

Victorian Women Gallery Walk

- Paintings:
 - The Girlhood of Mary Virgin by Rossetti
 - Mariana by Millais
- Sculpture:
 - The Greek Slave by Powers
- Clothing of the Victorian Era:
 - Sketches and description of high society fashion
- Magazine:
 - The Sphere of Woman
- Biography:
 - Charlotte Bronte: A Brief Biography
 - Passion, Dreams, and the Supernatural in *Jane Eyre*

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Victorian Women Gallery Walk: Notes

For each painting, sculpture and picture, complete the following three steps:

1. Describe: Take an inventory of objects, incidents or other visual information. What do you notice?
2. Analyze: Examining the things you described in the first step, speculate on what their meaning is in relation to the overall painting.
3. Interpret: What and how does this painting reveal about women of the Victorian period?

For the excerpt from Godey's Lady's Book, answer the following questions:

1. How does Goethe define the role of the Victorian woman?
2. How does he see the woman's role as having advantages over the man's role?
3. On what is the woman "dependent"?
4. How does the image complement the text?

For the essays about Bronte's biographical information, write down 5 details from each that may aid in our understanding of *Jane Eyre*.

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The Girlhood of Mary Virgin
Dante Gabriel Rossetti – 1849

from Mothers and Madonnas
Elizabeth Lee '97, Brown University

The phrase, "angel in the house" became a well-known description for the expected role of a woman in the Victorian period. Though modern readers and critics often rightfully question just how pervasive the domestic angel concept was in Victorian England, there is no doubt that the angelic view of women played an important role in literature and art. In fact, art critics of the day required the formation of a new genre in painting: "domestic pictures." In these paintings, wives support and soothe their husbands, or else, watch over and educate her children. She has become an earthly Madonna of everyday life – a saint of the hearth.

Even depictions of Mary herself, brought the spiritual unearthliness down to a domestic, or human, form. Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, shows a young woman learning the task of embroidery. David Sonstroem emphasizes her mundane nature, saying that she is "a real girl of flesh and blood... nothing about her person... suggests superhumanity." Indeed, instead of a sense of awe at the Virgin's perfection, viewers feel "more inclined to sympathize or reassure, for she seems very lonely as she faces the symbols of her future task." If any sense of religious admiration for this version of Mary arises, it is not because of her divinity but because of her strong will to quell her fears.

from the Rossetti Archive
www.rossettiarchive.org

DGR's own description of the work, given in a 14 Nov. 1848 letter to Charles Lyell, is primary: "It belongs to the religious class which has always appeared to me the most adapted and the most worthy to interest the members of a Christian community. The subject is the education of the Blessed Virgin, one which has been treated at various times by Murillo and other painters,—but, as I cannot but think, in a very inadequate manner, since they have invariably represented her as reading from a book under the superintendence of her Mother, St. Anne, an occupation obviously incompatible with these times, and which could only pass muster if treated in a purely symbolical manner. In order, therefore, to attempt something more probable and at the same time less commonplace, I have represented the future Mother of Our Lord as occupied in embroidering a lily,—always under the direction of St. Anne; the flower she is copying being held by two little angels. At a large window (or rather aperture) in the background, her father, St. Joachim, is seen pruning a vine. There are various symbolic accessories which it is needless to describe" (Fredeman, *Correspondence*, 48.12).



Mariana
Sir John Everett Millais - 1851

Summary

When it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851 this picture was accompanied by the following lines from Tennyson's *Mariana* (1830):

She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'

Tennyson's poem was inspired by the character of Mariana in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Rejected by her fiancé, Angelo, after her dowry was lost in a shipwreck, she leads a lonely existence in a moated grange. She is still in love with Angelo - now Deputy to the Duke of Vienna - and longs to be reunited with him.

In the picture the autumn leaves scattered on the ground mark the passage of time. Mariana has been working at some embroidery and pauses to stretch her back. Her longing for Angelo is suggested by her pose and the needle thrust fiercely into her embroidery. The stained-glass windows in front of her show the Annunciation, contrasting the Virgin's fulfilment with Mariana's frustration and longing. Millais copied the scene from the window of the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford.

However, the heraldic design appears to have been his own invention. The motto 'In coelo quies' means 'In Heaven there is rest' and clearly refers to Mariana's desire to be dead. The snowdrop symbolises 'consolation' and is also the birthday flower for 20 January, St Agnes' Eve, when young girls put herbs in their shoes and pray to St Agnes to send them a vision of their future husband. It may also refer indirectly to John Keats's narrative poem *The Eve of St Agnes*, which, like Tennyson's *Mariana*, is also concerned with the theme of yearning. The mouse in the right foreground is Tennyson's mouse that 'Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd, | Or from the crevice peer'd about'. The miniature altar in the background, decorated with a small triptych, and a silver casket, may refer to Tennyson's other poem on the same theme, *Mariana in the South*, in which Mariana prays desperately to the Virgin Mary.

Millais may have intended the picture to complement Holman Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* (1850, Tate [N03447](#)), a scene also taken from *Measure for Measure*. But as a subject from Tennyson the picture acquired a certain topicality, since Tennyson was made Poet Laureate in November 1850.

Further reading:

Leslie Parris (ed.), *The Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery 1984, reprinted 1994, no.35, pp.89-90, reproduced p.90.

Elisabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, London 2000, pp.11-13, reproduced p.10, in colour.

Frances Fowle
December 2000



The Greek Slave

Hiram Powers (1805-1873)

Marble - Exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851

Elizabeth Barrett Browning on Powers's Statue

Powers's *Greek Slave*, which was almost certainly the most famous work of sculpture in the second half of the nineteenth century, inspired the following sonnet by one of the most popular poets of the age:

They say Ideal beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
An alien Image with enshackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist meant her
(That passionless perfection which he lent her,
Shadowed not darkened where the sill expands)
To so confront man's crimes in different lands
With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the centre,
Art's fiery finger! and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world. Appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, and strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence, overthrown.
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning [II, 302]

Contemporary Commentary

"This celebrated exhibit stood in the middle of the American Section under a specially erected canopy and background of red plush. . . . As one of the most popular exhibits in the exhibition, the figure naturally gave rise to a wealth of comment, a selection of which is here quoted. 'The Greek Slave is one of the "lions" of the Exhibition and most deservedly so.' 'One of the most exquisite objects in the museum (sic) . . . a centre of a bevy of admiring spectators.' 'In this work a youthful creature of very delicate form is represented in marble. The figure is studied from life and exhibits an extraordinary refinement of imitation. The treatment of the back, especially, is one of the happiest efforts in modern sculpture.' 'The pedestal is so arranged that the whole figure can be turned round thereby displaying every portion of this chef-d'oeuvre. We recommend it to the artist, the statuary, and as the *Athenaeum* would say, "to the lover of the beautiful". 'During the early Greek revolutions the captives were exposed for sale in the Turkish bazaar, under the Hiram Powers of "slaves". The artist has delineated a young girl, deprived of her clothing, standing before the licentious gaze of a wealthy Eastern barbarian. Her face expresses shame and disgust at her ignominious position, while about her lip hovers that contemptuous scorn which a woman can so well show for her unmanly oppressor. "It is a hard thing to produce a perfect work, and many faults were soon found to injure the wellmerited reputation of the statue. The manner in which the right hand was made to lean upon the trunk of a tree, while the whole weight of the body was thrown upon the left leg was, however, the only grave error committed by the sculptor; and the greater number of those who daily swept past this happy effort of his genius, felt disposed to reply to all the merciless critics." [*The Great Exhibition*, p. 129; thanks to Mark Bernstein for pointing me to the URL. — GPL]

References

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. *Poetical Works*. 14th ed. 5 vols. London: Smith, Elder, 1886.
The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Commemorative Album. rev. ed. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1964. Figure 184.



BREAKFAST AT BONNEBOUCHE HALL

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim a hunting morning."



PRECEDENCE AT BONNEBOUCHE HALL DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Grandpapa takes the bride in to dinner, and the rest follow anyhow.

Clothing of the Victorian Era

Men's clothing became on the whole a little more comfortable, with a slightly easier fit and lower collars. However, like women, they were bound by the growth of rigid conventions stipulating the 'correct' dress for each and every occasion; in fashionable society a man might be required to change his outfit several times a day. Whereas in previous centuries a courtier or gentleman would be noted for his lavish and colourful style of dress in contrast to the modestly attired poorer classes, from around the 1850s good cloth in sober colours and immaculate tailoring and grooming became increasingly important. It was left to lively members of the working and lower-middle classes or the nouveau riche to indulge in a flashy tie or figured waistcoat. Both Charles Dickens and Benjamin Disraeli received derogatory comments during the 1840s on their somewhat flamboyant style of dress with brightly coloured and decorated waistcoats; but in later life they became more conventional, and during the 1870s they were included in the curious practice of sticking the heads of well-known people on to fashion plates.

An enormous variety of styles was worn by women during this half-century, many of them remarkably ugly. The invention of the sewing machine seems to have encouraged over-elaborate decoration, and the introduction of aniline dyes produced some garish colours.

The invention of the steel-framed crinoline in 1856 provided some relief from the enormous weight of stiffened petticoats and ever-widening skirts. By the 1860s the shape of the frame became flattened at the front, spreading and widening at the back and evolving into the bustle by the 1870s. This almost vanished during the fashion for the cuirass body during the mid 1870s, but returned in the 1880s in its most exaggerated form, looking, it has been suggested, like a camel with two legs. By the 1890s it had become once again a small pad.

*The author has graciously shared with readers of the Victorian Web this passage from the second edition of her *Fashion in Costume, 1200-2000* (2000), published by A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd., which retains copyright. Readers wishing to obtain of the complete book can e-mail the following address: sales@acblack.com .*

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Nunn, Joan. *Fashion in Costume, 1200-2000*. 2nd edition. A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd; Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2000.

Charlotte Brontë: A Brief Biography

David Cody, Assistant Professor of English, Hartwick College

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816, the third daughter of the Rev. Patrick Brontë and his wife Maria. Her brother Patrick Branwell was born in 1817, and her sisters Emily and Anne in 1818 and 1820. In 1820, too, the Brontë family moved to Haworth, Mrs. Brontë dying the following year.

In 1824 the four eldest Brontë daughters were enrolled as pupils at the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge. The following year Maria and Elizabeth, the two eldest daughters, became ill, left the school and died: Charlotte and Emily, understandably, were brought home.

In 1826 Mr. Brontë brought home a box of wooden soldiers for Branwell to play with. Charlotte, Emily, Branwell, and Ann, playing with the soldiers, conceived of and began to write in great detail about an imaginary world which they called Angria.

In 1831 Charlotte became a pupil at the school at Roe Head, but she left school the following year to teach her sisters at home. She returned to Roe Head School in 1835 as a governess: for a time her sister Emily attended the same school as a pupil, but became homesick and returned to Haworth. Ann took her place from 1836 to 1837.



In 1838, Charlotte left Roe Head School. In 1839 she accepted a position as governess in the Sidgewick family, but left after three months and returned to Haworth. In 1841 she became governess in the White family, but left, once again, after nine months.

Upon her return to Haworth the three sisters, led by Charlotte, decided to open their own school after the necessary preparations had been completed. In 1842 Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to complete their studies. After a trip home to Haworth, Charlotte returned alone to Brussels, where she remained until 1844.

Upon her return home the sisters embarked upon their project for founding a school, which proved to be an abject failure: their advertisements did not elicit a single response from the public. The following year Charlotte discovered Emily's poems, and decided to publish a selection of the poems of all three sisters: 1846 brought the publication of their Poems, written under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Charlotte also completed *The Professor*, which was rejected for publication. The following year, however, Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, and Ann's *Agnes Grey* were all published, still under the Bell pseudonyms.

In 1848 Charlotte and Ann visited their publishers in London, and revealed the true identities of the "Bells." In the same year Branwell Brontë, by now an alcoholic and a drug addict, died, and Emily died shortly thereafter. Ann died the following year.

In 1849 Charlotte, visiting London, began to move in literary circles, making the acquaintance, for example, of Thackeray. In 1850 Charlotte edited her sister's various works, and met Mrs. Gaskell. In 1851 she visited the Great Exhibition in London, and attended a series of lectures given by Thackeray.

The Rev. A. B. Nicholls, curate of Haworth since 1845, proposed marriage to Charlotte in 1852. The Rev. Mr. Brontë objected violently, and Charlotte, who, though she may have pitied him, was in any case not in love with him, refused him. Nicholls left Haworth in the following year, the same in which Charlotte's *Villette* was published. By 1854, however, Mr. Brontë's opposition to the proposed marriage had weakened, and Charlotte and Nicholls became engaged. Nicholls returned as curate at Haworth, and they were married, though it seems clear that Charlotte, though she admired him, still did not love him.

In 1854 Charlotte, expecting a child, caught pneumonia. It was an illness which could have been cured, but she seems to have seized upon it (consciously or unconsciously) as an opportunity of ending her life, and after a lengthy and painful illness, she died, probably of dehydration.

1857 saw the posthumous publication of *The Professor*, which had been written in 1845-46, and in that same year Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published.



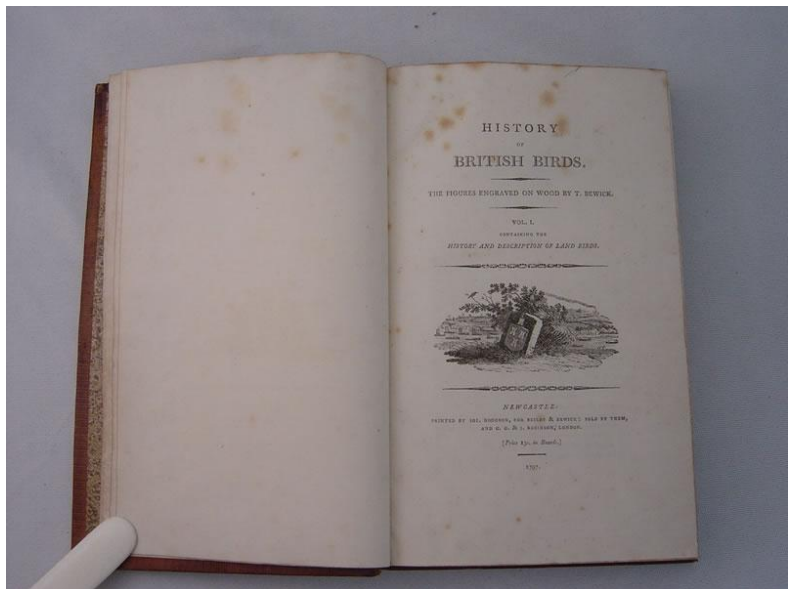
Eliza Brownell '97 (English 61, Brown University, 1993)

Introspection, half-belief in the supernatural, conflicting emotions, gushing description appear throughout *Jane Eyre*. Rochester's mention of prescience — both foreshadowing and premonition — come up again and again throughout the work. "I knew. . . you would do me good in some way . . . I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you," Rochester tells Jane. Both he and she believe implicitly the things they read in eyes, in nature, in dreams. Jane has dreams which she considers unlucky, and sure enough, ill fortune befalls her or her kin. When she is in a garden which seems "Eden-like" and laden with "honey-dew", the love of her life proposes to her. However, that very night the old horse-chestnut tree at the bottom of the garden is struck by lightning and split in half, hinting at the difficulties that lie in store for the couple.

The turbulent exploration of Jane's emotions so characteristic of the text reveals some of Brontë's most prevalent ideas — that judgment must always "warn passion," and that the sweet "hills of Beulah" are found within oneself.

As Jane grows throughout the book, one of the most important things she learns is to rule her heart with her mind. When a child at Gateshead she becomes entirely swept up in an emotional tantrum, which proves to be the most painful memory of her childhood. At the pivotal point in the plot when Jane decides to leave Rochester, she puts her love for him second to the knowledge that she cannot ethically remain with him - the "counteracting breeze" once again preventing her from reaching paradise. Only when Rochester has become worthy of her, and judgment and passion move toward the same end, can she marry him and achieve complete happiness./

Charlotte Brontë, like her heroines, traveled to wondrous lands within the confines of her own head. While Jane, engrossed in Bewick's *History of British Birds*, was mentally traversing "solitary rocks and promontories", her creator might have been calling to mind memories of her own sojourns in imagined lands. By the time she was a teacher at the Roe Head school, Charlotte and her brother Branwell had been writing stories and poems about an African kingdom called Angria for many years. While she was away at the school, the fate of the inhabitants of the country lay in Branwell's hands, which made her very nervous, as he was given to intrigue and violence. She was unhappy with her situation, loathing the available company and describing herself as "chained to this chair prisoned within these four bare walls," and so her happiest hours were spent in the wild landscapes of her mind. "What I imagined grew morbidly vivid," she says, and indeed her visions of Angria are almost more real to her than what is actually happening around her. "All this day I have been in a dream, half miserable and half ecstatic: miserable because I could not follow



it out uninterruptedly; ecstatic because it shewed almost in the vivid light of reality the ongoings of the infernal world. (She sometimes referred to Angria as "infernal" or below.") When pupils or fellow teachers interrupt her reveries she is furious, saying once, "But just then a dolt came up with a lesson. I thought I should have vomited."

About 1839 Brontë finally left Angria, saying 'still, I long to quit for a while that burning clime where we have sojourned too long . . . The mind would cease from excitement and turn now to a cooler region, where the dawn breaks grey and sober and the coming day, for a time at least, is subdued in clouds " (all materials from the Norton critical edition of *Jane Eyre*). Though she did at last consent to leave her imaginary world behind, it played such a large part in her child and early adulthood that there is no doubt her recollections of time spent there affected Jane's experience.

THE SPHERE OF WOMAN

Translated from the German of Goethe

"Women often complain that men are unjust towards their sex, in withholding from them higher mental culture, and in not allowing them full access to the sciences, thus Keeping them down to mere household duties, and to the government of the domestic circle. It is, however, unjust that man, on this account, should be the subject of complaint. For has he not placed his wife in the highest and holiest position she can occupy when he places her at the head of his domestic relations, and intrusts to her the government of his household? When a man is harassed by external duties and relations, when anxiously employed in procuring the means of subsistence, and when he even takes part in the government of the state ñ in all these conditions of life he is dependent on circumstances, and can scarcely be said to govern anything, but is often reduced to the necessity of acting from motives of *policy*, when he would gladly act from his own rational *convictions* to conceal his real principles when he would delight to act frankly and openly; and even to act out the suggestions of fallacy and falsehood, when he would gladly act from sincerity and uprightness. To all this the man, in his external life in the world, is subject, and at the same time rarely attains the end for which he labors, but loses that harmony with himself, in which, nevertheless, the true ends and the true enjoyment of life consist. Whereas, the prudent woman reigns in her family circle, making happiness and every virtue possible, and spreading harmony and peace throughout her domain. What is the highest happiness of man, but to carry out what he knows to be right and good, and to have full control over the means to this end? And where are our dearest and inmost ends in life, but in the household? Where do we find our ever-returning and indispensable wants satisfied, but in the beloved spot where we rise up and lie down? What regular activity is required to carry out this ever-returning order of things. To how few men is it granted to return regularly like a star, and to preside both over the day and the night! But the woman who arranges her household, forms her domestic plans, watches over the economy of her house, and wisely dispenses her means, spreads harmony, love, and peace throughout the circle, and makes her husband, whom she loves, a happy prince over that happiest domain. Her attention gathers all the knowledge she requires, and her activity knows how to employ it. She is dependent on nothing, save the love and attachment of her husband, for whom she procures true independence ñ that which is internal and domestic. That which his labor has acquired, he sees properly secured and employed, Thus, in a spirit of true independence, he can devote his energies to great objects ñ and become to the state (by promoting its prosperity) what his wife is to the household over which she presides."



Nineteenth-century Americans, perhaps even more than their British or French contemporaries, thought in terms of gender and sought to divide the whole of human activity into masculine and feminine "spheres." They did not, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman complained late in the century, recognize human characteristics. So, if one associated a given trait with men, then women should possess its opposite or its complement. If men were strong; women must be frail; if men were rational, then women were emotional. If men tended to be coarse, women were supposed to be naturally more refined. And so on and so on. Virtually every quality, trait, or characteristic presumably belonged to one or the other sex, as they phrased it. Activities were supposed to correspond. Since women were supposedly more nurturing, Catharine Beecher's campaign in the 1830s and 1840s to open the teaching profession to them succeeded. Taking care of children, especially young children, was seen as a "natural" extension of woman's "sphere." If the basic notion of all this is clear enough, the compulsion behind it is more elusive. And the consequences for daily living, which Paulina Wright Davis, president of the first two national woman's rights conventions, once described as "soul murder," were both pervasive and profound. They were also highly controversial.

One place to begin is with an idealized description of the American woman by the popular novelist and magazine editor, John Neal. Another male view is provided by an anonymous writer in Harper's New Monthly Magazine. This essay was provoked by a pamphlet written by the radical minister, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. The most outspoken woman to write on the subject may well have been Jane Swisshelm. In editorializing on the subject of women voting or holding political office, she observed:

We have watched women making hay, raking and binding grain, reaping, raking and binding grain, reaping, plowing, harrowing, milking cows, churning, hoeing, digging, weeding, planting, wrestling with washtubs and big kettles, driving market carts, carrying loads like hotel porters, whitewashing, scrubbing, scouring --doing all sorts of drudgery, against which public opinion had not one word to say, and "thinks I to myself, thinks I," if anyone should propose that these women should take any part in making or executing the laws that regulate the reward and relations of labor, what a lecture he would get from public opinion, about feminine delicacy, female weakness, domestic duties, and all that sort of thing! Woman should be very delicate, very depending, very helpless, when men want to be loved; but she must grow very strong, very self-reliant, very efficient when he wants to be served. It is especially silly to place the physical labor or exposure of any branch of legislation, as a reason why women may not engage in it. The preventing causes, if [there] be causes at all, must be mental, moral or religious.

Progress and Gender

By the late 1850s some men were willing to admit that the boundaries of the "spheres" were shifting. This was, a Harper's New Illustrated Monthly editorial, proclaimed a good thing. It was a necessary outgrowth of the "progress" of the age. Harper's essayist could retain his equanimity because he was sure that some of the key differences between the genders, or sexes as he and his contemporaries phrased it, were God-given and therefore immutable. So, even in the midst of change, one could hold on to certain truths. Or could one? By the end of the 1860s the Atlantic Monthly was asking "Is There Such A Thing As Sex?" The question was provoked by the stubborn insistence of woman's rights advocates that women, like men, were persons and that they therefore had identical claims to various legal rights and privileges.

from "The Yellow Wallpaper" Background by Suzanne Helfman, DeAnza College