify,' and of which she should be the 'chief ornament.' By virtue of its descent from a patriarchal past, our social system makes it the woman's function in an especial degree to put in evidence her household's ability to pay. . . . in the life of the higher pecuniary classes, this attention to conspicuous waste of substance and effort should normally be the sole economic function of the woman." Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, with the addition of a review by William Dean Howells (1899; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1975), 180.

44 As early as 1867, Cassatt's friend Eliza Haldeman reassured her mother that Paris held no danger for her: "Do not trouble about me disappearing in Paris, I know it thoroughly and I think likely the lady you read of ran off with some good-looking
Frenchman. As I am to be an old maid there is no danger for me in that quarter.” Eliza Haldeman to Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Courances, 8 March 1867; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 44.

45 “Oh! you will enjoy your place. There is nothing like making pictures with real things.” Mary Cassatt to Ada Pope, Mesnil-Beaufresne, 7 April (1900); in Mathews, Selected Letters, 274; see also Ibid., 131.

46 May Alcott Nieriker to Abigail May Alcott [Paris, November 1876], in Caroline Ticknor, May Alcott: A Memoir (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1928), 152-152; see also Judith A. Barter, “Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” in Judith A. Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 61; and Mathews, Selected Letters, 131. At this time Cassatt’s address was 19, rue Laval.

May Alcott arrived in Paris in 1876 to study painting. Full of admiring stories about Mary Cassatt, her letters home provided her sister Louisa May with a role model for “Miss Cassal,” the painting protagonist in her unfinished novel Diana and Persis. See Mathews, A Life, 102-103; for an account of May Alcott’s life in Paris, see Ticknor, May Alcott.

47 Louisine W. Havemeyer, Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector, ed. Susan Alyson Stein (New York: Ursus Press, 1993), 269-270; see also Mathews, A Life, 102-103. Despite their difference in ages, the two women became close friends. Louisine came to share many of Mary Cassatt’s opinions about art, including a deep appreciation for Courbet’s nudes. With Cassatt’s encouragement, Louisine started what would become one of the most important art collections in the United States. Her first purchase was radical for a proper New York teenager: Rehearsal of the Ballet (La Répétition de Ballet), a pastel by Degas that cost 500 francs (about $100) in 1877—all of young Louisine’s spending money. This began a life-long pursuit of fine art that continued when Louisine married sugar-magnate Henry O. Havemeyer. Eventually the couple’s collection included sixty-five of Degas’ paintings and pastels, forty-one pieces by Courbet, thirty by Monet, and five by Pissarro (see Mathews, A Life, 101-102; Sweet, Miss Cassatt, 28-29; Havemeyer, Sixteen to Sixty, 249; and Erica E. Hirshler, “Helping ‘Fine Things Across the Atlantic’: Mary Cassatt and Art Collecting in the United States,” in Judith A. Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 182-183; and Frances Weitzhenhoffer, The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986]).

For the other young women at Mme Del Sarte’s, see Mathews, Selected Letters, 129 n. 2; Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 39; and Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 43.

48 She had received much praise and even assistance from the predominantly male art world in both Parma and Seville. For a contextualized discussion of Cassatt’s Spanish paintings that includes both style and subject matter, and raises the question of whether Cassatt painted prostitutes, see M. Elizabeth Boone, “Bullfights and Balconies: Flirtation and Majismo in Mary Cassatt’s Spanish Paintings of 1872-1873,” American Art 9 (Spring 1995): 55-71.
49 "...I told you what a washed-out affair [Ida] she has at the Salon [of 1874],—but she has a picture now at her dealer's in the Boul. Haussmann, that is superb and delicate in color,—three figures singing [A Musical Party]. The light on the chest and face of the foreground figure, a blonde, is perfectly dazzling. It is as slovenly in manner and in drawing as her Spanish pochades, however" (Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Paris, 17 June 1874; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 126). See also Peet, "The Art Education of Emily Sartain," 13. For Ida, ca. 1874, oil on canvas, 58.4 x 45.7 cm., private collection, see George T. M. Shackelford, "Pas de Deux: Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas," in Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 110, fig. 2. For A Musical Party, ca. 1874, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 66 cm., Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, see Bellion, "Chronology," 333, fig. 8; and Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 37, cat. no. 29.

50 Mary Cassatt to Eugenie Heller, 10 rue de Marignan, Sunday [c. 1 February 1896]; in Matthews, Selected Letters, 263.

51 Mathews, A Life, 93-96. While Cassatt provided herself with a diverse art background through her travels and by changing ateliers, Elizabeth Gardner believed in the Salon style and was now supporting herself entirely through painting sales and art related activities. See notes 17 and 38 above, and Mathews, A Life, 340-341, n. 1.

52 Earlier, paintings by Cassatt had been rejected by the Salons of 1867 and 1869. However, under the name of "Mary Stevenson" she exhibited Mandolin Player in the 1868 Salon, Una Contadina di Fobello; val Sesia (Piemont) (now lost) in the 1870 Salon, and During Carnival in the 1872 Salon. Eventually Cassatt submitted and was accepted under her full name, showing Offering the Panal to the Bullfighter by Mary Stevenson-Cassatt in the Salon of 1873, and Ida by Mary Cassatt in 1874. Although Ida was satirized in Le journal amusant, the work also caught the favorable attention of Degas, who became familiar with Cassatt's work for the first time. See Bellion, "Chronology," 330-333; and Shackelford, "Pas de Deux," 110. For the Salons of 1875-1877, including the revision of Cassatt's portrait of Lydia, see Sweet, Miss Cassatt, 31-32.

53 Emily Sartain to John Sartain, 88 boulevard Courcelles [Paris], 8 May 1873; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 118.


During the Salon of 1874, the painting by Cassatt entitled Ida, a work which Sartain had roundly condemned as "a washed-out affair," attracted both attention and praise from another artist viewing the exhibition. When Cassatt's friend Joseph Gabriel Tourny pointed out this painting to Edgar Degas, Ida reputedly provoked from Degas the statement "It's true. Here is someone who feels as I do" (see Segard, Un Peintre, 35; quoted and translated in Mathews, Selected Letters, 126 n. 1). Sweet identified the woman who posed for Ida as Mme Cortier (Miss Cassatt, 31).
A vociferous critic of the Salon system, Degas had been instrumental in the formation of the “Société anonyme cooperative des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.” or in shorter form, the “Independents.” After her double rejection by the Salon in 1877, Degas approached Mary Cassatt for the first time and tendered to her a liberating invitation to join the Impressionist group. The introduction has been variously attributed to Léon Auguste Tourny (Mathews, Selected Letters, 121, 122 n. 1) and Joseph Gabriel Tourny (Shackelford, “Pas de Deux,” 109, 140 n. 4).

Biographer Sweet described this new home life as the imposition of “an eighteen-year bondage on the daughter, during which time she was beholden to their ill health and could not travel as she once had” (Sweet, Miss Cassatt, 33). Louïsine Havemeyer also remarked on the sacrificial aspect of Cassatt’s acceptance of her position of caregiver for her sister and her parents: “[holding] her duty high before her as a pilgrim would his cross . . . . No sacrifice was too great for her to make for her family.” Louïsine Havemeyer in Weitzenhoffer, Impressionism Comes to America, 28; see also Hirshler, “Cassatt and Art Collecting,” 191; and Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman.” 56.

Lydia died of Bright’s disease in 1882, and it is doubtful she modeled to the extent indicated by Adelyn Breeskin. In the Catalogue Raisonné, nearly any work with an unidentified woman has been descriptively titled “Lydia.”

56 Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, 13 avenue Trudaine [Paris], 13 Friday December 1878; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 143. Alexander Cassatt’s success within the Pennsylvania Railroad must have been a common topic of discussion in the Cassatt family, and cannot have helped Mary Cassatt’s self-confidence. His career peaked at the turn of the century, when Alexander Cassatt accepted the presidency of the Pennsylvania Railroad and became one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the United States.

Although he did not follow-up with future purchases, this portrait made Rodman Ellison one of the earliest collectors of Cassatt’s work in Philadelphia. Mary Cassatt’s father and brothers also intermittently worked as business men or railroad executives in the Philadelphia area, and Cassatt’s father moved the family to the city several times. This makes it possible that the two families were acquainted before the Marys met at Madame Del Sarte’s boarding school. For the commissioning of Mary Ellison’s portrait and other Cassatt patrons in Philadelphia, see Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 43; and Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 39, 29-30.

58 Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering, 1877, oil paint on canvas, 29 ¼ x 23 ½”; signed on the lower left: “M. S. Cassatt, Paris 1877.” Private Collection, Thayer Estate, Ithan, PA. Provenance: (1) Rodman Barker Ellison, Philadelphia; (2) his daughter Mary Ellison (Mrs. William) Walbaum, Ithan PA; (3) the Thayer Estate, by descent (Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 43, cat. no. 48; and Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 39, cat. no. 2).

By the 1880s Cassatt was consistently signing her works with “Mary Cassatt” or “M. C.”, and works which bear place and date in addition to this signature are rare.
Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering, however, the following paintings from the late 1870s and early 1880s bear the longer documentation: Young Woman on a Striped Sofa, with her Young Dog, signed on the upper left “M. S. Cassatt / Paris / 1875” (private collection); Mrs. Duffée Seated on a Striped Sofa, Reading (Young Woman Reading), signed on upper left “M. S. Cassatt / Paris / 1876” (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering, signed on lower left toward center “M. S. Cassatt / Paris 1877” (private collection, Pennsylvania). Works that show both signature and date are: The Reader (Femme assise, habillée on blanc), signed on lower right “M. S. Cassatt / 1877” (private collection, New York); Portrait of a Young Girl in a White Hat, signed on middle right “Mary Cassatt / 1879” (private collection, Paris); and Young Woman Buttoning her White Gloves (Femme mettant ses gants, or La femme au gant; Durand-Ruel number 7007-L9610) signed on upper left “M. S. Cassatt, 1880” (now destroyed, and no date is visible in the reproduction). See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. nos. 45, 47, 48, 50, 68, 74.


60 While the family informed Suzanne Lindsay that Mary Ellison was born in 1856, making her twenty-one in the painting, Mary Ellison’s daughter Evelina earlier wrote Adelyn Breeskin that the portrait had been painted in 1877 when her mother was eighteen. This gives Mary Ellison an 1859 birth date. Mary Ellison later married William Walbaum and the couple had several children. She died in 1936. See Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 39, 40 n. 1; and Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 43.

For Mary Ellison’s time in Paris and subsequent life in Pennsylvania, see Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 39, referencing Evelina Walbaum to Adelyn D. Breeskin, 23 October [1967], in the Thayer family archives; and Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 43, cat. no. 48, 58, cat. no. 80.

61 Evelina Walbaum to Adelyn D. Breeskin, 23 October [1967], in the Thayer family archives; referenced by Lindsay, Cassatt and Philadelphia, 39.

62 Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, 58.

63 Segard, Un Peintre, quoted and translated in Mathews, A Life, 342 n. 19. A small portrait inscribed to Mme Alfred Sisley, painted by Cassatt in 1873, indicates her familiarity with at least one of the Impressionists years before she accepted Degas’
invitation to participate in their exhibitions (oil paint on wood, 7 x 5 ½”, private collection, New York; see Mathews, Mary Cassatt, 29; 22-23, cat. no. 15).

64 Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, 13, avenue Trudaine [Paris], 18 April 1881; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 160-161. Robert Cassatt’s response to the 1879 exhibition had relied even more heavily on others’ responses to Mary’s success: “In addition to my letters I have also sent you a number of newspapers, art journals &c containing notices of Mame [Mary].— Her success has been more and more emphasized since I wrote and she even begins to tire of it— “The Artist” [L’Artiste] for May—edited by Arsène Houssaye—Alex Dumas etc. contains an extremely flattering notice of her— and the Review des Deux Mondes has an article entitled “Les Expositions d’art” page 478 very hard on the Independent artists generally—Makes an exception as to Mr Degas, & Mame, in terms that under the circumstances and the source must I think also be construed as very complimentary. The Philada Library takes the Deux Mondes—& you can of course get it from them. We hear also, almost daily of notices in other French & English papers which have escaped our notice— in short everybody says now that in future it dont matter what the papers say about her— She is now known to the Art world as well as to the general public in such a way as not to be forgotten again so long as she continues to paint!! Every one of the leading daily French papers mentioned the Exposition & nearly all named Mame—most of them in terms of praise, only one of the American papers noticed it and it named her rather disparagingly!!!” Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, 13, avenue Trudaine [Paris] Monday, 21 May 1879; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 143.


66 Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class, 179. There is a hierarchy not just of class, but of sex at work here: “The homely reason for all this conspicuous leisure and attire on the part of women lies in the fact that they are servants to whom, in the differentiation of economic functions, has been delegated the office of putting in evidence their master’s ability to pay.” Ibid., 182; see also Wolff, “Invisible Flâneuse,” 44.

67 Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class 148-149; see also Green, “Circuits of Production,” 31.

Among the Impressionists who frequented events at the Cassatt apartment were Degas, Pissarro, Renoir, and Berthe Morisot and her husband Eugène Manet, and she even made a print of George Moore in the Cassatt living room. On at least one occasion, Mary Cassatt invited both Edgar Degas and Stéphane Mallarmé to dine at the Cassatt apartment in Paris (Mary Cassatt to Stéphane Mallarmé, 22 January 1899, in Henri Mondor and Lloyd James Austin, eds. Stéphane Mallarmé Correspondance, vol. 3 [Paris 1969], 292, n. 1; in Shackelford, “Pas de Deux,” 131). On Cassatt’s social circle, see also Mathews, A Life, 163, 141; and Sweet, Miss Cassatt, 143.

Cassatt’s first meeting with Clemenceau took place in late 1884: “She was invited to meet Clemenceau (the great radical leader) at breakfast the other day and went. When you come she will tell you what she thought of him” (Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, 3 December 1884, in Sweet Miss Cassatt, 96). What Cassatt thought is suggested by a comment about Clemenceau she made later in life: “With a ball in his back [from a duel in 1871], he is certainly wonderful, but I hate his politics.” Mary Cassatt to Mrs. Jane Miller, 10 Rue de Marignan, 1919, in Ibid., 194.

In 1868 Emily Sartain wrote to her father: “Mr Muzio the impresario, now director of the Italian opera [Théâtre Italien] at Paris, and his wife are intimate friends of Miss Cassatt’s, and very warmhearted pleasant people (the wife is American),— and they gave us a letter of introduction to Signor Rossi the director of the opera here [in Parma]— He has been exceedingly kind. We left the letter of introduction at the theatre on the way to the Academy, and he called in the evening to say that he had at once consulted his mother about finding a suitable lodging.” Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Hotel Prince Albert—rue St. Hyacinthe St. Honore [Paris] 15 December; and Parma, 23 December 1871; Mathews, Selected Letters, 81, 82 n. 5.

On the theater and loge, see Martin-Fugier, “Bourgeois Rituals,” 278-279. Women in high-necked day dresses were seated on the ground floor during matinees, but the best place for them to see and be seen—which formed the major social goal in going to the theater—was in the space of a loge during an evening performance. See Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 46-47. Electricity began replacing gas light in the 1880s.


Baudelaire, Constantin Guys, 153-155; see also Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 46. In addition to being a friend of Baudelaire, Guys knew and was an influence upon Édouard Manet. Working mostly from memory, Guys drew and painted scenes from all over Paris, and he recorded both the seedy and the fashionable life of the city. Among the latter are representations of young women sitting in theater loges. Guys did not sign his images, which were bundled together and sold for a few shillings at bookshops and art dealers throughout Paris. See P. G. Konody, “Constantin Guys,” in Baudelaire, Constantin Guys, 10-11, 4; and Constantin Guys, “At the Theatre,” in Baudelaire, Constantin Guys, 19.

It is interesting to compare Baudelaire’s fairly passive women with May Alcott’s description of a late night drive through the active streets of Paris with the Cassatt sisters:
“all the world being abroad apparently till morning. The avenues lined . . . with brilliant street lights. . . . We turned into a great court-yard filled with little tables surrounded by a set of nice looking people sipping their coffee, wine or absinthe. The dense darkness of the wood surrounding it being illuminated by colored lamps giving the whole thing a most theatrical appearance. . . . We felt as if in a play, all was so fantastic.” Ticknor, May Alcott, 237-248; in Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 54.

72 For the situation of women who worked selling beer and often themselves in the cafés and brasseries of Paris during the latter part of the 19th century, and a consideration of interpretations by Degas and Manet of these women as both subjects and modern women, see Theresa Ann Gronberg, “Femmes de Brasserie,” Art History 7 (September 1984): 329-344.

73 “The woman’s shoe adds the so-called French heel to the evidence of enforced leisure afforded by its polish; because this high heel obviously makes any, even the simplest and most necessary manual work extremely difficult. The like is true even in a higher degree of the skirt and the rest of the drapery which characterises women’s dress. The substantial reason for our tenacious attachment to the skirt is just this: it is expensive and it hampers the wearer at every turn and incapacitates her for all useful exertion. . . . The corset is, in economic theory, substantially a mutilation, undergone for the purpose of lowering the subject’s vitality and rendering her permanently and obviously unfit for work. . . . loss suffered on that score is offset by the gain in reputation which comes of her visibly increased expensiveness and infirmity. It may broadly be set down that the womanliness of women’s apparel resolves itself, in point of substantial fact, into the more effective hindrance to useful exertion offered by the garments peculiar to women.” Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class, 171-172.

74 Eliza Haldeman to Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Ecouen 15 May 1867, in Mathews, Selected Letters, 46; Mary Cassatt to Paul Durand-Ruel, 22 January [1908], in Mathews, Selected Letters, 266-267; see also Kevin Sharp, “How Mary Cassatt Became an American Artist,” in Judith A. Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 163. Sharp dates the above Cassatt letter to 1906.

75 Simply being an American in Paris might have provided Cassatt with freedom unavailable to Frenchwomen of her class. See Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 181 n. 100; on the freedom allowed by a woman’s married versus single status, see Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 54; referencing Deborah Cherry, Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists (New York, 1991), 41-48.

It was commonly believed in 19th-century France that a hereditary and essential “temperament” constituted part of a people’s “national character” of both men and women. This sexist nationalistic chauvinism was used to excuse the lack of figure drawing opportunities for female French students. Since Frenchmen were more manly and Frenchwomen more womanly than their colder counterparts in England or America, the fact that co-ed life drawing classes caused no problems in these two countries proved nothing about would happen in France, where it was thought that the weakness of truly feminine women and the passion of truly masculine men would lead to scandal and


77 “Her circle among artists & litterary people is constantly extending & she enjoys a reputation among them not only as an artist—but also for literary taste & knowledge & which moreover she deserves for she is uncommonly well read especially in french literature.” Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, 13, avenue Trudaine [Paris] Friday, 13 December 1878; in Mathews, *Selected Letters*, 143.

78 Baudelaire, *Constantin Guys*, 67, 75.

79 Baudelaire, *Constantin Guys*, 17. “The Beautiful has always, inevitably, a twofold composition, even though the impression produced by it be but one. . . . The Beautiful consists of the eternal, invariable element, the quality of which it is exceedingly difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which may be, as you please, in turn or simultaneously. the epoch, the fashion, morality or passion. Without this second element, which is, as it were, the amusing, titillating, appetising [sic] envelope of the divine sweet, the first element would be indigestible, unappreciable, not adapted and not appropriate to human nature.” Ibid., 24; see also “On the Heroism of Modern Life,” in “The Salon of 1846, Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed by Charles Baudelaire,” trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1965), 117-118.

80 Baudelaire, *Constantin Guys*, 76-77. “Thus M. G. [Constantine Guys, the painter of modern life], whilst faithfully translating his own impressions, marks with instinctive energy the culminating or luminous points of an object (they may be culminating or luminous from the dramatic point of view), or its chief characteristics, sometimes even with an exaggeration that is useful for human memory; and the spectator’s imagination, subject in its turn to these very despotic mnemonics, perceives with clearness the impression produced by the objects upon M. G.’s mind.” Ibid., 80.

81 “There is in this trivial life, in the daily metamorphosis of exterior things, a rapid movement which demands from the artist an equal speed of execution.” Ibid., 29.

82 For Baudelaire, Constantin Guys epitomized the modern man: “The crowd is his element, just as the air is the bird’s as the water is the fish’s. His passion and his profession are to espouse the crowd. For the perfect loungers, for the passionate observer, it is an immense pleasure to choose his domicile among the multitude, in undulation and movement, in the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home, and yet to always be
at home; to see the world, to be in the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from
the world—these are some of these independent passionate, impartial spirits’ least
pleasures, which can only be clumsily defined by words. The observer is the prince who
always preserves his incognito. . . . He may also be compared with a mirror as immense
as that crowd; with a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which at every
movement represents the complexity of life and the moving grace of all the elements of
life. He is an ego, incapable of being satiated with the non-ego which at every moment
he renders and expresses in images more living than life itself, life being always unstable
and fugitive.” Baudelaire, Constantin Guys. 48-49.

For a discussion of gendered space that includes flâneurs and the situation of
women artists in both Paris and its suburbs, see Adler, “The Suburban, the Modern and
‘une Dame de Passy,’” 3-4. For the relationship between modernity and the city’s public
spaces as occupied by the male Flâneur, see T. J. Clark, The Painting of Modern Life:
Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1984). In her article referenced above, Adler’s discussion of Berthe Morisot’s time in
Passy underscores the injustice of Clark’s adherence to the belief in the inherent
superiority of the male-masculine gendered public spaces of the modern city over the
female-feminine gendered spaces of the suburbs. Instead, Adler argues that “the security
of a suburb like Passy provided a place in which women, instead of being invisible as
they were in the city, might, by resisting reinstatement in a wider society, be seen”
(Adler, “The Suburban, the Modern and ‘une Dame de Passy,’” 9). For a critique of
Clark’s Flâneur as, by definition, male and therefore as both excluding and
discriminating, see Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” in
Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art
(London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 50-90; for a more contextually nuanced view
of the impossibility of a female flâneur, see Wolff, “The Invisible Flâneuse,” 37-46. For
an internationally successful artist who, as a woman, embraced an independent and
unconventional personal life, see Albert Boime, “The Case of Rosa Bonheur: Why
Should a Woman Want to be More Like a Man?” Art History 4 (December 1981): 384-
409.

For Marie Bashkirtseff, the double standard was clear: “Ah! How women are to
be pitied; men are at least free. Absolute independence in everyday life, liberty to come
and go, to dine out, to dine at an inn or at home, to walk to the Bois or the café; this liberty
is half the battle in acquiring talent, and three parts of every-day happiness.” The Journal
of Marie Bashkirtseff, ed. Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker (London: 1985), 536;
quoted in Garb, “Self-Representation in the Case of Maria Bashkirtseff,” 82.

When Cassatt did not use family and friends as models, the “respectability” of the
women who posed for her is suggested by the artist’s efforts to find them household jobs
within her family. In one case, Cassatt suggested that her extremely proper sister-in-law
Louis Cassatt would find one of her models useful: “I have a Swedish model, whose
family are in America, & who is going over soon; when she goes I will give her your
address, tell Lois I think she will find her an excellent sewing girl, she was at Worths for
some time, & makes dresses very well, Lois might find her useful.” Mary Cassatt to
For Morisot as a feminine painter of a non-heroic and domestic modernity in the Parisian suburbs, see Adler, "The Suburban, the Modern and 'Une Dame de Passy,'" 9. Of the eight Independent exhibitions, Morisot missed only one, an absence presumably due to the birth of her daughter. The only man in a Morisot painting is her husband, Eugène Manet. Even then, he is usually depicted in company with their daughter. By comparison, Cassatt hired and painted Spanish men during her stay in Seville; used her father, brother, and numerous nephews as models; made prints, pastels, and paintings of adult male friends; and even incorporated a coach-driver and boatman into two of her paintings. Cassatt's position as an unmarried American in a foreign land worked to create a different experience than that of Morisot, who was a upper-class Frenchwoman, and both married and a mother (see Ibid., 10-11, 13 n. 45).

In one case, Morisot was upheld as the only true painter in the intrinsically feminine style of Impressionism; see Camille Mouclain, "Les salons de 1896," La Nouvelle Revue 100 (May-June 1896): 342-242; in Garb, "L'Art Féminin," 44, 60 n. 22. See also Tamar Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism," in Perspectives on Morisot, ed. Adler and Edlestein, 57-66; and Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women Art and Ideology (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). 41-44. For the critics lauding of Morisot's paintings, see Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 126-127.

"L'esthétique masculine est une esthétique de forme, l'esthétique féminine est une esthétique de mouvement." C. Dissard, "Essai d'esthétique féminine," La Revue féministe 1 (1895): 41; in Garb, "L'Art Féminin," 63 n. 51; see also Ibid., 50).

May Alcott Nieriker to Abigail May Alcott [Paris, November 1876], in Ticknor, May Alcott, 152-152.

"It may interest you to know what Degas said when he saw the picture you have just bought for your museum... Degas came to see me after he had seen it at Durand-Ruels. He was chary of praises but he spoke of the drawing of the woman's arm picking the fruit & made a familiar gesture indicating the line & said no woman has a right to draw like that" (Villa Angeletto, 28 December 1922; in Mathews, Selected Letters, 335, nn. 1-3). Cassatt recollected this statement in a letter written to Homer Saint-Gaudens, who as director of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute had purchased Young Women Picking Fruit, probably painted in the summer of 1892.


The practice continued in Cassatt's artistic circles. Berthe Morisot posed for Edouard Manet before her marriage to his brother Eugène. Mary Cassatt herself posed
for Degas, whose prints, drawings, and pastels feature her studying art at the Louvre and modeling hats at the milliner’s.

91 Katherine Cassatt appears alone in Reading “Le Figaro”, a three-quarter length 1878 painting of her dressed in white and sitting on an upholstered chair before a mirror while reading the newspaper; and reading again, this time to her grandchildren Katharine, Elsie, and Robert, in the 1880 painting Reading. An 1879-1880 etching entitled Evening (Le Soir) shows both Katherine and Lydia Cassatt, the first reading and the second sewing, gathered around a single pedestal light in an otherwise dark interior. Lydia appears in profile and alone on a park bench in the 1880 painting Autumn; alone in three-quarter view in the 1880-1881 painting Lydia Seated at an Embroidery Frame, which once again shows her sewing; and again in the 1880-1881 painting Tea (Le Thé), where she sits in profile with a raised tea cup. A painting from the same time entitled Driving (En Voiture) depicts Lydia driving a carriage in the company of Degas’ young niece Odile Fèvre and a male groom or coachman. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné of the Graphic Works, cat. no. 71; Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. nos. 96, 115, 65, 69; and Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 10; Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 69, fig. no. 32; Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. nos. 40, 29, 38, 33, 34.

92 Works in which Ellison appears will be discussed below. The following are among the works in which Cassatt depicted men during the late 1870s and early 1880s: an 1879 pastel portrait of Cassatt’s friend Moïse Dreyfus; a portrait of Marcellin Desboutin from about the same time which shows its subject smoking a pipe; and an etching, probably from 1880, of George Moore sitting in the Cassatt living room. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. nos. 66, 67; and Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné of the Graphic Works, cat. no. 27.

93 Edgar Degas to M. Le Comte Lepic supplier of good dogs, at Berk [1879], in Matthews, Selected Letters, 148; and in Guérin, ed., Degas: Letters, 144.

94 Mary Cassatt, At the Theater (Au théâtre), an 1879 mixed media painting of pastel and metallic paint on canvas now known as In the Loge. This work features a profile view of a woman backed by the corner of her red loge and distant yellow and red balconies. She wears chartreuse and holds a green and red fan open and parallel to the picture plane. Made of pastel and metallic paint on canvas, the work is now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat no. 61; Shackelford, “Pas de Deux,” 111, fig. 3.

95 Edgar Degas to Henri Rouart, Paris, Tuesday 26 Oct. 1880; in Guérin, Degas: Letters, 62. See also Bellion, “Chronology,” Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, 336. The Cassatts rented a house at Marly-le-Roi for the summer of 1879, where they were joined by Aleck’s children.

96 Cassatt takes her women even further into the public in such works as the 1881 Driving, which features Lydia driving a carriage; and the 1890-1891 print Interior of a Tramway passing a Bridge, which shows two women and a baby using public
transportation. See Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Graphic Work*, cat. no. 145; Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 58.

97 Mary Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Bachiviller [France], 11 October 1892; in Mathews, *Selected Letters*, 237-238.


The following are the works which most likely constituted Cassatt's contribution to the exhibition:

1. **Portrait de M. C.** [Portrait of Robert Simpson Cassatt, the artist's father], an oil painting listed as no. 46 in the 1879 catalog (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 29);
2. **Portrait de petite fille**, an oil painting now known as *Little Girl in Blue Armchair*, listed as no. 47 in the 1879 catalog (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 56);
3. **Etude de femme avec éventail** (Study of a Woman with a Fan) (Fig. 4.1), a circa 1878 oil painting now known as *Portrait of a Lady and Miss Mary Ellison*, listed as no. 48 in the 1879 catalog (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 80);
4. **Femme dans une loge**, an 1878-1879 oil painting of a blond woman now known as *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* and often identified as Lydia, listed as no. 49 in the 1879 catalog (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 64);
5. **Tête de jeune fille**, an unidentified work, listed as no. 50 in the 1879 catalog;
6. There is not a Cassatt work listed for catalog no. 51;
7. **Femme lisant** (Woman Reading), an oil painting now known as *Woman Reading* and as *Portrait of Lydia Cassatt, the Artist's Sister*, listed as no. 52 in the 1879 catalog and purchased by Antonin Proust before the end of the year. **Femme lisant** offers a profile view of a woman sitting in an upholstered green chair and reading a newspaper; as with the related work *On a Balcony* (shown in the 1880 exhibition as no. 20), the subject of this loosely painted work is usually identified as Lydia but looks like Mary Ellison (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. nos. 51, 94);
8. **Portrait of M. D.**, a pastel now known as *Portrait of d'homme* and as *Möise Dreyfus*, listed as no. 53 in the 1879 catalog (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. no. 66);
9. **Au théâtre** (At the Theater) (Fig. 4.5), an 1878-1879 mixed-media painting of pastel, gouache, and metallic paint on paper, listed as no. 54 or as no. 55.

333
in the 1879 catalog, and in the collection of Paul Gauguin by the end of the year (Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 72);

10. **Au théâtre**, an 1879 mixed-media painting of pastel and metallic paint on canvas now known as *In the Loge*, listed as no. 54 or as no. 55 in the 1879 catalog, and subsequently owned by Edgar Degas (Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 61);

11. **Dans un jardin** (*In the Garden*), an unidentified painting, listed as no. 56 in the 1879 catalog;

12. **Coin de loge** (*A Corner of a Loge*) (Fig. 4.6), an 1879 oil painting now known as *A Corner of a Loge* and as *In the Box*, included in the 1879 show but not listed in the catalog (Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 62).

Although Cassatt’s 1877-1878 oil painting *At the Français, a Sketch* (also known as *At the Opera* and *Woman in Black at the Opera*) has recently received critical attention, it was not among the works included by Cassatt in her shows with the Impressionists. This painting features a profile view of an unidentified woman in black peering intently through opera glasses at the loges across the theater to the viewer’s left; simultaneously, she is viewed through opera glasses by a man positioned opposite the external viewer. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 73; Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 17. For *At the Français, A Sketch* as Cassatt’s assertion of “the threat of femininity” in the face of relentless male scopic desire, and for a consideration of how their status as women kept female painters from appropriating the pervasive woman-as-image trope, see Griselda Pollock, “The Gaze and the Look: Women with Binoculars—A Question of Difference,” in Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock, eds, *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (New York: Universe, 1992). 125.

100 For works by other artists in the 1879 exhibition, see Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 51; and “The Fourth Exhibition: 1879,” in Berson, ed. *The New Painting*, vol. II: Exhibited Works, 103-142. For the purchases mentioned in the text below, see note 99 above.


103 **Mary Cassatt, Au théâtre (At the Theater)**, 1878-1879, pastel with gouache and metallic paints on tan wove paper, 25 ½ x 21 ½”, signed vertically on the left edge: “M. Cassatt”. Private Collection, Boston, MA. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 72; Barter et al., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. no. 19.


The following discussion will concentrate on the painting *Women in a Loge* (fig. 4.3) which is the stronger and more resolved of the two works. Although the pastel entitled *Women in a Loge* (fig. 4.4) is weaker in design than other works, it shows an unusual bridge between Cassatt’s two types of loge images. Mary Ellison and Geneviève Mallarmé are at front and center of a bowed theater box and seen against a mirrored reflection. However, on the left edge of the pastel Cassatt has drawn the side and bottom corner of the loge’s frame. This places the ladies at the front of the curved box, a location visible from three sides; and contextualizes the unity of their looks down, presumably at the theater stage itself.

In the active images that include Ellison, members of the audience are often abstract blur. However, other images by Cassatt that present women as objects to be seen and as subjects who actively look, do show male audience members actively looking back. See, for example, the *Woman in a Loge (Lydia with a Pearl Necklace)* of 1878-79 and *At the Français, a Sketch*, 1877-78.

For the linkage of white and virginity in nineteenth-century Paris, see Martin-Fugier, “Bourgeois Rituals,” 310.

See note 71 above.

See note 42 above.


Observations of this painting were made by the author on July 17, 1999 during the “Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman” exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. During the show the author also observed another painting which seems to depict Mary Ellison in a domestic setting: Cassatt’s *On the Balcony* painted in 1878-1879. Cassatt scholar Adelyn Breeskin referred to *On the Balcony* as *Lydia Reading in the Garden* (Breeskin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 61, cat. no. 94). When the work was painted, Mary Cassatt’s sister was both ill and forty-one or forty-two years of age. In contrast, the woman Cassatt paints reading a newspaper in *On the Balcony* is both young and vibrantly healthy. In addition, her Ellison-like soft brown hair parts on her left and is pulled back and rolled into a characteristic large chignon, her eyes are narrow with black pupils, her straight nose large and blocky, her chin slightly recessed, her lips wide and bow-shaped, and her distinctive eyebrows straight. Since these are features found in
known paintings of Ellison such as Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering (Fig. 4.2), Study of a Woman with a Fan (Fig. 4.1), and Women in a Loge (Fig. 4.3), the author believes Ellison is the woman shown reading in On the Balcony as well as in the more roughly painted Woman Reading (Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, 44-45, cat. no. 51; listed as Lydia Reading the Morning Paper). Both On the Balcony and Woman Reading share similar compositions, postures, clothing, and women. However, both depict a woman in her early morning déshabillé rather than in proper visiting clothes, indicating a greater intimacy and familiarity than perhaps can be expected except among family members. For this and reasons of space, they have not been included in this discussion of works featuring Ellison. On the dress, see Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 62.

113 Mary Cassatt, Interior: On the Sofa, ca. 1880, softground etching on cream wove paper, 5 9/16 x 8 9/16”, unsigned, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné of the Graphic Work, cat. no. 76 (as Interior: On the Sofa, ca. 1883); Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 42.

Mary Cassatt, Reading “Le Figaro” (Portrait of a Lady), 1878, oil on canvas, 41 x 33”, signed lower right: “Mary Cassatt”, private collection, Washington DC. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 128 (as 1883); Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 10.

Mary Cassatt, Tea (Le thé). 1879-1880, oil on canvas, 25 ½ x 36 ½”, signed lower left: “Mary Cassatt”, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 78 (as Five O’Clock Tea, 1880); Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 27.

A bolder green and red floral pattern dominates the chair in the 1884 portrait of Alexander and his son Robert. Mary Cassatt, Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and His Son Robert Kelso Cassatt, 1884-1885, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 32”, signed lower left: “Mary Cassatt, 1884”, Philadelphia Museum of Art. See Breeskin, Catalogue Raisonné, cat. no. 136; Barter et al., Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman, cat. no. 46.

114 Cassatt’s use of colored frames was an abrupt rejection of the traditional gold frame seen at the Salon. Although he does not seem to have taken it as far, Degas also experimented with framing. See Barter, “Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman,” 49; citing Le Soir 1879; see also Ronald Pickvance, “Contemporary Popularity and Posthumous Neglect,” in Charles Moffett et al., The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874-1886 (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1986), 264.

115 See text page 259 above.

116 For Baudelariare, see text page 241 above.

117 See text page 239 above.


119 Barter also compares the loge paintings of Cassatt with those of Renoir. See Ibid., 49-50.
120 Baudelaire, Constantine Guys, 138-143.


References


———. At the Theater (Au théâtre). 1878-1879. Pastel with gouache and metallic paints on tan wove paper. Private Collection, Boston.


———. Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering. 1877. Oil paint on canvas. Private Collection, Ithan, Pennsylvania.

———. Study of a Woman with a Fan. ca. 1878. Oil paint on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.


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CHAPTER V
THE EVALUATION OF THE NUANCED GAZE

The primary aim in this investigation has been to develop and test Lacanian-based psychoanalytic Gaze theory as a tool for the interpretation of figurative paintings. To this end, the selected artworks offered different interpretative opportunities: in Chapter II, Titian’s *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* provided a situation wherein male and female figures from Roman legend interacted within a narrative; Chapter III considered the potential of Gaze theory when applied to John Singleton Copley’s double portrait of a husband and wife, *Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin*; and although Chapter IV considered Mary Cassatt’s painting of a single introspective woman in *Study of a Woman with a Fan*, it also broadened the investigation to consider other images in which the artist used her friend as a model. Together, these studies allowed for the application of Gaze theory to images featuring both legendary and actual historic subjects, in works created for specific patrons and for public exhibition.

One aspect of Gaze theory being investigated was how well it integrated with and expanded the possibilities of traditional art historical methods. The investigation found that Gaze theory coordinated well with Panofsky’s culturally-grounded iconographic methodology, incorporated the evidence offered by the “paintedness” of the paintings to a greater extent than possible with iconology alone, and illuminated the gendered and social positioning of both the internal viewers within the images and the external viewers implied through the compositions. In sum, for the cases investigated within this study, the application of integrated Gaze theory created richer, more nuanced meaning than was possible when the interpretive tools stood alone. The following section will discuss the findings in each chapter, beginning with Iconography and ending with the meanings produced by an expanded Gaze theory.
Iconography

Iconography sets the stage for subsequent interpretation by gathering and ordering information about the selected artwork and artist. This search included the artist's own background and cultural context, the opinions of contemporaries and his or her patronage situation, and the history of the artwork under investigation. This broad background was assembled for each of the artists under discussion in the previous chapters, and formed the ground for subsequent interpretations. In iconographic explorations of the paintings, individual motifs were identified as images and linked together into a narrative, which then became secondary or conventional subject matter. Iconography functioned most clearly with Titian's painting *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio*, where the situation of an armed man, woman, and bedroom was illuminated through reference to Lucretia's story as found in Livy's *History of Rome* and Ovid's *Fasti*. In Chapter III, which considered the Copley portrait of the Mifflins, and Chapter IV, which investigated Cassatt's multiple images of Mary Ellison, establishing the identity of the subjects, their environments, and their accessories constituted this stage of investigation.

After the identification stage, the exploration broadened into a consideration of types and themes. Once again, Titian's painting provided the scope for the deepest iconographic investigation, for as chastity and adultery surfaced repeatedly in sixteenth-century Europe, Lucretia became a "type" in literature and visual art. Conflicting revivals of her story transformed the Roman matron into a Christianized symbol of female excellence who became a martyr in the name of wifely chastity, and into an agent of consensual adultery whose guilt drove her to suicide. Further, Titian appropriated aspects of Northern European prints from the Lucretia "type" tradition, reworking and revising the compositions within a series of paintings produced by the artist and his workshop. In the process, Titian and his studio created paintings that dealt with the suicide and rape of Lucretia. Analysis of these related artworks revealed both the debt *Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio* owed to previous prints and paintings, and the extent to which the work offered a unique interpretation of the Lucretia theme. All of this provided a rich background for a subsequent iconologic interpretation. In contrast, as
a single treatment of its subject, Copley’s portrait Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris) lacked the genealogy of text and type found in the Titian work. This difference occurred because the eighteenth-century work is a portrait and because painting as a discipline was beginning to develop away from textual iconography. In a further dissimilarity with the Titian painting, the individuality of Copley’s image extended from its Quaker patrons to incorporate both the couple’s interaction within the painting and Sarah Mifflin’s fringe loom. Cassatt’s multiple images of Mary Ellison provided yet another iconographic situation, for in their painting style and subject these works fit within the types of “impressionist painting,” “woman’s painting,” and the “modern painting” espoused by Baudelaire. In addition, although Cassatt’s individual art works were unique in composition, they shared models, accessories, and settings. This made it possible to compare images that used the same subject, Mary Ellison, but placed her in related yet varied situations and contexts.

For all of the images this study has considered, iconography determined the “meanings” of items within the paintings. In Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio, iconography was vital in identifying the moment in Lucretia’s narrative. The method also illuminated Tarquin’s coloration as indicative of raging passion, his grasp on her raised arm as a sign of rape, and her pearls and hairstyle as symbols of virtue appropriate for a chaste Venetian matron. With Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin, iconography categorized his clothing as appropriate for a plain Quaker, and hers as exhibiting the refined elegance of a wet Quaker. Further, iconography identified their postures as genteel and their accessories—his book, her loom and corsage—as markers of refinement and elevated social class. On another level, iconography also identified the meanings of the flowers within Sarah Mifflin’s corsage. In its study of a specific painting, iconography had less direct evidence to work with in Cassatt’s Study of a Woman with a Fan. However, a broadened investigation revealed that Cassatt repeatedly used her friend Mary Ellison as a model both in the public arena of the theater and in the private spaces of a domestic environment. In addition, Cassatt’s multiple representations of “woman in a loge” were revealed as belonging to an ideal image-type of modern beauty, and
fashionable articles of ornamentation such as fans were identified as symbolic of feminine display. Indeed, clothing, objects, and accessories eventually proved pivotal in constructing the social façades of the characters or people pictured in all of these artworks. By illuminating meanings held at the time of a work’s creation, iconography helped to construct the cultural screens through and upon which the individual paintings originally were perceived by contemporaries and continue to be seen by the historically literate viewer of today.

**Iconology**

Analysis for the purpose of interpretation begins the process of iconography in the deeper sense, or iconology. The goal is to reveal how the work mirrors the guiding principles and attitudes held by the producing culture, and so to excavate content which had been unconsciously embodied into the work by the artist during the process of creation. In order to probe this deeper meaning, iconology places the evidence offered by iconography and the artwork itself within a reconstruction of the culturally relevant environment. In addition to Renaissance theories about the “art” manifested in Titian’s paintings, treatises on proper female behavior, the nature of feminine virtue in a patriarchal society obsessed with the purity of patrician bloodlines, and analysis of sex crimes against women in Venice, all helped to contextualize the interpretation of Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio. Against this background, iconology revealed Lucretia as a “symptom” of cultural anxiety in an environment where sexual violence against women was common and chastity formed a patrician woman’s defining virtue.

With Copley’s painting, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin, iconology enriched and complicated the painting’s context by bringing into consideration the differing social, professional, and political goals of artist and patrons during the strife-ridden atmosphere preceding the American Revolution. Further, in incorporating the Quaker prohibition of images and adornment, iconology considered the impact Thomas and Sarah Mifflin’s Quaker beliefs might have had on the painting’s context. Finally, reconstructing the
cultural climate of the individuals involved in the painting’s construction allowed Sarah Mifflin’s act of fringe weaving to be interpreted as a deliberate political act.

A series of images by Mary Cassatt entailed a less structured and less focused application of iconology for three reasons. First, the nature of the investigation focused upon multiple works; second, the images themselves contain less pure iconographic content; and third, Lacanian Gaze theory had become more integrated into the interpretive process at this point in the overarching investigation. However, the broad themes of women, gender, and specularity united Cassatt’s images and integrated them into the prevailing ethos of visuality in late nineteenth-century Paris. The chapter discussed four image types in which Cassatt used her friend Mary Ellison as a model: a commissioned portrait, theater images in which women function as spectacle within the semi-public space of the loge, other theater images in which women participate as active spectators of the modern public, and an exploration Study of a Woman with a Fan, which placed Ellison in the private space of the home. Written texts were instrumental in constructing the contextual background for our interpretation of Cassatt’s paintings, for they elucidated the gender-linked positions of men and women in French society and in the arts. Assigned a superficial, irrational, and emotional character, woman’s chief art was the construction of decorative façades. A woman augmented the creation and ornamentation of her own fashionable appearance by exercising her “feminine nature” through the creation of a comfortable and decorative home environment. Baudelaire, whose writings on modernity greatly influenced the artists with whom Cassatt exhibited as an Impressionist, also espoused this limited, gender-linked view of women. For the poet, the decorative appearance of women epitomized the beauty of modern life, and this was especially true when young ladies were encased by the frame of a theater loge. This constitutes exactly the scene represented in several of Cassatt’s paintings of Mary Ellison. However, echoing the prevalent nineteenth-century understanding, Baudelaire viewed women as stupid creatures of superficial glitter rather than as intelligent human beings. Cassatt’s own writings countered this view, and worked with and against the societal positioning of woman as feminine. Her explanation of “modern woman” posited
a femininity that encompassed both the creation of beautifully fashionable façades and the existence of an individual and intelligent human being. However, given the weight of contemporary opinion and the prevalence of texts that devalued woman’s intelligence and equated her worth with spectacle, Cassatt’s own use of female models, women whom she repeatedly placed in positions that highlighted their status as spectacle, creates a potential conflict in the heart of a strict iconologic interpretation.

Using iconology to interpret the works in which Cassatt used Ellison as a model reveals the limiting difficulties of that method. Our investigation revealed that in all but one of the Ellison images, Cassatt used fans to defend her model from the external viewer. Iconography can identify and explicate the use of fans as fashionable accessories, and iconology can link them to the status of woman as spectacle within the spaces of public modernity described by the poet Baudelaire. However, the reference remains general rather than specific to both the individual images and to Cassatt’s own empowered view of “modern woman.” Without the nuance made possible by considering the “artist’s Gaze,” Cassatt appears to use the beautiful façades of women, as did her male colleagues, to decorate the spectacle of modern space. A few individual pieces stretch beyond this and reach a deeper meaning. The deliberate composition and visible facture in At the Theater (Au théâtre) made it possible for iconology to suggest that the work deals with the art of painting itself. Given Cassatt’s own struggle for artistic validation and her continued use of Ellison as a model in a climate where women were equated with beauty, ornamentation, and spectacle, the notion of artistic representation is a fertile theme. However, by itself iconology cannot present a conclusive interpretation, nor does this isolated suggestion integrate At the Theater effectively with Cassatt’s use of Ellison in other images. Without the input of Gaze theory, an iconological investigation of Study of a Woman with a Fan presents a related and even more disturbing problem. When viewed through iconology alone, it is possible for a viewer to read the painting as a representation of the shallow and self-indulgent “feminine” of the French ideal, a situation at odds with Cassatt’s own actions and the intelligence she attributed to “modern woman.” Through iconology, artistic and cultural
context combine with subject matter to create rather superficial interpretations when compared with the meanings produced by Chapter IV’s integrated application of Gaze theory.

These problems arise because iconographic interpretations lack a means for effectively coordinating cultural information with the visual and material evidence offered by the painting itself. One important area beyond the easy grasp of Panofsky’s method is a consideration of how the acts of looking structured by the artist—both the painted figures and the implied external viewer—interact to create cultural meanings. A corollary to this, also important for a nuanced interpretation, is the manner in which the artist positions the external viewer relative to the space, action, and figures within the painting. And finally, by treating the painting as a seamless surface containing distinct symbols waiting to be read, rather than as an interwoven fabric of brush-strokes created over time by a desiring subject, both iconography and iconology fail to adequately consider the painterly nature of the painting as a painting. As iconography focuses upon the identification and categorization of the images within a painting, it reads them as factual or expressive characters, places, or things, rather than as idiosyncratic semblances crafted with paint. With iconologic analysis and interpretation, Panofsky’s methodology moves even further from the “paintedness” of the surface, since the manner in which an artist described something is not, in and of itself, important for the elucidation of how the artwork’s content embodies the philosophies and beliefs of the producing culture.

Interpretations Produced by an Integrated and Nuanced Gaze Theory

When the artist creates a painting by combining images into a composition, he or she integrates the individual “motifs” into a unified whole that initially resists compartmentalization by the viewer into separate objects, people, and expressions. By taking apart this coordinated representation, however, it is possible to read the painting as an inventory of individual objects, atmospheres, and people, whose combination awaits iconographic investigation. Alternately, a viewer can read the painted surface as a field on which brushwork and anomalies in paint handling mark the presence of the artist.
Paintings function as paintings, rather than as imprecise inventories or illustrations, because a desire-laden individual has created a semblance which both represents and exceeds the chosen iconographic subject matter. The surface of a painting is the product of a creative act of vision that, in Lacanian terms, traces the artist’s unconscious desire to regain a lost unity with the “seeingness” of the visual world. In investigating paintings by Titian, Copley, and Cassatt, we have considered surface anomalies as markers for painterly desire. In an overall factured surface, as with Titian and Cassatt, areas that resonated unconsciously for the artists were found where the paint handling became tighter and the façade more illusionary. With Copley’s tightly controlled and seamless style, his creative presence as artist was indicated through unusual areas of visible brush strokes and impasto. Together with curiously placed or formed signatures, stylistic anomalies functioned to mark the painter’s unconscious desires and his or her scopic drive for visual unity.

In Titian’s Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio, the composition, paint handling, and signature placement combine to create an image that situates the external viewer in a position of humility before, and sympathy with, Lucretia as the victim of a violent crime. Unlike other images within this type, a viewer open to the evidence offered by the painting itself is not encouraged to mentally abet Tarquin as either the rapist or seducer of a virtuous wife. This is an interpretation that goes further than iconography alone, for it necessitates reading, through the painting itself, how Titian emphasized Lucretia’s trapped and heroic status. Gaze theory also provided the opportunity to reconstruct separate cultural screens for Venetian women and men, and to hypothesize different responses and interpretations of the painting based upon their content. For the patrician Venetian woman, the painting might have emphasized the pivotal importance of the premier female virtue, chastity; a defining quality which secured her position and worth as daughter, sister, wife, and mother within the rigid constraints of her governing patriarchal society. In addition, the painting would have reminded a woman how tenuously she held that virtue within a cultural climate where violent sexual assault on women was understood to be a natural precursor for the
consensual crimes of fornication and adultery. In contrast, Titian’s painting confronted a patrician Venetian man with a decision. He could empathize with a woman who was held up to his female kin as a virtuous ideal; or like the internal watcher, he could vicariously enjoy her sexual violation and destruction. If he sought a superficial reading which ignored the painting’s evidence and reveled in the destruction of a virtuous wife, the painting itself would have unsettled his contemplation and compelled his eyes to move across the surface. However, if he were sensitive to the nuances of the painted surface, and open to the possibility that a woman might act with virtuous strength, he read Titian’s painting as upholding Lucretia’s chastity and moral strength.

A contextually grounded and iconographically informed Gaze theory found in Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio a work which emphasizes the brutality of rape in a way which evokes viewer sympathy for Lucretia. Further, although we are mirrored within the painting by an internal watcher whose active spectatorship indicates avid complicity, the composition and paint handling encourage us to separate from Tarquin and connect psychologically with Lucretia and her plight. In this way, the application of a contextually based and iconologically informed Gaze theory reveals Lucrezia Romana Violata da Tarquinio as a work which epitomizes art’s power to communicate the “secrets of the heart” to a sensitive viewer. Thus, nuanced Gaze theory finds an overarching meaning beyond the reach of a strict iconographic interpretation: the pathos surrounding the life of women in Renaissance Italy.

Copley’s portrait of Thomas and Sarah Mifflin presents different issues for Gaze theory, for here the artist represents actual, and influential, people who had a vested interest in the portrait and with whom the artist interacted during the painting process. The painting Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin was created in a society that defined people by sex, occupation, family background, and allegiance in the heightened and increasingly polarized political atmosphere of pre-Revolutionary America. In addition, at the time of the commission, both painter and patron were experiencing intense personal ambition. By reading the corsage as an emblem for fine art, it is possible to imagine a relationship between Sarah Mifflin’s artfully constructed and successfully implemented façade of
gentility and Copley’s own desire for acceptance as a gentleman. However, since iconology lacks a means of explaining the connection, it remains only a tantalizing speculation. In contrast, with the concept of the “painter’s Gaze,” Lacanian-based theory provides a reason for focusing upon disruptions in the painting’s screen, and for connecting those anomalies to the iconological context of the painter and the painting. Gaze theory uses surface facture and the compositional positioning of the external viewer as indications of Copley’s uneasy and unconscious identification with Sarah Mifflin’s successful projection. This evidence from the painting itself substantiates the connection between artful corsage, artful painting, and artful social façade. In addition, Gaze theory’s ability to take into consideration both the active looks of those pictured within the painting and the compositional positioning of the external viewer increases the importance of cultural context in building meaning. Although Gaze theory cannot access the iconography of politics necessary to understand the importance of Sarah’s fringe-loom, it isolates the viewer and subordinates him, or her, relative to the combined front presented by the couple. Considering the positioning of the Mifflins relative to each other and to the implied viewer reveals Sarah Mifflin’s function as linchpin between her husband, who in 1773 was involved in important sub-rosa political activity, and the external viewer who has momentarily engaged her attention. Further, the threads of the loom and the completed fringe both bear unusual impasto brush marks similar to those used by Copley in the corsage, and once again mark the painter’s presence. Combining the social identification revealed through Copley’s treatment of the corsage, and the political association inherent in the fringe loom, an integration of iconology and Gaze theory suggests that the painting’s viewer—a position originally occupied by Copley himself—does not measure up either socially or politically to the ideals espoused by the Mifflins. How could Copley, a man of intense professional and social ambitions, position himself in such a definitively inferior position relative to his clients? Gaze theory does show how Copley’s attention to the metaphorical corsage combines with his positioning of the viewer to reveal as unfulfilled his own desire to be accepted as, and therefore become, a gentleman. Balancing this is Copley’s success as he reached, for the first time,
the exalted sphere of “great art.” By implying political meaning in a humble portrait painting, he transformed Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin into a “muffled” history painting and achieved his life-long ambition of creating fine art. These dual meanings are inaccessible without the application of a contextually grounded and culturally aware integration of iconology and Lacanian-based Gaze theory.

Gaze theory identifies complex layers of meaning within Cassatt’s images of Mary Ellison. As demonstrated by iconologic interpretation, a woman who presented herself to society in the space of the loge formed a picture that encapsulated her own feminine virtue and the wealth and status of her family. Gaze theory augments this, showing how appropriation and manipulation empowered women to transform the attributes of “femininity” into lures that attract attention and into shielding masks which deflect the judging societal Gaze. Fans provide a central element in this expanded investigation into the nature of specularity and the construction of representative façades. In most of the images of Ellison, Cassatt uses fans to defend her model from the external viewer and to reinforce the linkage between fan and feminine appearance, both of which formed crafted and decorative façades. This situation highlights the multivalent nature of these images, which simultaneously function as pictures of modernity, as investigations of the art of painting, and as examinations of the presentation of self within a society which seeks to limit and confine possibilities. By considering Cassatt’s own equivocal position as woman and painter, Gaze theory shows how fans function not just as culturally approved symbols of femininity, but also as signs for the façades crafted by women in their status as objects-of-beauty. As revealed by Gaze theory, Cassatt’s theater images explore both women’s positioning as self-created objects of spectacle, and their simultaneous existence as intelligent individuals who interact with the modern spaces of the theater both as seen objects and as viewing subjects.

Gaze theory uses the concept of the “artist’s Gaze” to allow for a more nuanced interpretation that considers Cassatt’s own equivalent position. The images of Mary Ellison explore the connections between spectacle and spectator, fashion and painting, and the artist’s own masculine and feminine qualities. As a respectable, if foreign,
woman, Mary Cassatt was limited to “feminine” subjects represented in socially acceptable ways; as a “modern artist,” she took her subjects from daily life; and as a painter who viewed the world with “masculine eyes,” she developed strong designs and great technical ability. Cassatt’s compositional constructions and decorative surfaces combine with changes in painting style and repeated emphasis on mirrors, gloved hands, and fans, to reference the artist’s own dual situation as a “masculine” fine artist and as a “feminine” woman. At the same time, Cassatt manipulated space and viewpoint to unsettle and even displace the external viewer from the physical and psychological space occupied by the women she pictures. The kaleidoscopic environment of modern Paris immersed its inhabitants in spectacle, and Cassatt shows Mary Ellison actively participating as a viewer even as she receives and deflects the attention of the cultural Gaze.

With regard to surface, layers of broken color, media combinations, repetition of decorative colors and shapes, and occasional unusual signature placement were found to be important to Cassatt’s images. Iconology reveals her painting style as both appropriately feminine for the greater cultural context of late nineteenth-century France, and as essentially modern for the Impressionist artists with whom Cassatt now associated. With Gaze theory, however, attention to the surface and construction of the works allows multiple images to be read, on one level, as being about creating painted representations, even about fine art itself. Further, in Study of a Woman with a Fan, anomalous areas of tighter paint handling amidst the “impressionist” surface facture link Mary Ellison with her reflection and with the surface of the mirror. This linkage of woman with mirror and the subliminal association of Ellison with a highly ordered composition combine to create for her a contemplative and orderly character quite different from the superficial and self-indulgent reverie attributed to the French “feminine.” The unusual placement of Cassatt’s signature, which metaphorically seats the artist beside Ellison on the sofa, shows the artist’s own solidarity with Ellison’s act of intelligent and “unfeminine” introspection. In consequence, it is possible to read Ellison’s meditation, and the painting
itself, as a "dark reflection" upon the construction of self-identity within a culture which used gender bias to restrict woman's behavior and potential.

The application of Gaze theory also allowed us to posit different meanings for male and female viewers in Cassatt’s Paris. Women perceived works that dealt with the constructed nature of representation in the feminine and masculine arts, and with women’s own potential as spectators of others and of self in nineteenth-century Paris. In short, Cassatt’s images presented their feminine viewing audience with the “making oneself to be seen” which provides the momentary self-satisfaction of the scopic drive. Obviously, this would be an individual satisfaction experienced as a human subject rather than by the glittery inhumanity of Baudelaire’s woman. Men viewing the Ellison images would confront works that both conformed to and undermined the cultural positioning of woman as an object-to-be-seen. The “feminine” subject matter and “impressionistic” painting style, both so appropriate for a “woman-painter,” were balanced and even counteracted by the “masculine” strength of Cassatt’s design skills and the way the compositions obstruct the viewer’s attempt to assume the position of Gaze relative to the women pictured.

For Lacan, “masculine” and “feminine” provided some of the strongest masquerades with which a subject could play on the cultural screen and work against the defining cultural Gaze, and mimetic painting offered artists a similar opportunity. Cassatt’s paintings might be viewed as explorations of this masking process, for they are “feminine” in superficial appearance but subversive in their construction and subliminal in their content. In her images of Mary Ellison, Cassatt empowered the woman with individuality, active looking, and intelligence, and so constructed a modern femininity different from that of the prevailing culture. As illuminated by Gaze theory, the works address the “arts” of crafting a painted representation and fashioning and presenting a self-façade within the public and private spaces of contemporary Paris; the reconstruction of “femininity” as embodied in a “modern” woman who exists as a highly individual subject possessing intelligence, rationality, and fashionable grace; and the very nature of specularity within a society which sought to define woman as object-to-be-seen. Without
doubt, the application of Gaze theory enriched the interpretation of these often overlooked paintings. As with the Copley and Titian interpretations discussed above, the interwoven directions revealed in Cassatt's images of Mary Ellison are only accessible through the application of a Lacanian-based psychoanalytic Gaze theory which has been informed by iconology and grounded within a cultural screen. The results clearly demonstrate that a nuanced Gaze theory does hold potential for the interpretation of western figurative paintings.

Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Finally, let me conclude with a brief coda that demonstrates further the rich interpretive potential of nuanced Gaze theory. Two paintings and artists not yet discussed suggest the possibilities: James Stuart, Fourth Duke of Lennox and First Duke of Richmond by Anthony van Dyck (ca. 1633) and The Sustained Comedy (Portrait of an Object) by Marsden Hartley (1939). In his portrait of James Stuart, van Dyck turns his "painter's Gaze" onto a royal male, creating a painting which suggests the necessity for a Gaze sensitive to court etiquette, personal and aristocratic status, and the "feminine" qualities of a male artist and patron. In contrast, the twentieth-century American painter Marsden Hartley consciously turns himself into the object for his own painter's Gaze, creating a stylized self-portrait that contains narrative symbols of his own personal history.

Van Dyck's ca. 1633 painting James Stuart, Fourth Duke of Lennox and First Duke of Richmond would further nuance the Gaze in a gender-sensitive investigation into the interaction of a male painter and a male patron in a visually-oriented patriarchal culture: the royal courts of seventeenth-century England. In this portrait, van Dyck used his "feminine" painterly style to create a representation of a powerful royal male whose own self-presentation involved "feminized" qualities. Further, the painter headed his own aristocratic household even as he served as a subsidiary member of the Stuart court family. As a successful portrait painter, van Dyck must have been exquisitely sensitive to the nuances of court status and etiquette. His crafted image presents the Duke as a public
figure who, although aware of the artist-viewer’s scrutiny, does not quite return it.

Building the contextual background for the operation of a blended iconologic and Gaze methodology would involve investigating the artist, the patron, and issues related to court portraiture. Consideration of objects, clothing, and setting, would involve inquiry into courtly behavior, including the bearing, fashionable clothing, and status of the Duke. This in turn would incorporate the related issues of chivalry and aristocratic pastimes. A parallel investigation into the visual and compositional evidence offered by the portrait’s painted surface, including areas of stylistic anomaly and compositional emphasis, would track the presence and interests of van Dyck. At the same time, the artist’s own success as a portrait painter, and this work’s reception within the court setting, signaled the artist’s acceptance of the court hierarchy and his recognition of his subject as a royal aristocrat. The interplay between the controlling and creative “Gaze” of the artist, the work’s style, and the social and painted positioning of its subject and the external viewer all should provide rich opportunities for the application of a nuanced Gaze.

The success of the above investigations of paintings by Copley and Cassatt, which address the interplay of artist and patron, suggests that a Lacanian-based Gaze theory might also prove fertile when the work being explored is a self-portrait and the artist’s gaze turns onto the self. An iconographically rich 1939 painting by Marsden Hartley would provide an excellent opportunity for such an inquiry. \(^3\) In building the contextual background against which the picture might be understood, Hartley’s biography, his travels to Europe, his homosexuality, and his paintings would all merit attention. Further, since Hartley was an avant-garde artist associated with Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 Gallery in New York City, the role of painting within the rising modern art movement in America during the early part of the twentieth century would also be addressed. Hartley’s own writings and letters would augment the evidence offered by his paintings and their context. Seeing assumes an important place in Somehow A Past, an autobiography upon which the artist was working in 1939. \(^4\) This manuscript addresses issues that parallel those raised by Lacanian Gaze theory, for Hartley associates vision and presence with the subject, and absence and blindness with the object. The interconnection between sight,
memory, and individuality is also raised directly and indirectly as he frequently refers to
eyes and seeing while avoiding the recollection of some events and repeatedly returning
to others. Hartley’s 1939 self-portrait references the above concerns. Entitled The
Sustained Comedy (Portrait of an Object) and bearing on its back in the artist’s
handwriting the word “travesty,” the painting is a fertile site for the application of a
Lacanian-based Gaze theory. Then in his fifties, the artist depicts himself as a young
blond man whose muscled body is covered with symbolic tattoos connected to art and his
own past. A lighting bolt of inspiration strikes his forehead and large arrows pierce his
eyes to metaphorically create blindness. The artist is simultaneously creative subject and
sightless object, and this symbolically rich self-portrait has been interpreted as a
statement of the artist’s homosexuality and as a painting of ritual blinding and of
mourning. The application of Lacanian Gaze methodology might reveal whether the
painting also investigates a decentered individuality and the construction—and
destruction—of the subject.

When Gaze theory is merged with traditional art historical approaches, the
combination of interpretive tools creates a “nuanced” Gaze theory that possesses an
inclusive flexibility and sensitivity to situational differences that enables it to reach
beyond the textually tied constraints of a pure iconological method. Gaze theory
identifies key portions within a painting’s surface, areas that create or reveal meaning.
Since it does so without regard for the establishment of a single dominant interpretation,
this can be a liberating and enriching tool that cuts across the textual evidence offered by
the societal context. Further, meanings produced by Gaze methodology change
according to the cultural screen through which the work is filtered, and allow multiple
possibilities to exist simultaneously. We saw this happen with the paintings of Sarah and
Thomas Mifflin, and the multiple images in which Cassatt employed Mary Ellison as a
model. The interpreter’s own influence upon the process provides an additional screen
that augments those of artist and model, for the interpretive process consciously and
unconsciously prioritizes possibilities and privileges meanings. In this way, Gaze theory
shows how and why different viewers, armed with different screens, assign divergent
meanings to the same work. The Copley and Cassatt chapters show how the multiple and divergent screens intrinsic to portraiture (or quasi-portraiture, in the case of Mary Ellison) reveal a unique collaboration, or perhaps collusion, between the painter’s desires, the artist’s desires, and the desires of the external viewer. Nuanced Gaze theory provides the critical art historian with an inclusive method sensitive to the individuality of artist, patron, subject, viewer—and the painting itself. For western figurative paintings, and especially for those portraying actual people, a historically grounded and iconographically informed nuanced Gaze theory holds great value as an investigative and interpretive tool.
Notes


3 For Hartley, see Barbara Haskell, Marsden Hartley (New York: Whitney Museum, 1980); and Gail Scott, Marsden Hartley (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988).

References


