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ALICE IN MANHATTAN

By U. C. Knoepflmacher

"'WILL YOU WALK A LITTLE FASTER?' *said a whiting to a snail, / 'There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.'"* The opening lines of the "Lobster-Quadrille" sung so "very slowly and sadly" (*AAIW* 79) by the Mock Turtle rang in my ears whenever I found myself blocked by slow-moving viewers at the Morgan Library's superb exhibit of "Alice: 150 Years of Wonderland." The leisurely progress of my fellow-spectators was an obvious testimony to our fascination with the 106 objects on display. Chronologically arranged and divided into separate frames in fourteen glass cases, these materials – some never seen before – were complemented by two touch-screens and one short film.

Once again, all of New York seemed mesmerized by Wonderland's inexhaustible nonsense. Having already been a prime site for the centennial celebration of Lewis Carroll's birth in 1932, the city now boasted a host of conferences and dramatic reenactments. But the scope and cohesion offered by the Morgan exhibit so finely curated by Carolyn Vega remained a central magnet for all such festivities. While flocks of visitors lingered over the 1864 manuscript of *Alice's Adventures Underground* on loan from the British Library, a scholarly *flaneur* could stumble upon many surprising discoveries.

The comic cartoon-sequence that a thirteen-year-old Charles Dodgson devised for his younger siblings furnished an unforeseen preamble to the 1864 and 1865 Alice texts. Created for five-year-old Louisa and seven-year-old Wilfred, "A Tale of a Tail" reveals a teenage fascination with an appendage of "desperate length," a tail "of muscle, bone, and

strength." Affixed here to a vainglorious "cur," this curled extremity would resurface as the typographically narrowing tail that contains the Mouse's "long" and "sad tale" in both the hand-drawn *Underground* and printed *Wonderland* texts (*AAUG* 27; *AAIW* 24). Whether accidental or executed by a nemesis called "Fury," death is, in both cases, caused by a dog and not a cat.

Another juvenile production, a wordless comic strip that recasts the story of the Three Little Pigs features the grin that would later be affixed to the Cheshire Cat. It presents the three structures that another canine nemesis, a fox-like wolf, will try to destroy. But the builders here are human infants, not pigs. Posing next to a huge female who resembles the Wonderland Duchess, they are swaddled like the "queer-shaped little creature" who turns into a piglet in *Wonderland* (*AAIW* 49). Tenniel's "Pig and Pepper" illustration contrasts the Cheshire Cat's smile to the down-turned mouths of the kitchen's human denizens. Similarly, this early group picture highlights the broad smile of a round-faced baby who looks directly at the viewer. As the architect of the fortified structure that can resist death, this grinning baby is an obvious forerunner of the inviolable Cheshire Cat.

Displayed in a glass-case, the microscope that Dodgson treasured as much as his photographic equipment confirmed his lifelong "engagement with Darwinism," a topic brilliantly explored in a recent issue of this journal (Tazudeen 555 n4) and also taken up in a forthcoming book by Gillian Beer. Here, too, an early letter about tiny "insects that live but a day or two" anticipates the mutations Alice predicts for Wonderland's Caterpillar and foreshadows the short-lived Gnat's list of "Looking-Glass Insects" as well as the aborted episode of the dying Wasp in a Wig.

Surprised by the numerous *cartes de visite* for which Dodgson had posed as a very young man, I was struck by a possible likeness I had never entertained before. The youthful face on those cards seemed to resemble the photograph of a pensive Alice Liddell in her pageboy haircut that Carroll had pasted at the end of the *Underground* text as a memento of the "happy summer days" of a vanished "child-life" (*AAUG* 90). That resemblance was erased when Carroll licensed John Tenniel's conversion of a dark-haired Pre-Raphaelite into the iconic blonde of the *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* texts.

For me, however, the most fascinating item in the exhibit was a set of nine drawings that Carroll had given Alice Liddell in spring of 1865 to prepare her for the *Wonderland* text. Drawn in sepia ink on cards he mounted on leaves inserted on guards and then bound in red morocco, these captioned illustrations were assumed to be sketched by Tenniel until 1979, when Justin Schiller, the specialist in illustrated children's books, correctly identified them as Carroll's own handiwork. Why did Carroll so painstakingly try to reproduce Tenniel's artwork? If he was offering Alice Liddell a preview of the additions to the 1864 *Underground* text he had given her five months before, could he not simply have forwarded Tenniel's own sketches? Was he eager to regain control over images he had ceded to the professional artist whose rebus signature he now carefully removed? We shall never know.

As a visual distillation of *Wonderland*, this image-sequence is designed to create a bridge between the private offering of 1864 and a book that will soon be presented to a much wider public. But Carroll's pictorial compression of the text that he and Tenniel had just expanded also fits into a much larger series. The kinetic imagination already apparent in juvenile constructs such as "A Tale of a Tail" thrived on a continuous process of expansion and condensation, a persistent reshuffling of antecedents. Carroll devised sequels for the *Wonderland* text when he created the chess-board world of the 1872 *Looking-Glass*;

Figure 19. Lewis Carroll. Nine drawings made after Tenniel's proof engravings for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Private Collection), drawing 3 [1865]. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

reclaimed and marketed in 1886 an *Underground* text he had not seen for over two decades; and, finally, in 1890, shrunk his 1865 masterpiece into the mawkish *Nursery Alice*. Embraced by a host of prose writers, poets, parodists, dramatists, translators, screenwriters, illustrators,

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comic-strip artists, animators, musical composers, sculptors, puppeteers, and filmmakers, this revisionary process conferred a never-ending afterlife to the Carroll/Tenniel collaborations.

The first of the nine pictures Carroll had copied for Alice Liddell invites her to look at Tenniel's drawing of a White Rabbit who gazes at its watch. Recast as the Queen's trumpeting herald in the sequence's last image, the Rabbit thus acts as a framing device for a progression that will introduce a series of new characters. As a familiar usher for unfamiliar vistas, it is paired with the Fish-Footman with "powdered hair" in the second illustration ("The Queen's Messenger," *AAIW* 45) and, at the end, with the Lobster who holds a hairbrush in his claw (in the eighth illustration). Unlike the furry Rabbit, these two bald water-creatures are provided with hair, although their human posture and attire also links them to Alice's time-obsessed guide.

The sequence's third illustration, highlighted in its case by Carolyn Vega, fuses two drawings that are kept apart in the printed *Wonderland* text. By pairing the Cheshire Cat and Mad Hatter, Carroll stresses a contrast that illustrations four and five will reinforce. The two new figures complement the redrawn White Rabbit and Mock Turtle as narrative surrogates who respond very differently to the fictional Alice, herself a surrogate for the girl whose tenure as dream-child was becoming increasingly problematic.

Perched on his tree, Wonderland's Cheshire Cat vanishes after it warns Alice that she would find the Hatter to be as deranged as the March Hare. But in the drawing that Carroll sends Alice Liddell, the Cat and his tree are implanted above the Tea Party in front of the Hatter's house (Figure 19). Whether Carroll conflated two separate drawings or had merely copied a drawing that Tenniel would later split seems irrelevant. For, in either case, the fusion creates an opposition between the Olympian Cat's genial foolery and the Hatter's aggressive wit.

Emanating from the Hatter's mouth, Carroll has added the penciled words "Yr hair wants cutting." His challenge is met by a frowning Alice. But the ever-smiling Cat, unseen by the party-guests below, has tossed a nosegay from his perch above Alice's head. Still falling in mid-air, this offering has yet to land. Unlike the bouquet picked up by a giant Alice after it was dropped by the frightened White Rabbit of *Underground*, the Cat's gift may go unnoticed by the girl who is visibly distracted by the Hatter's rudeness. Curiously enough, this gift is composed of the foxglove flowers that grow between Alice and the Cat's tree in the printed drawing of chapter six.

As a naturalist, Charles Dodgson surely knew that extracts of *digitalis purpurea*, an ornamental flowering plant also known as "foxglove," supplied Victorians with a widely used medicine that had "the power of reducing in a remarkable degree the heart's action" as the *Penny Cyclopedia* had pointed out in 1837 (*OED* I.726.354). Noting that the plant's flowers resemble a gloved finger, the *OED* stresses the obviousness of the "second part" of its name, but concedes that the foxglove's association with foxes remains unclear (*OED* I.1070.502).

Carroll eventually toyed with the finger-shaped plant's name in *The Nursery Alice*. Following the illustration (now colored) of Alice looking up at the Cheshire Cat "with her hands behind, just as if she were going to say her lessons," the narrator of the 1890 text feels compelled to interject a "very *little*" mock-lesson of his own (*NA* 33, 34):

> Do you see that Fox-Glove growing close to the tree? And do you know why it's called *Fox*-Glove? Perhaps you think it's got something to do with a Fox? Not indeed! *Foxes* never wear gloves! The right word is "*Folk's*-Gloves." Did you ever hear that Fairies used to be called "the good *Folk*"?

> Now we've finished the lesson, and we'll wait a minute, till you got your temper again.
> Well? Do you feel quite good-natured again? No temper-ache? No crossness about the corners of the mouth? Then we'll go on.
> "Cheshire Puss!" said Alice. (*Wasn't* that a pretty name for a Cat?) "Would you tell me which way I ought to go from here?" (*NA* 35).

Inserted twenty-five years after he had the Cat drop a foxglove bouquet on Alice, this rather strained etymological joke suggests that Carroll still wants to confer some symbolic significance on the medicinal plant "growing close" to the Cheshire Cat's tree. As a cure for heartache, that emphasis would fit the sentimentality of the later book.

But the contrast between Cat and Hatter has vanished from *The Nursery Alice.* Worried that the sight of a Grin without a Cat might disturb a small child, the narrator asks his viewers to look at Alice's calm demeanor on the previous page (*NA* 36). And he promptly intervenes when the Hatter gets "up to say to Alice 'Your hair wants cutting!'" Such insolence must be nipped in the bud: "That was a rude thing to say, *wasn't* it? And do you think her hair *does* want cutting? *I* think it's a very pretty length – just the right length" (*NA* 40). The recipient of the 1865 drawings has been replaced by a babied "Nursery Darling."

The 1865 sequence, however, juxtaposes the images in its fourth and fifth drawings to accentuate the contrasts between Hatter and Cat. Whereas the image captioned "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!" shows the Mad Hatter without the Dormouse on the next chair, the next, uncaptioned image stresses the sociability of the Cat whom Alice has just introduced as "a friend of mine" to the King of Hearts (*AAIW* 67). Floating balloon-like above the angry Queen's assembled court, the Cat's round head – wide-eyed, relaxed, and ever-smiling – starkly differs from the cranium of the solipsist who closes his eyes and contorts his lips as he declaims verses that flatten a star into a flying tea-tray.

Carroll uses the sixth drawing to introduce another new character, the ugly Duchess. Not presented as the forbidding figure of "Pig and Pepper," she is depicted as Alice's friendly croquet partner. Since her genial smile here replicates that of the Cheshire Cat in the previous illustration, it can also act as a foil to the cross "corners of the mouth" of the perennially irate Queen.

Just as he had removed the Dormouse from the Hatter's portrait, so does Carroll cut both Gryphon and Alice from the seventh illustration ("The Mock Turtle"). The excision allows his viewer to appreciate the differences between Tenniel's calf-headed, bitterly sobbing, Mock-Turtle and the armor-plated creature shown as the dancing companion of a small, but extremely long-tailed, Gryphon in *Underground*. The Turtle's isolation is important. For it can now confirm Alice's first impressions of the weeper she first saw "sitting sad and lonely on a little ledge of rock." She "deeply" pities its plight in both versions of the scene (*AAUG* 78, *AAIW* 74), but in *Wonderland*, the creature's "heavy sobs" are still audible at the very end of her older sister's "half-believed" dream (*AAIW* 99, 98).

* * *

The Morgan exhibit offered important insights into the pictorial aftermath of Carroll's 1865 classic. Viewers of the crowned *Looking-Glass* Alice who props up two snoring chessboard queens were reminded of her difference from the Queen of Hearts' feisty challenger. But Tenniel's re-fashioning of Alice in an 1899 political *Punch* cartoon proved to be even more startling. Transformed into a bumbling Arthur Balfour whose reading of a dull government

bill clearly bores to tears both Gryphon and Mock Turtle, this myopic, bespectacled creature now looms above the two hybrids.

Before exiting, visitors were also treated to a rare ten-minute film clip from a British movie produced in 1903, a mere five years after Lewis Carroll's death. Having just squeezed through the little door, the reduced Alice here confronts a giant (but short-tailed!) puppy. By cleverly splicing together replications of Tenniel's drawings, this silent film provided a new venue for Carroll's own reshuffling of separate images.

Indeed, the imagination I have called "kinetic" would soon cross the Atlantic and flourish in American cinema. As Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens point out, a far more ambitious but still soundless adaptation produced by the American Film Manufacturing Company in 1915 bravely tried to compensate for its lack of dialogue by relying on special effects and quick edits. Although this 42-minute movie included "a full rendition of the Father William poem" (Jaques 203), it slighted the dialogues that only the later "talkies" managed to reintroduce.

By 1933, Paramount's blending of *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* capitalized on Charlotte Henry's verbal sparring with fine actors such as W. C. Fields (as Humpty Dumpty). This film's insertion of an animated cartoon that dramatized "The Walrus and the Carpenter" built on the popularity garnered by Walt Disney's "Alice Comedies" in the previous decade. Each of these short films features a girl actress who dreams herself into a cartoon-land with whose droll inhabitants she quickly interacts. Disney's attempts to produce a full-scale version of *Alice in Wonderland* in the late 1930s and mid-1940s faltered until the appearance of the 1951 film carefully analyzed by Jan Susina in a forthcoming essay.

Before the end of the nineteenth century, however, American children's magazines and books had already capitalized on their readers' familiarity with the Alice books. British émigrés such as Frances Hodgson Burnett, Anna M. Richards, and Rudyard Kipling relied on that familiarity. The American girls who do housework in Burnett's "Behind the White Brick" (1879) and Richards's *A New Alice in the Old Wonderland* (1895) may be less genteel than Carroll's Alice, yet are cast as imaginative readers eager to enter new dreamlands. Burnett's bookish Jemima follows a favorite heroine into a realm in which her angry baby sister clashes with talking dolls; Richards's Alice Lee more directly revises her namesake's adventures after she pursues the piglet Alice had freed.

Inserted into the 1894 *Jungle Book*, Kipling's "The White Seal" (1893) dramatizes a young Alaskan seal's entry into an aquatic Wonderland. If Alice ran after a talking rabbit, Kotick swims behind mute sea-manatees that bow and wave "their flippers like the Frog Footman." These Disneyesque "schlooping and grazing and chumping" grotesques lead him through a "dark tunnel" into a wishful haven "where no man" can kill and skin creatures in danger of extinction (Kipling 111).

Although some readers have tried to link Alice's Wonderland adventures to little Dorothy's in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, it is the 1939 film's reliance on a girl dreamer rather than L. Frank Baum's 1900 text that encourages such connections. Much "richer in humor of the Carrollian variety" is, as Martin Gardner has so rightly stressed, Baum's *A New Wonderland*, later renamed *The Surprising Adventures of the Magical Monarch of Mo and His People*, a story-collection published a mere month after *Oz* (Baum ix). Full of puns and "outrageous logical impossibilities," this sequence of separate stories is set in a kingdom initially called "Phunnyland" and features an accident-prone but invulnerable king

who easily survives his decapitation and also emerges from a hole into which he has fallen by simply "turning it upside down" (Baum ix, 44).

After leaving the Morgan Library, I looked at my watch. Might there still be time left for a quick uptown visit to admire José de Creeft's superb statue of Alice on her huge mushroom throne? But it was far too late to go to Central Park. I turned in the opposite direction to find a New Jersey Transit train at Penn Station. The late afternoon rush was about to start and the streets were getting crowded. Pushed by a maelstrom of pedestrians, I walked at a faster pace and heard the sounds of shrill sirens, rattling push carts, honking taxis, the clamor of multi-lingual voices, but no Mock Turtle sobs.

But later, safely ensconced on the train and lulled by its rocking motion, I replayed the Morgan Library's Wonderland vistas. Might these not be complemented by a future exhibit solely devoted to America's persistent appropriations of Alice? Maurice Sendak's cartoon strip of an Alice who ultimately gets devoured by the Cheshire Cat could serve as a perfect emblem for the voraciousness of an American imagination that still keeps transforming the offshoots of a story-telling expedition that took place in a dreamy pastoral setting on July fourth of 1862.

In Dennis Potter's brilliant *Dreamchild*, still by far my favorite cinematic adaptation of Carroll's legacy, the eighty-year old Alice Hargreaves must revisit modern Manhattan before she can come to terms with conflicting memories of the role she had played in the Reverend Dodgson's literary fantasies. Vainly insisting that she is "not the girl he made me out to be," the matriarch impersonated by Coral Browne reverses herself only after finding out that Hollywood is filming a version with American and British actors. "But who is to be *me*?" she asks. It is only in a "far-off land" that she can reanimate a "wreath of flowers" that had already "wither'd" by 1865. Potter's film, however, suggests that the closure Mrs. Hargreaves found in America was itself an infinitely renewable fiction.

Princeton University

WORKS CONSIDERED

"Alice: 150 Years of Wonderland," organized by Carolyn Vega, Assistant Curator of Literary and Historical manuscripts at the Morgan Library and Museum, took two entire years to prepare and featured as its centerpiece the notebook containing the manuscript of "Alice's Adventures Under Ground," which had been acquired by A. S. W. Rosenbach of Philadelphia in 1928, but was returned to the British Library in 1948. The exhibit ran from 26 June to 12 October 2015.

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FACING BRITAIN'S IMPERIAL PAST?

By Kate Nichols

Artist and Empire: Facing Britain's Imperial Past was the first major British exhibition to bring together art objects from *c.*1600 to the present day in order to "explore how artists from Britain and around the world have responded to the dramas, tragedies and experiences of the Empire" (opening panel text, available on the *Artist and Empire* website). The exhibition framed itself as cautious but critical, stating in the opening panel that the British imperial "history of wars, conquest and appropriation is difficult, even painful to address," with curator Alison Smith noting in a BBC news interview that "The real challenge was selecting the material to make a wonderful show without being celebratory of empire." Paul Gilroy's foreword to the catalogue concluded that "Innovative exercises of this kind will help to reconcile the tasks of remembering and working through Britain's imperial past with the difficult labour of building its post-colonial future" (9). In the *Guardian*, Jonathan Jones praised its nuanced approach. I had high hopes that this exhibition might begin to critically examine the cultural history of the British empire, admittedly, as Renate Dohmen has discussed, extremely belatedly, but nevertheless an important undertaking. I was also apprehensive: I had seen advertised on tate.org.uk a £90 a head "culinary journey to discover the food and drinks of the old British Empire" (accompanied by canapés, champagne, and a private view). I hoped that this was a product of ill-considered marketing, rather than a sign of an exhibition that would neglect those tragedies of empire which its publicity material claimed it would address, such as, grimly appropriate, the millions of Indians who died in famines enabled by the British government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The exhibition was organised into six thematic rooms. The first, "Mapping and Marking," introduced viewers to the enormous geographical sweep of the British Empire. There were maps from sixteenth-century Ireland, seventeenth-century Morocco, eighteenth-century North America, India, and Polynesia, nineteenth-century Australia, as well as Millais's 1874 painting *The North-West Passage*, foregrounding the emotional drama of references to Arctic exploration. A room of maps is a helpful guide, but not the most visually exciting start to an exhibition. It sets a rather stuffy tone, feeling more like an illustrated history book than an art exhibition. Indeed, the idea of art as a passive (and somehow reliable) reflection of society permeated *Artist and Empire*. And in this enormous sweeping together of the globe, visitors encountered for the first time a fundamental problem underlying the organisation of the exhibition into six thematic rooms: every place and every time period were clumped together, with no exploration of the different levels of autonomy, of the different experiences of varied colonies, dominions, crown protectorates. Emilia Terracianno's suggestion that the exhibition might have been better organised and have told a more precise narrative by separating artworks produced in settled and colonised lands seems particularly apposite. As

she notes, this distinction "permeated all aspects of governance and of course, culture and art-making, but was overlooked by curators."

This first room also featured Asafo flags, which hung from the ceiling, enabling viewers to look at both sides. These were made by Fante artists on the Gold Coast (1900-40), initially in cooperation with British rule. During the struggle for independence the British began to see the flags' combination of the Union flag with local imagery as subversive, and, the label informs us, they were often destroyed by the British. They were the first of a number of art objects made by colonised peoples scattered throughout the exhibition, providing *some* alternative voices. The inclusion of what are often referred to as "ethnographic" collections, long denied the status of art, was not, however, explained, its more radical potential not harnessed. This room also featured the only image depicting slavery, Nicholas Pocock's *c*.1760 *A View of the Jason Privateer*, a small, easily missed, and underwhelming pen and ink sketch. Slavery is a serious omission, and strange given the number of British paintings and sculptures dealing with an institution so central to both imperial undertakings and (post-abolition) British self-fashioning, as Marcus Wood has explored.

Room 2, "Trophies of Empire," "shows some of the different ways in which the world was brought to Britain through the various transactions of Empire, and the status accorded to objects and specimens by collectors, artists, and subsequently museums." In this introductory text panel, does Tate acknowledge museums' complicities in the (largely non-consensual) removal of art objects from colonial territories? Or shift the blame back on to individual collectors? Here viewers encountered controversial objects, such as the head of an Oba made by a turn of the nineteenth-century Edo artist, better known as one of the Benin bronzes. It is good to see the Benin bronzes finally acknowledged as part of British imperial endeavour by their inclusion in this exhibition, and interesting to contemplate them, as this display evoked for me, as part of late Victorian visual culture. However, the accompanying label used the passive voice to such an extent that – even though it employed the word "loot" – any active force in the removal of the bronzes seems entirely anonymized: "These heads were among the many precious ancestral objects looted from the palace of the Oba (king) of Benin during a British 'punitive raid' in 1897, in retaliation for the killing of envoys trying to negotiate trading rights." The British plunder of these objects is here spun as having had positive consequences: it apparently "helped to restore or enlarge African history" (without noting that African history only needed "restoring" or "enlarging" because of racist European assumptions that Africa was ahistorical). There is a sense that Tate are having their cake and eating it – able to claim that they were quite radically including these challenging narratives, but at the same time incorporating them into a larger story of imperial benevolence.

Here viewers also encountered a face familiar from the exhibition's publicity materials (on banners, underground posters, leaflets): Rudolph Swoboda's 1886 portrait of Bakshiram, an apparently 102-year-old Indian man, brought to London in 1886 to be exhibited as a "traditional artisan" at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. The poster-image is often the highlight of an exhibition – the place where viewers encounter perhaps the one image with which they are already familiar, and which has been singled out as its most representative work. It was thus something of a shock to read the label. Bakshiram, and the two other artisans whose portraits were also on show, were not life-long potters or weavers, but inmates of Agra jail, where they had been taught these trades. The portrait was one of a series painted for Queen Victoria, displayed first at Windsor and then at Osborne House. Swoboda's painting is a compelling, apparently sympathetic portrait, its protagonist's watering eyes meeting the

Figure 20. Installation view of room 3, "Imperial Heroics," Artist and Empire exhibition, Tate Britain. Foreground: Andrew Gilbert, *British Infantry Advance on Jerusalem, 4th July 1879* (2015). The large painting to the right is Edward Armitage, *Retribution* (1858, Leeds City Art Gallery). The smaller painting to the left is Allan Stewart, *To the Memory of Brave Men: The Last Stand of Major Allan Wilson at the Shangani, 4th December 1893* (1897, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth). Photograph © Tate 2015, Joe Humphrys.

viewer's gaze. But it is also a representation of an incarcerated person, displayed without consent in the 1880s for Londoners' pleasure, and now, once again, on show across the city as exotic publicity material. In an important article on the men exhibited in 1886, Saloni Mathur suggests that Bakshiram was able to resist being entirely objectified and to close himself off from scrutiny, by refusing to look up at visitors while working in the exhibition. His refusal to look at visitors to the exhibition renders even more complex the story of his gaze-returning portrait. Swoboda's *Bakshiram* raises questions about the relationship between aesthetic pleasure and exploitation under imperial regimes, which should have been central to the exhibition. There was, however, no attempt at such reflexivity. Further information about imperial exhibitionary cultures – such as the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition – might have encouraged some self-conscious reflection: what does it mean to exhibit empire? What role did these images serve in their original context? How does the Tate show relate to these previous displays? The walls of Room 3 (Figure 20), "Imperial Heroics," were dominated by large-scale Victorian history paintings, and the information panel offered important acknowledgement of the role art played in shaping perceptions "at home" of events abroad. However, Room 3 similarly failed to explore how such fine art

figured in daily life and thus contributed to popular understandings of the empire, through the broader visual cultures of exhibitions, public museum displays, paintings sent on tour, reproduction in the press, advertising, tableaux vivants, pageants, film.

In this pomp-ridden red and gold room, the only suffering and hardships created by imperialism were borne by plucky British soldiers facing onslaughts of naked black men, and cowed British women and children. Four of the paintings included deal with the Indian Uprising of 1857, all from the perspective of British suffering and British heroism, justifying British vengeance. The threats to domestic order and a range of personal dramas are picked out in incredible detail, as British men leave for and return from India in Henry Nelson O'Neil's dockside scenes, *Eastward Ho! August 1857* (1857) and *Home Again, 1858* (1859), reunited here to considerable effect (they are usually housed apart at Elton Hall and the Museum of London respectively). Edward Armitage's *Retribution* (1858) (visible in Figure 20) sees a muscular Britannia on the verge of plunging her sword into a conquered tiger; Joseph Noel Paton's *In Memoriam* (1858), shows British women and children hiding from Indian men and on the verge of being rescued by the 78th Highland Regiment. Although the entire point of this room was to show how Victorian painting worked as a form of imperial propaganda (the many other purposes of art somewhat ignored), the contextual, historical information provided by the labels seems to have been swept along by their subjects' patriotic fervour. Accompanying *In Memoriam*, for example, we learned that "The slaughter of women and children at Cawnpore (now Kanpur) on 15 July 1857, was the most notorious atrocity associated with the Indian rebellion": notorious to Victorians, certainly, but this careless phrasing claims greater significance for dead British people than for the Indian civilians who also died in brutal reprisals. The inclusion of an Indian perspective on the uprising would have offered something of a rebuke to the singular narrative of British heroism that hung on the walls.

It is certainly possible to read the images assembled here against the grain. Viewed alongside Charles Edwin Fripp's *Last Stand at Isandluha* (1885), strewn with dead black bodies, the violence of "civilisation" that underlies Thomas Barker's well-known *Secret of England's Greatness* (1863), where Queen Victoria bestows a bible upon a genuflecting African prince, was suddenly manifest. The central placing of Andrew Gilbert's installation, *British Infantry Advance on Jerusalem, 4th July 1879* (2015) (Figure 20), might have encouraged viewers to turn these narratives on their heads, to wonder how the British would have been exhibited by the Zulus if they had lost the battle of Ulundi in 1879. Here four mannequins dressed in a parody of British military garb (complete with high-heeled boots) appear in a bizarre reworking of a nineteenth-century exhibition diorama; another missed opportunity for the Tate to think reflectively about the history of exhibiting empire. This was the only room that used contemporary art to create something of a critical dialogue with the historical works, to undercut and in this case ridicule these images of British heroism, although, as with the possible dialogues set up by art made by colonised peoples, the reasoning behind this positioning of Gilbert's installation was not explained nor explored.

Room 4, "Power Dressing," featured primarily British sitters in versions of indigenous garb, with a handful of colonised peoples in adaptations of western clothing, from a 1594 painting of Captain Thomas Lee dressed as an Irish foot soldier to a 1937 photograph of Sir John Buchanan, Governor-General of Canada wearing a First Nation headdress and robes. "Trans-cultural cross-dressing" (as the introductory panel described it) appeared here almost entirely isolated from the power dynamics of imperialism, a joyous expression of "the

adaptive, hybrid aspects of its wearer's experiences between homeland, colony and imperial centre" (introductory panel text, available on *Artist and Empire* website). Writing in 1992 after a slew of exhibitions foregrounding the hybridity of both western and non-western art objects, Annie Coombes explored the ways in which hybrid objects are transformed in western art and anthropological museums. Coombes cautioned against

> the uncritical celebration in museum culture of a hybridity which threatens to collapse the heterogeneous experience of racism into a scopic feast where the goods on display are laid out for easy consumption in ever more enticing configurations, none of which actually challenge or expose the ways in which such difference is constituted and operates as a mechanism of oppression. (43)

Is it significant that in *Artist and Empire*, the term "hybridity" appeared in three out of the seven introductory room panels, "racist" in none? This "uncritical celebration" of transcultural hybrid forms was particularly marked in Tate's deployment of art objects made by colonised peoples. Room 5, "Face to Face," continued in this vein, featuring remarkable portraits both created by and representing colonised and coloniser. Many of these were created by figures usually marginal to the western historical record and art historical canon: Indian artists, Nigerian artists, Welsh artists, English artists who were women. But there was a complete failure to sufficiently identify the various power imbalances at play in their creation, and in their reception; in the happy juxtaposition of images, the fact that many of the Nigerian works here now reside at the World Museum in Liverpool, rather than in an art gallery, was not mentioned. The rationale behind British documentation of colonised peoples slipped out of view. Such images were invoked by racial "science" as "types" inferior to white "Anglo-Saxons"; or they were attempts to document, conceptualise, and thus justify as likely-to-vanish "primitive" populations that settler colonists were in many cases violently persecuting into "extinction" (see, for example, Lawson 446–47).

The final two sections, elided as Room 6, dealt with "Out of Empire" and "Legacies of Empire," featuring early twentieth-century colonial artists and postcolonial artists from the 1970s onwards respectively. The works contained in "Legacies of Empire" in particular offered overtly critical responses to British imperialism, bringing to the fore the "difficult" questions the exhibition set out to raise. Unfortunately in this final room they seemed disconnected, tokenistic, and all too easily bypassed by visitors with feet aching after six very full rooms. Andrew Gilbert's installation in Room 3 (Figure 20) went some way to subverting the "Imperial Heroics" on the walls, and – as Renate Dohmen has also noted – it seemed a missed opportunity not to weave more contemporary postcolonial art into the main displays. The dominating presence of Donald Locke's *Trophies of Empire* (1972-74) would have offered a critical engagement with the "Trophies of Empire" on show in Room 2. Comprising a black display case populated with 29 cylindrical black ceramic forms of various sizes, with different accessories, suggestive of sugar cane, phalluses, and bullets, this monumental structure invites viewers' interactions and reflects on the role played by museums in the making of imperial knowledge. The Singh Twins' *EnTWINed* (2009) reworks O'Neill's *Home Again 1858* (1859) using Indian miniature painting techniques, replacing British soldiers returning from India with generations of Sikh immigrants to Britain, drawing out the relationship between present day Britain and nineteenth-century imperial undertakings. Surely this would have been better positioned alongside O'Neill's painting? Sonia Boyce's

Lay Back, Keep Quiet and Think of What Made Britain so Great (1986) is made up of four watercolour and charcoal panels, visually linked by the black roses that creep across all four. The first three feature black and white charcoal crucifixes, labelled Cape Colony, India, and Australia, subject matter derived, according to the catalogue essay, from Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Wallpaper by F. Scott & Son (1887, Victoria & Albert) (Smith, Brown, and Jacobi 230). The final panel is dominated by Boyce's self-portrait, which directly engages the viewer. The catalogue entry notes Boyce's reworking of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beloved* (1865-66), replacing Rossetti's anonymous black child as accessory to white British beauty with Boyce's defiant presence. Neither Rossetti's painting, nor the Golden Jubilee wallpaper was displayed in the exhibition. Bringing these images together (perhaps in Room 5) could have suggested the continued legacies of racist notions of beauty and personhood, and have allowed one contemporary black British voice at least to answer back to the historical images on show. It would also have reminded viewers that many of the most beloved of Victorian paintings – not just the somewhat less-appreciated jingoistic military scenes in Room 3 – are also implicated in imperialism and slavery, issues Jan Marsh explored in relation to Rossetti's *Beloved* some 20 years ago.

Artist and Empire did not sustain a critical engagement with British imperialism, and in this sense it could not be said to "face" very much. In some instances it seemed celebratory. Its scope was too vast: the relationship between art, society, and politics, across the globe, across five centuries. Curators prioritised subject matter and particular historical contexts over aesthetic or material qualities (despite the fact that, as Natasha Eaton notes, the materials of art, "cochineal, indigo, cow urine, jute, poppy oil, tropical woods, ivory," were also predicated on the exploitation of imperial ecosystems). This poses a problem, since it is simply not possible to cram onto one exhibition label the requisite explanation of the complex historical background, geographies, and biographies often unfamiliar to many viewers, or the nuances of interchange and hybridity which can characterise the material culture of imperialism and make these images engaging. It is telling how much more interesting many of these objects appear on reading the more detailed catalogue entries – the additional context and art historical references provided, for example, in the entry on Sonia Boyce's *Lay Back* (described above: Smith, Brown, and Jacobi 230). Of course, a label can only contain a tiny amount of information, but an entire room could have been devoted to more fully exploring almost every item on show. I left frustrated at the missed opportunities, too angered at the neglect of the "tragedies" this show purported to foreground to be encouraged by the moments of thoughtful critical engagement that did emerge, or the encounters with Victorian women making art in imperial contexts with whom I had previously been unfamiliar: Marianne North, Olivia Tonge, as well as the better known (although still under-researched) Elizabeth Butler. I felt unsure of what message I was to take home, beyond the fact that Britain had an empire, and there were a lot of images made in and about it. The relationship between artist and empire remained unexplored in any detail. These questions have at least (belatedly) been raised, if not answered at a major London art gallery. But will this meandering exhibition now be taken as the final word on the relationship between artist and empire? Or a starting point for new debate, further research, and discussion?

"Such paintings are forgotten now," noted Jonathan Jones of the Victorian works in Room 3. Certainly these paintings are less familiar in the canon of Victorian art, still dominated by 1840s and fifties Pre-Raphaelite works and the later nineteenth-century "aesthetic" works of Leighton, Moore, Whistler (although the very limited role played here by photography,

sculpture, or decorative arts did little to broaden understandings of Victorian visual culture off canvas). Indeed, *Artist and Empire*'s congregation of narrative-dominated history paintings, combined with the exhibition's only attempt at periodisation in Room 6, "Out of Empire," where an emancipatory multi-cultural modernism emerges in opposition to nineteenth-century imperialist painting, reinforced the longstanding and somewhat limited notion of Victorian art as artistically *as well as* politically conservative (and thus marginal to the history of art), a somewhat unfair designation considering that most art made in nineteenth-century Europe was implicated in imperial undertakings – even aesthetically radical work (Gauguin in Tahiti springs to mind).

The apparently "forgotten" nature of these works also betrays a London-centric understanding of what is deemed "known," since so many hail from civic collections outside the capital. Two of the large canvasses in Room 3, for example, Edward Armitage's *Retribution* (1858) and George William Joy's *Death of General Gordon* (1893), are prominent features of civic space in Leeds, where they have dominated the Queen's Gallery in the City Art Gallery since the nineteenth and early twentieth century respectively, further testimony to the widespread public use of these images in Victorian culture. Tate might have learnt something from the ways in which some of these now chronically underfunded civic institutions are attempting to rethink their displays, working with unfashionable, difficult collections of imperial imagery and sizable communities of people with family ties to postcolonial nations. Curators at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, for example, have worked with the local Muslim community to reinterpret William Müller's 1843 painting *Prayers in the Desert* in the context of the museum's new faith galleries. They produced a booklet offering multi-vocal contemporary understandings of a work that might be seen as irredeemably mired in Orientalist fantasies. This offers populations who might well feel alienated or objectified by Victorian representations of their ethnic difference and religious practice some agency over, and a stake in, museum displays. Such undertakings enter into dialogue with the legacies of the art of empire, and might even be a starting point for "Facing Britain's Imperial Past."

University of Birmingham

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THE VICTORIAN ART SCENE IN 2016: PRE-RAPHAELITE WOMEN ARTISTS AND MARIE SPARTALI STILLMAN'S OVERDUE RETROSPECTIVE IN THE UK

By Margaret D. Stetz

FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN Pre-Raphaelite art, as well as for those who believe that more works by women should be on display in museums, Spring 2016 was certainly the right season to be in the UK. At Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery, for instance, which featured the exhibition *Pre-Raphaelites: Beauty and Rebellion*, viewers had the chance to be charmed by *The Hay Loft* (1858), a genre painting by Rosa Brett (1829–1882) of a cat asleep on a bale of hay near a pile of clothes, with the latter slyly indicative, as the curators suggested, of human high jinks that might be going on in another corner of the barn. The presence of this delightful oil by the sister of John Brett (whose name is more familiar to art historians, and who was also represented at the Walker) made clear that, even for those who may think they know the Pre-Raphaelites' *oeuvre* well, there are happy discoveries still to be made, and many of those involve images by women artists. Hanging this work with paintings by men – such as Arthur Hughes's *In the Grass* (1865), of a supine girl posed provocatively against a background of greenery – quite literally allowed for a fuller picture of the landscape of Victorian art, even as it hinted at women's more active roles in shaping that world.

In London during the same season, there were numerous opportunities to see this point illustrated. *Botticelli Reimagined*, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, proved a controversial exhibition, excoriated by British critics for its focus on late-twentieth and twenty-first-century pop culture inspired by the Italian master. No one, however, complained about the inclusion of some truly gorgeous Victorian paintings such as *Flora* (1894), a reinterpretation of the central figure from Botticelli's *Primavera* by Evelyn De Morgan (1855–1919), who came by her Pre-Raphaelite connection through her uncle, John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, and solidified it with her marriage to William De Morgan. *Flora* hung alongside work by William Morris and D. G. Rossetti, just as, at Tate Britain's

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Painting with Light: Art and Photography from the Pre-Raphaelites to the Modern Age, images by the photographers Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) and by the London-born (and Pre-Raphaelite-influenced) Zaida Ben-Yusuf (1869–1933) appeared this spring in the company of paintings by Rossetti with similar compositions and subjects. Simultaneously, at Leighton House Museum in Kensington, two studies by Evelyn De Morgan for larger works (*The Captives* and *Daughters of the Mist*) were part of a section devoted to "Contemporary Literature and Social Issues" in *Pre-Raphaelites on Paper: Victorian Drawings from the Lanigan Collection*, a traveling exhibition from the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Meanwhile, in another room at Leighton House, *Autumn, or Young Girl Harvesting Apples* – a watercolor by Marie Spartali Stillman (1844–1927) of a female figure with masses of streaming red hair, dating from the late 1860s or early 1870s and thus from the period of second-generation Pre-Raphaelitism – glowed with such intensity that it overshadowed the less colorful pen-and-ink sketches near it by George Price Boyce and others.

This welcome recognition, at least in a few major British venues, of women's art affiliated with Pre-Raphaelitism should be cause for celebration; yet it also raises questions. Feminists who lived through the founding and then the institutional entrenchment of Women's Studies programs and departments will remember the debates over whether these academic units were necessary or even desirable – whether it would be better to "mainstream" the history of women and, having done so, to eliminate anything that might treat it as a separate subject. Most of us will recall, too, that the so-called mainstreaming was never quite a mission accomplished, for disparities invariably remained in the amount of space allotted to topics associated with women versus that assigned to men. What mainstreaming sacrificed, moreover, was context. Treating cultural objects created by women as though they were identical to those by men meant losing the particulars of their production, which involved a range of social circumstances specific to women, due to the gender roles and norms (and, often, the limitations) within which they had to operate. Even as it seemed to offer validation to women, mainstreaming told only a partial story, by assuming that there was a single narrative that could or should be used to encompass all – one based on the experience of men (not to mention on a decided slant toward white Western men, primarily of the upper classes).

Thus, for all the brilliance of the red, gold, and orange pigments that made it stand out visually, Marie Spartali Stillman's *Autumn, or Young Girl Harvesting Apples* faded into the background in other ways, when it was merely one of many examples in a section called "Models, Head Studies and Allegorical Heads" in *Pre-Raphaelites on Paper*. Viewers did not come to it already prepared with an interesting "backstory" of the sort that they could attach to work by Stillman's male contemporaries. Numerous books, websites, and retrospectives have enabled everyone to become acquainted with the histories of male Pre-Raphaelites such as Edward Burne-Jones and D. G. Rossetti. At Leighton House Museum, Rossetti's chalk drawing, *Study of the Figure of Love for Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice* (1874), assumed importance (and became memorable) because of the spectator's ability to forge an imaginative link between this sketch and the painting *Dante's Dream*, along with the narrative of Rossetti's relationship with his dead wife and model, Elizabeth Siddal, whom the painter idealized as Dante's Beatrice. But how many visitors to *Pre-Raphaelites on Paper* could bring to Stillman's watercolor any knowledge of its place either in her artistic career or in her life, let alone of its reception within nineteenth-century British art circles? And where would they have found such information, even if they cared to look for it?

Fortunately, anyone dissatisfied with the dearth of representation of Stillman's art, as well as of information about her throughout the various Pre-Raphaelite-heavy shows across the UK in spring 2016, had easy recourse to an alternative. The Watts Gallery, a gem of a small museum in Compton, Surrey, that is dedicated to the work of G. F. Watts, but also hosts exhibitions on related Victorian subjects, was the U.K. location from 1 March to 5 June 2016 of *Poetry in Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Marie Spartali Stillman*, a magnificent venture that originated in Wilmington, Delaware at the Delaware Art Museum (DAM). Its two curators, Margaretta S. Frederick (Chief Curator and Annette Woolard-Provine Curator of the Bancroft Collection at the DAM) and Jan Marsh (acknowledged as the preeminent authority on Pre-Raphaelite women artists since the publication of her groundbreaking *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* in 1985), set out to counter the perception, long held in art history circles, that Stillman was a second-rate, peripheral figure – a mere amateur, who produced paintings that were decorative, but derivative, and who is best remembered instead as the striking beauty who sat for Rossetti and Burne-Jones. Drawing on her work in several media, while concentrating chiefly on watercolors from across the long span of her career, Frederick and Marsh not only demonstrated Stillman's professionalism and her distinctiveness as a painter, but also positioned her within a community of Pre-Raphaelite women artists. Among these was Maria Zambaco, the sculptor whose 1887 bronze portrait medal of Stillman in profile featured in the U.S. version of the exhibition – but which, like other items owned by North American collectors (in this instance, Dennis Lanigan), did not cross the Atlantic.

What was assembled for the Watts Gallery was a reduced version, due to constraints in terms of space and of funding, of the exhibition at the DAM. Nevertheless, the exhibition at the Watts showed important pieces such as Stillman's painting of Kelmscott Manor, one of eight romanticized images she created of the home of William and Jane Morris. This meant that British viewers could not see in person – only in reproductions in the accompanying catalogue – such impressive examples of Stillman's art as her 1871 charcoal *Self-Portrait* (Figure 21), the 1885 watercolor *Love's Messenger* (Figure 22), or the 1914 *The Pilgrim Folk* (Figure 23), the last of which represented the culmination of Stillman's desire to depict Italian landscapes and scenes inspired by the poetry of Dante Alighieri (a desire, of course, that linked Stillman to her better known male Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries). Perhaps most unfortunate was the loss of *Love's Messenger*, which Frederick and Marsh wisely chose as the cover image for their published catalogue, as it embodied so well a point made by the exhibition as a whole: that Stillman's aesthetic emphasized complex and mysterious ties between human figures and the natural world, while also foregrounding the importance of art itself – including art (in this instance, embroidery) produced by women.

Also missing from the British venue were some surprising material objects, shown at the DAM, that helped to bring the artist to life as a woman of her times, who was expected to master "feminine" accomplishments and produce handicrafts. Chief among these were domestic items that demonstrated Stillman's talent for Arts-and-Crafts needlework and her continuing interest in using this expertise in daily life, such as a silk dress skillfully embroidered with flowers and bows and a pair of matching court shoes (both undated, but seemingly reflective of fashion in the immediate aftermath of the First World War). Other examples of Stillman's involvement in the decorative arts that did not travel from Delaware were her highly accomplished exercises in twentieth-century *japonisme*, in the form of watercolor studies for screens with peacocks and cranes. In the excellent and informative catalogue descriptions, Frederick and Marsh have suggested that these designs for household

Figure 21. Marie Spartali Stillman, *Self Portrait*, 1871. Charcoal and white chalk on paper, 25 3/8 x 20 5/8 inches. Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Lucia N. Valentine, 1974.

goods that could be produced and marketed on a larger scale may have been, in effect, her gift in old age (Stillman was in her eighties by the 1920s) to her son Michael, who was living in New York and had opened a firm there – the aptly named Kelmscott Decorating Company.

This attention to how both Stillman and her work were embedded in a social context and, moreover, influenced by family relationships and financial concerns is one of the major contributions to scholarship of the exhibition and of the catalogue recording it. Repeatedly, Frederick and Marsh remind us that Stillman was a professional artist, who never stopped being one throughout her long life. To occupy this role as a Victorian woman, moreover, was different from and more challenging than to do so as a man. While fulfilling her domestic

Figure 22. Marie Spartali Stillman, *Love's Messenger*, 1885. Watercolor, tempera, and gold paint on paper mounted on wood, 32 x 26 inches. Delaware Art Museum, Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial, 1935.

responsibilities as a Victorian wife and mother, looking after children and stepchildren – and doing so through moves that took her away from England for extended periods, whether to Italy or to the U.S. – she never ceased to paint or to exhibit in galleries on both sides of the Atlantic over the course of several decades. Uncharacteristically, too, for a woman of her class, she had to contribute to her family's support through sales of her work. Even as she remained loyal to the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics that she had absorbed through her early art training by Ford Madox Brown and through her close personal ties to William Morris and his family, she kept an eye on the marketplace and subtly altered her style to appeal to

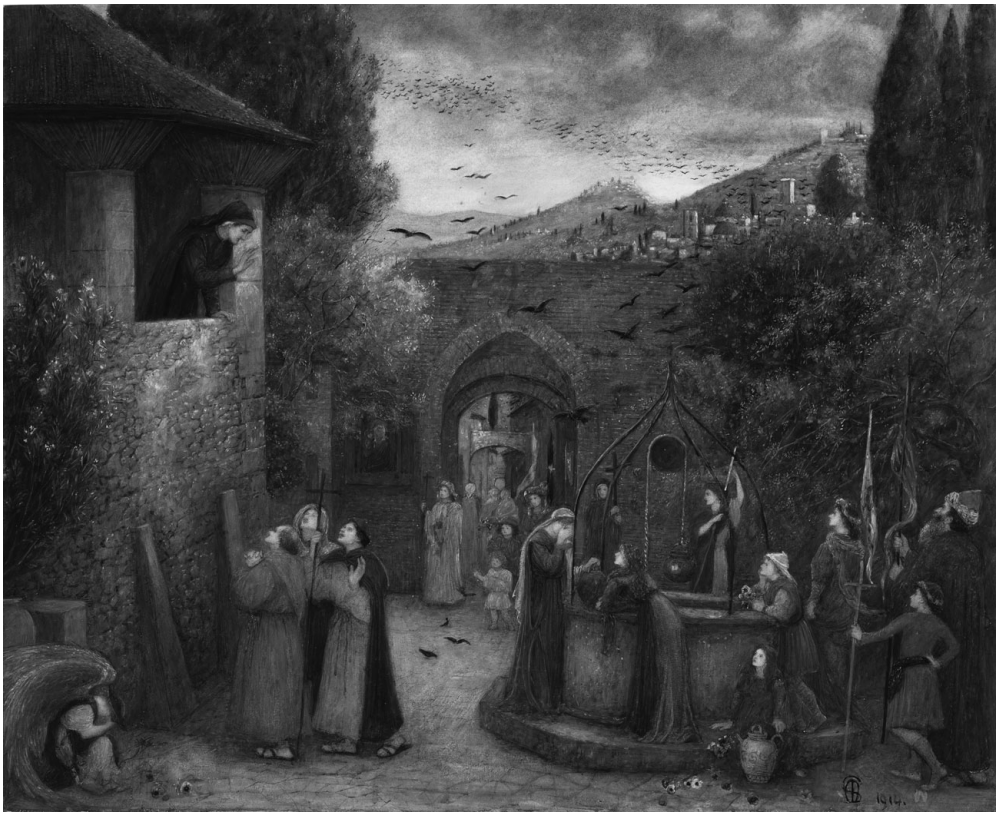

Figure 23. Marie Spartali Stillman, *The Pilgrim Folk*, 1914. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 22 3/8 x 27 11/16 inches. Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. S. S. Auchincloss, 1974.

collectors. When tastes shifted toward the close of the nineteenth century, she increasingly incorporated elements of late-Victorian Aestheticism and hints of Impressionism, particularly in her floral still lifes. Frederick and Marsh end their survey with several of Stillman's flower paintings from the close of her career, where the brush strokes have become looser and the backgrounds are monochromatic and deliberately flat, no longer with the depth and richness of detail found in her Pre-Raphaelite images. Here, the curators reveal that Stillman was so gifted in technical prowess that she could adapt to changing styles, and that this capacity to transform her art was not a sign of imitativeness, but of openness to new possibilities, even if it was also spurred by financial necessity.

The great revelation that *Poetry in Beauty* provides, of how and why Stillman's art not only flourished but evolved, is the sort available only through the medium of a retrospective focused on an individual artist. As so few Victorian women painters, Pre-Raphaelite or otherwise, have ever been granted, so to speak, A Retrospective of One's Own, this one is all the more to be treasured. But its long-term value will not be didactic alone. As this exhibition convincingly shows, to know Marie Spartali Stillman (as most critics and scholars

have done) solely as a model, through portraits of her by Ford Madox Brown, G. F. Watts, and other artists, is to experience a memorable version of Pre-Raphaelite beauty. But to see Stillman's own visions beauty – sometimes dark, melancholy, and hinting at profound spiritual connections between women and the interiors or landscapes that surround them – is to feel enriched and inspired. Her works belong in the canon of British art. Through the comprehensiveness of this exhibition, which leaves viewers in no doubt as to Stillman's mastery of color and ability to create images that resonate emotionally, Frederick and Marsh make a convincing case for that inclusion.

University of Delaware

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Botticelli Reimagined. Curated by Mark Evans and Ana Debenedetti. V&A Museum, London, UK, 5 March–3 July 2016.

Frederick, Margaretta S., and Jan Marsh. *Poetry in Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Marie Spartali Stillman*. Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 2015.

Painting with Light: Art and Photography from the Pre-Raphaelites to the Modern Age. Curated by Carol Jacobi and Hope Kingsley, with Tim Batchelor. Tate Britain, London, UK, 11 May–25 September 2016.

Poetry in Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Marie Spartali Stillman. Curated by Margaretta S. Frederick and Jan Marsh. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, 7 November 2015–31 January 2016; Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey, UK, 1 March–5 June 2016.

Pre-Raphaelites: Beauty and Rebellion. Curated by Christopher Newall and Ann Bukantas. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK, 12 February–5 June 2016.

Pre-Raphaelites on Paper: Victorian Drawings from the Lanigan Collection. Organised by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Leighton House Museum, London, UK, 12 February–29 May 2016.

THE FALLEN WOMAN

By Hilary Fraser

WHEN I DECIDED TO INVITE my mother to see *The Fallen Woman* exhibition on her ninety-first birthday last year, it was, to be sure, in part because I knew we could park easily right outside (thereby hoping to avoid any more falls). I also noticed that the newly released film *Suffragette* (2015) was screening at the Curzon cinema just across the road from the Foundling Museum. I thought we could manage to take in both, and that the exhibition and the movie would speak to each other, and to us as mother and daughter. They did.

I had already been to see the exhibition – the museum, which is built on the site of the eighteenth-century Foundling Hospital, is located only a few minutes from my office in Gordon Square. It was quite brilliant. Imaginatively curated by Lynda Nead and sympathetically researched by Victoria Mills, both colleagues at Birkbeck, it offered fresh perspectives on a familiar theme by displaying some of the best-known Victorian narrative paintings depicting ideal and "fallen" womanhood alongside a heart-wrenching

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collection of material objects and records from the Foundling archives. A haunting sound installation commissioned from composer and musician Steve Lewinson, entitled "Fallen Voices," enabled the women themselves to be heard, and gave the entire show an edgy contemporary inflection.

Mediated by the film, and by the companionship of my mother, the exhibition acquired further, more personal resonances the second time around. As the foreword to the catalogue observes, "Foundling mothers and fallen women may seem to belong to a distant Victorian world, entirely different from our own," but there are parallels to be drawn, and there are connections to be made. Mum, nicknamed when young "the suffragette" by her father, and the film of that name provided such a connective thread. She was born in 1924, four years before universal suffrage was achieved for women in Britain. This was the year that the decision was made to move the still thriving Foundling Hospital from Bloomsbury to a healthier location in the countryside. I was born in 1953, the year before its last pupil was placed in foster care. That distant Victorian world spilled into our own lifetimes. We felt part of this history, and privileged to be experiencing the stories of these women together in the face of so much loss.

The film we had watched as a prelude to our visit to the exhibition showed how many of the mid-nineteenth-century issues explored in *The Fallen Woman* had continued well into the twentieth century and had fuelled the campaign for political reform. Its contemporary relevance was underscored at the London premiere by a demonstration organized by the group Sisters Uncut against cuts to domestic violence services. The fictional heroine of *Suffragette* works long hard hours in a laundry where the sexual abuse of women by their male supervisor is routine. She is, because of her increasingly radical political activities, ostracized by her community and prevented from seeing her son, who is eventually put up for adoption by her estranged husband. Sex and motherhood are the dramatic and emotional focus of this film about the campaign for women's suffrage. They are also the crucially, and often painfully, entwined themes of this exhibition.

The exhibition provides new perspectives on the figure of the "fallen woman" by exploring the specific experience of the unmarried mothers who petitioned the Foundling Hospital to accept, educate, and care for their children in the middle of the nineteenth century. Freighted by the connotations of the first Fall, conventionally blamed on Eve, the Victorian phenomenon of the "fallen woman" was mythologized in Victorian literature, journalism, and painting. As the excellent gallery guide explains, the term refers to "a particular kind of moral identity; neither a prostitute, nor an ideal wife and mother, it implies that the woman had been respectable but had dropped out of respectable society through her experience of sexual relations outside of marriage." These were the very women whose illegitimate babies were admitted into the Foundling Hospital in the Victorian period, and its archives, which include hundreds of first-person testimonies of mothers as well as records of the decisions made by its Governors, offer a particularly nuanced insight into Victorian sexual morality.

The Foundling Hospital was established in Bloomsbury in 1739 by the philanthropist Thomas Coram "for the education and maintenance of exposed and deserted young children," but during the nineteenth century other criteria were introduced that seemingly had more to do with the character of the mother than the welfare of the child. According to its new admission procedures, only the children of women who could demonstrate their respectability before their fall from grace, and could convince the Governors of their capacity for reform, would be considered. The selection process was gruelling, at once bureaucratic and shockingly

invasive. Having completed a petition form, the mother who wished her child to be taken into the Hospital's care had to present herself for interview by a panel of male Governors. The records show that she was there subjected to interrogation about her background and sexual history, the circumstances of her becoming pregnant (which were often traumatic), and the identity and whereabouts of the father. Françoise Barret-Ducrocq researched these records for her ground-breaking history of sexuality, class, and gender in nineteenth-century London, *Love in the Time of Victoria* (1991).

As Victoria Mills writes in the catalogue, "The sexual encounters reported by petitioners were often described as 'seductions' in the Enquirer's reports. Many of these would now be classed as rape. There are myriad examples of women being lured into houses by strangers or casual acquaintances and forced to engage in sexual activity against their will." Their stories were then investigated by the Hospital's Enquirer, character references were sought, and a decision was made. One of the most poignant exhibits showed how the petitions and decisions were filed by the Hospital authorities: on metal spikes. One pierced the pile of acceptances, the other the much larger heap of rejections.

The women's stories of how they came to be in this plight are a wonderful resource. This is history from below at its finest. We read the accounts, hear the voices of real women whose intimate sexual lives, so hard to access by modern scholars, are laid bare in fully documented and authenticated form. It makes heartbreaking, sometimes harrowing reading. And the site-specific location of the exhibition, with its evocative soundtrack, intensifies the sense of authenticity. The curator, though, introduces a note of caution. She reminds us that the petitioners' pleas are narratives. The criteria for acceptance were well known, and women seeking admission for their children were aware of the story they had to tell if their petition was to be successful. And of course there was no legitimate language available to these women for talking about their own desire in cases where intercourse was not unwanted but consensual. Whilst the letters displayed in the exhibition had the ring of truth, and had me and my mother in tears, this was a timely reminder that the petition is a genre with its rules like any other. The women's experience is mediated, even in these first-person testimonies, by a story of fallenness that cannot but shape the way they represent themselves.

And it is this story that the rest of the exhibition told through a well-chosen selection of paintings and texts. It is a story that is both factual and mythologized: factual, in that the reason why these women were so willing to give up their children to institutional care was to increase their life chances, because the alternative, life on the streets, was even worse (the Foundling's children were the lucky ones); mythologized, because the literary and pictorial representation of their likely fate exploits a vision of womanhood that is symbolic and ideological.

Here too, the siting of the exhibition of paintings at the Foundling Museum seemed apt, for the Hospital had from its inception been associated with the arts. Public exhibitions there, organized by the Dilettante Society, led to the formation of the Royal Academy in 1768. William Hogarth was among its founders, and he encouraged other artists, such as Reynolds and Gainsborough, to donate their work. Handel too was a prominent benefactor, and *Messiah* was often performed there. The Hospital's connections with the arts continued into the nineteenth century. Dickens lived in nearby Doughty Street in the 1840s and the foundlings inspired some of his fictional characters. His novels are also populated by stereotypical "fallen" women. The exhibition pays homage to this in its inclusion of David Lean's 1948 film adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, which memorably opens with Oliver's mother's desperate

journey across the moorlands to the workhouse. This scene is not actually in Dickens's novel, and was displayed to demonstrate the enduring sentimental appeal of the figure of the outcast unmarried mother in twentieth-century visual culture.

Sentimentality was, unsurprisingly, the overwhelming keynote of the Victorian paintings chosen for this exhibition. The "fallen" woman was, as we have seen, defined in relation to the virtuous woman she had once been, and both types, and all the intermediary stages in her fall, were well represented at the Foundling Museum. Two mid-century paintings by George Elgar Hicks and another by Charles West Cope invoke religious imagery of the Madonna and Child to celebrate the Victorian secular vision of motherhood, while George Smith's *Evenings at Home* (1852-53), a group family portrait of art patron Henry Cole's wife and children, offers a powerful image of the feminine domestic ideal. Other works show how women who strayed from the home, especially into paid employment, were vulnerable to the attentions of men with dishonourable motives. Robert Dowling's *Breakfasting Out* (1859), for example, depicts a young milliner out alone in the city, easy prey to the flashily dressed gentleman, with his back to the viewer, who is eying her up. The exhibition included several petitions from milliners who had succumbed to the attentions of such men, and this is one of many eloquent juxtapositions of visual and archival materials.

The consequences of exposure to the dangers of the world are spelled out in other works that map the decline from the "before" of respectability to the "after" of disgrace. An engraving in the journal *Echoes from the Clubs* (1869), "Passion: Its Beginning/Its End," portrays a seduction and its dire consequences for the woman. Other artists draw attention to the dangers of alcohol. George Cruikshank's series of etchings entitled *The Bottle* (1847) charts the ruin of a respectable family when both parents take to drink, and the once virtuous daughter is forced into prostitution. Gambling was another vice to which women were deemed especially vulnerable, and which could make them teeter and fall. Alfred Elmore's *On the Brink* (1865) portrays a young woman exposed by her passion for gambling to the dangers of the streets. In this heavily symbolic painting, the woman, her life in the balance, is shown outside the gambling-rooms. A man leans out of the window behind her, and she holds an empty purse. Like Laura, in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862), she has "no copper" in her purse, and "no silver either," but, just as Laura has "much gold upon [her] head," this woman wears a golden dress. The symbolism suggests that it is herself she will sell; of the flowers depicted on the right hand side of the canvas, we fear she will choose the passionflower over the lily.

The work of Christina's brother, Dante Gabriel, was represented in the exhibition by his watercolour *The Gate of Memory* (1857), which shows a prostitute standing under an archway looking at a group of young girls playing together in the street, and remembering her own innocent past. The painting refers to a scene near the end of William Bell Scott's poem "Maryanne" (1854) which relates, year by worsening year, the story of a girl who falls into prostitution. Watching the carefree innocence of the girls at play, "in her utter abandonment / She loathed their loveliness." This is the final trajectory of the fallen woman's fate once she is cast out from respectable society. The moment of ejection is poignantly captured by Richard Redgrave's *The Outcast* (1851), which shows a young woman being expelled from the safety of the family home by her father. Her mother looks on sympathetically but helplessly.

When I revisited the exhibition with my own mother, I was especially struck by these women looking on: by the mother seeing her daughter cast out into the dangerous unknown; by the prostitute looking on at the young girls and recalling her own lost innocence; by the

older woman at the centre of *Breakfasting Out* looking knowingly at the man who homes in on the young milliner. We look to our mothers for protection, for education and guidance. This exhibition showed a history of mothers exercising their best duty of care by giving up the right to care for their children, as captured by Henry Nelson O'Neil's painfully beautiful painting *A Mother Depositing her Child at the Foundling Hospital in Paris* (1855). And it also showed women looking down the generations in other ways, thinking about what lies ahead for younger women. The paintings displayed, through their use of narrative, colour, light and shade, and symbolism, invite the viewer to respond emotionally to these issues. Their sentimental register seems quintessentially Victorian. But sentimentality is not entirely absent from the representation of the suffering and abuse of mothers and children in twentieth-century visual culture, or indeed in our own century, as the films *Oliver Twist* and *Suffragette* demonstrate. And this seems to me not aesthetically unforgiveable but entirely proper. My mother and I were convinced by the points made about the petitions as narrative constructions, and about their authors inhabiting the subject position of "fallen women," but we also wept when confronted by all those images of desperate women and by their revenant voices, and we smiled at their courage and resourcefulness. And that's as it should be for women looking back to the struggles of our grandmothers and looking on to coming generations.

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