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MARY CASSATT, THE MATERNAL BODY, AND MODERN CONNOISSEURSHIP

by

PAMELA A. IVINSKI

VOLUME I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2003

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Abstract

MARY CASSATT, THE MATERNAL BODY,
AND MODERN CONNOISSEURSHIP

by

PAMELA A. IVINSKI

Adviser: Professor Carol Armstrong

As a woman in a male-dominated profession, a somewhat latecoming American participant in what has come to be defined as "French Impressionism," and a figure painter working within an artistic movement that is now most often seen publicly in exhibitions of landscapes, Mary Cassatt has been written out of many histories of art, with most studies of her work either taking biographical shape, concentrating ahistorically on her mother and child imagery, or bracketing her career within the category of "woman artist"—something the artist herself fought against by refusing to participate in "women only" exhibitions. While these approaches have carved out a space for the deserved recognition of an oeuvre without a comfortable art historical home, they all too frequently serve to confirm the validity of a formalist modernism that finds little of interest or value in her work. And to try to understand—even to celebrate—Cassatt's mother and child images outside history is to suggest that the family is unchanging or "natural" and that she has somehow managed to capture some essential truth about maternity.

"Mary Cassatt, the Maternal Body, and Modern Connoisseurship" examines the artist's maternal imagery and the critical response to it within the cultural context of her time as well as in relation to the continuing problem of the place of the woman artist within various bodies of art historical knowledge. Primary among these is the development of formalism, as it emerged from the "modern connoisseurship" of Bernard Berenson in particular. The many parallels between efforts to define a woman's role as

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solely within the family (as debated in the popular press and in new fields of study including psychoanalysis), to give connoisseurship the status of a "science," and to theorize formalism during the artist's lifetime will be understood to be not merely uncanny coincidences, but as motivated in part by women's efforts to assert themselves outside the home, in the political, social, economic, and artistic realms.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must begin by thanking Carol Armstrong for her intellectual inspiration, discerning commentary, support, and willingness to see this project through to the end, though she had long before left the Graduate Center. I would also like to thank my other readers for their advice and time, for which I am very appreciative: Patricia Mainardi, Sally Webster, and Nancy K. Miller.

This dissertation benefited from the continuing dialogue with my colleagues on the Mary Cassatt Catalogue Raisonné Committee: Warren Adelson, Jay Cantor, and William H. Gerdts. The opportunity to examine and discuss many works firsthand has been invaluable. I am extremely grateful to Warren for his generosity and encouragement, as well as to the staff of Adelson Galleries, especially Susan Mason and Andrea Maltese.

While at Williams College, I was inspired by the teaching and counsel of Carol Clark and Carol Ockman. In recent years, I have also had important opportunities to develop my argument through lectures and symposia, and I thank the Vancouver Art Gallery and the New Britain Museum of Art, as well as the organizers of and participants in the following events, all held in 2000: "Uncommon Senses": An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Senses in Art and Culture, Lonergan College, Concordia University, Montréal, Canada; "Ways of Seeing": INCS Interdisciplinary 19th-Century Studies Conference, Université Paris-X, Nanterre, France; and "High Aspirations and New Realities: The Artist Between the Museum and the Marketplace in the Nineteenth Century," The Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art and the Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

My parents, John and Dorothy Ivinski, provided my first lessons in "ways of seeing," from which I continue to benefit. My sister Patricia comforted me and provided a model of scholarship in her museum work. My brother Jeffrey, sister-in-law Laura, and niece Chloe provided moral support along the way, as did my friend Denise Krieger

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Migdail. Lauren Frederick-Bowen saw me through many a crisis with her friendship and wise assistance. I am indebted to Tod Lippy and Martin Fox for many laughs and for fostering my creativity. Dionne R. Powell led me to understand the motivations behind my intellectual obsessions and helped me to work through them. And Josh Moreinis, of course, provided the day-to-day love and support for which I am most grateful.

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PREFACE

Given that this dissertation takes as one of its subjects issues of origins, sources, influences, knowledge, and acknowledgments, I find it both necessary and appropriate to begin with a brief discussion of its genesis and relation to the works of my predecessors and colleagues in the field of Cassatt studies. "Mary Cassatt, the Maternal Body, and Modern Connoisseurship" has grown out of my experiences negotiating two associated but very different worlds: my work, beginning in 1991, as Senior Research Associate for and now as a member of the Mary Cassatt Catalogue Raisonné Committee (which is preparing a revised edition of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin's 1970 volume);[1] and second, my graduate studies, beginning in 1985, through which I have become immersed in postmodern theoretical discourses that call into question the very existence of art historical tools such as the catalogue raisonné and the monograph. As I simultaneously began to gain insight into Cassatt's oeuvre and to explore the literature and history of connoisseurship in an effort to determine whether critiques of this type of scholarship are convincing, I grew interested in the question of how Cassatt's place in the trajectory of modernism may have been affected by connoisseurship's dismissive attitude toward her most popular subject matter, that of mother and child.

After extensively studying the literature of connoisseurship from the early modern period to the present, I have reluctantly admitted that I cannot incorporate the majority of what I have learned about its fascinating history into the present project.[2] Nor will I offer any conclusions here as to the ultimate validity of the catalogue raisonné system in its current state. If, as Donald Preziosi suggests, art history's efforts to define the boundaries

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[1] Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, *Mary Cassatt, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors, and Drawings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970). The Mary Cassatt Catalogue Raisonné project is sponsored by Adelson Galleries, Inc., New York.

[2] Carol Gibson-Wood's *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988) was extremely useful to me as a guide to approaching the history of connoisseurship.

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of the individual artist's *corpus* are "in one respect a key matrix wherein disciplinary, legal, and commercial lines of power converge and support each other—the keystone, perhaps, of disciplinary rhetoric,"[3] the task of untangling these lines is far beyond my scope here. However, I hope this study will be seen as a contribution to such a goal. Art history's obsessions with authenticity, attribution, the genealogy of national and stylistic schools, sources, influence, originality, etc., as well as the discipline's relation to a market that privileges the individual object in a way that is foreign to works of literature, are not easily banished by a postmodern declaration of the "death of the author/artist," and are deeply indebted to modern Western concepts of the family as a legal entity, I contend.

As someone who combines interests in theory and in the history of art history, and as a contributor to two catalogues raisonnés,[4] I feel I am well-suited to making a contribution regarding certain strands of art history's "disciplinary, legal, and commercial lines of power." And though this study works in many ways to uncover a bias against the feminine/maternal that shapes art history and its connoisseurial support structure, I remain strongly convinced of the validity of the Cassatt catalogue raisonné project. I believe that Cassatt is important not only for her aesthetic achievements, but also as a woman who resisted gender restrictions. Furthermore, she must be studied because she has entered into our popular American mythology beyond the art world or academe as few artists have. For instance, her works are frequently employed to "illustrate" books and articles treating questions of infant and maternal behavior and psychology, and have been reproduced on posters published by governmental health agencies. For all these reasons her art ought to be documented as accurately as possible.

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[3] Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 33.

[4] See Pamela A. Ivinski, "Unpictured Works," in Carol Clark, Nancy Mowll Mathews, Gwendolyn Owens, et al., *Maurice Prendergast, Charles Prendergast: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Williamstown and Munich: Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA, in association with Prestel, 1990), 644-64.

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This study differs from other examples of Cassatt scholarship in a number of ways. First, it should be noted that there is remarkably little serious or specialized literature on the artist, despite the immense Cassatt bibliography. I have been privileged to work with the files of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, the founder of Cassatt studies, who began researching her subject during the late 1910s and continued until her death in 1986. We have Breeskin to thank for keeping the artist's name alive during the years in which she was rather reviled by the art historical community.[5] Nancy Mowll Mathews has shown herself to be a worthy successor to Mrs. Breeskin, adding immensely to our knowledge of the artist with her meticulously documented books, articles, and exhibitions. I owe much to her scholarly example, which I experienced firsthand while working as an assistant to the Maurice and Charles Prendergast catalogue raisonné project. My work differs from Mathews's in the use of a more theoretical approach, but I would not have been able to devote myself to either of these areas had not she and Breeskin established the foundation upon which I work.

This study also shares many of the same interests and concerns of the third scholar most closely associated with Cassatt, Griselda Pollock. Pollock introduced psychoanalytically-informed feminist theory to Cassatt studies in a manner that has informed and inspired me. My work attempts to situate many of the same types of ideas within a rigorously historical context, looking beyond the pictures to many responses by Cassatt's critics and also to the ways in which these responses echo and transform the scientific, philosophical, sociological, and popular discourses about women and maternity that were disseminated during the artist's lifetime, from the *Gazette des beaux-arts* to *Good Housekeeping*, for Cassatt was discussed in both. In addition, while Pollock has

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[5] In addition to publishing the 1970 catalogue raisonné of the oils, pastels, watercolors, and drawings, Breeskin also compiled a catalogue raisonné of the prints, first published as *The Graphic Art of Mary Cassatt* (Washington, D.C.: H. Bittner & Co., 1948), then revised and published in 1978 by the Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. In addition, Breeskin organized a number of important retrospectives of the artist's work, including those held at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1941–42 and at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 1970–71.

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greatly elucidated the position of the female artist and her work within the generally masculinist scopic regime through her Cassatt writings,[6] I explore some of the same material with a concern for the relation of sight and of artmaking to touch and the feminine.

Mary Cassatt, the Maternal Body, and Modern Connoisseurship also differs from almost all other preceding studies of the artist—except Mathews's dissertation—in its focus on the mother and child works. Of course, Mathews initiated the specialized study of Cassatt's maternal imagery with her 1980 New York University dissertation, "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century," the first and, at the time of this writing, only other completed dissertation on the artist.[7] After tracing Cassatt from her student years and early career to her Impressionist period, and reading her 1893 *Modern Woman* mural with Symbolist theory, Mathews discusses the nineteenth-century secularization of the Madonna in religion and literature and surveys the Madonna in nineteenth-century art. Only in the last two chapters does she directly study Cassatt's "Modern Madonnas," defined as the mother and child works circa 1888–93, and the remainder of the artist's maternal imagery, 1893–1915. The present dissertation differs in the attempt to cover certain phases in her development of this theme in far more detail,

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[6] See in particular her discussion of Cassatt in chapter 3, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 50-90.

[7] Nancy Mowll Mathews, "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1980).

Psychoanalyst and professor Jane Silverman Van Buren, in chapter 5 of the promisingly titled *The Modernist Madonna: Semiotics of the Maternal Metaphor* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, London: Karnac Books, 1989), also focuses on Cassatt's maternal imagery. Her book, however, is compromised by many errors, from the relatively innocuous (misspellings) to the serious, such as the misidentification of sitters around which her interpretations are built. In addition, though claiming that Cassatt, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Louisa May Alcott constructed their female figures out of the stereotypes of their era while also transforming them, Van Buren fails to offer even the most basic historical context for her interpretations, as if the idea of the mother remained static during the entire second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, she offers a reading of Cassatt in relation to the Oedipus myth and other psychoanalytic concepts as if these, too, have no relation to history. Although I will also rely heavily upon psychoanalytic theory in this dissertation, I believe that such theory is always a product of the era during which it is formed, and I attempt acknowledge this relation whenever possible.

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and to incorporate many now lesser-known pictures that were very popular during Cassatt's lifetime rather than the popular museum pictures commonly discussed in more recent Cassatt literature. Mathews in her dissertation illustrates only 18 mother and child works and discusses none dated after 1902; Pollock in her recent *Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women* treats only five pictures dated post-1900; and the 1998 Art Institute of Chicago exhibition catalogue, *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, illustrates 39 mother and child pictures, but only four from 1900 and after.[8] This study, in contrast, considers 55 of Cassatt's depictions of child care, 14 of them dating to 1900 and after. Moreover, it features an extensive discussion of Cassatt criticism written during the artist's lifetime, the majority of which has never been addressed, nor even translated.

Because I wished to cover the entire range of Cassatt's maternal imagery, I have arranged the dissertation chronologically. This allows me to demonstrate how dramatically ideas about women, mothers, and children changed during the nearly 50-year span of Cassatt's professional career, while also permitting me to replicate the shift of the artist's primary audience from France to the U.S. In addition, by approaching her works in this manner, we will see that the artist has not illustrated any "natural" or "essential" truth about motherhood. Rather, we will understand that the very idea of maternity is in constant flux, and begin to see how connoisseurship and art history have been inflected by these mutable ideas regarding gender, creation, and procreation.

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[8] Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt, Painter of Modern Women* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, ed. Judith A. Barter (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

All illustrations are by Mary Cassatt unless otherwise noted. Works by Cassatt are identified by Breeskin catalogue raisonné number, employing the following abbreviations:

BrCR Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, *Mary Cassatt, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors, and Drawings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970).

Br. Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, *The Graphic Art of Mary Cassatt*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978).

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Fig. 101 "Entrelacs." Illustration from Jules Bourgoin, *Théorie de l'ornement*, new ed. (Paris: Ducher & Cie., 1883), plate 12.

Fig. 102 "Figure 29. Rear face of the Right Hand." Illustration from Alphonse Bertillon, *Alphonse Bertillon's Instructions for Taking Descriptions for the Identification of Criminals and Others by the Means of Anthropometric Indications* (1889), trans. Gallus Muller. Reprint ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1977).

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CHAPTER SIX

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Fig. 133 "Madonna and Child (Cimabue)." Illustration from Anna Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts* (1852), 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857), 120. After original now attributed to Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Rucellai Madonna*, 1285, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

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Fig. 155 *The Caress*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 32 x 26 3/4 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. (BrCR 393)

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Fig. 160 *Young Mother Sewing*, 1899. Oil on canvas, 37 3/8 x 26 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (BrCR 415)

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Fig. 170 *Baby Lying on His Mother's Lap Reaching to Hold a Scarf*, 1914. Pastel on paper, 29 1/2 x 24 1/2 in. Private collection. (BrCR 604)

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INTRODUCTION: *The Female Artist, the Uncanny Maternal Body, and Art History's Bodies of Knowledge*

Mary Cassatt, one of the most popular of all American-born painters, is still best known as "a painter of children and mothers," a title bestowed by her first biographer, art critic Achille Segard, in 1913.[1] Though Segard believed that Cassatt was "interested in *mamans* only on account of their children," he characterized her primary subject as one that "more or less comes down to maternal love alone."[2] He believed that Cassatt, despite "this restricted choice of motifs" to which she was limited "by taste or necessity," had "all the same known how to see, through this relatively unvaried subject, the life of humanity," for she had a "strong feeling that the child in society is of limitless importance because he is at once the present and the future, the gauge of its duration, the necessary condition for the continuation of the race and its perpetuity."[3]

Segard chose to emphasize Cassatt as "a painter of children and mothers" in the title of his book, but when examining her images he attended to their formal aspects with great intelligence, and in the passages treating her choice of subject he took care to specify, "children have been for her a theme for study in the domain of forms and the domain of color as much as in the order of sentiment."[4] This consideration of form as well as content in Cassatt's art was rare at this time, however; by the second decade of the twentieth century her work was far more frequently discussed in terms of its subject

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[1] Achille Segard, *Mary Cassatt, Un peintre des enfants et des mères* (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1913). [All translations to follow are mine unless otherwise noted; all emphases in quotations are original, unless otherwise specified.]

[2] Ibid.: "ne s'est intéressée aux mamans qu'à cause de leur enfant" (171); "se résume à peu près par le seul amour maternel" (181-2).

[3] Ibid.: "choix restreint de motifs" (181); "par goût ou par nécessité" (181); "a su voir tout de même, à travers ce sujet relativement peu varié, la vie de l'humanité" (182); "sentiment profond que l'enfant dans la société est d'une importance sans limites puisqu'il est à la fois le présent et l'avenir, le gage de durée, la condition nécessaire de la continuité de la race et de sa perpétuité" (180).

[4] Ibid., 171-2: "les enfants ont été pour elle un motif de recherche dans le domaine des formes et dans le domaine de la couleur autant que dans l'ordre du sentiment."

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matter than its technical means, and in publications such as American ladies' magazines rather than in art journals in France or the United States. Segard's commentary was also unusual in its serious appreciation of the emotionally and symbolically expressive aspects of the mother and child theme, given the growing authority of formalism among critics, connoisseurs, and art historians. The degree to which figures had come to be valued not as vehicles for the communication of emotional or symbolic content but rather for their function as formal elements in painting is evident from another book published in 1913, Clive Bell's popular and influential *Art*. Comparing the Uffizi *Maestà* panels by Cimabue and Giotto [Figs. 1, 2], Bell preferred the Cimabue, stating of Giotto's figures,

> The coarse heaviness of the forms of that woman and her baby is unthinkable in Cimabue; for Cimabue had learnt from the Byzantines that forms should be significant and not life-like. Doubtless in the minds of both there was something besides a preoccupation with formal combinations; but Giotto has allowed that "something" to dominate his design. Cimabue has forced his design to dominate it. . . . [Giotto] is so dreadfully obsessed by the idea that the humanity of the mother and child is the important thing about them that he has insisted on it to the detriment of his art.[5]

The representation of "humanity" lauded by Segard in Cassatt's works was dismissed at the same moment by Bell as something inessential to the formal concerns of art.

"Mary Cassatt, the Maternal Body, and Modern Connoisseurship" represents an attempt to understand a number of issues raised by this conjunction of texts by Segard and Bell: not only the relationship of form to content in Cassatt's maternal imagery throughout her career, but also the concurrent emergence of formalism out of "modern" or "scientific connoisseurship" and its devaluation of the emotionally and symbolically expressive content associated with the mother and child theme and with Cassatt's work. This

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[5] Clive Bell, *Art* (1913) (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), 104. [An effort has been made in this dissertation to ascertain the first publication date of each piece of literature written before or during Cassatt's lifetime that is cited here from a reprint or later edition. This date will be given, when known, in parentheses after the article or book title.]

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dissertation thus functions on two levels. Above all it is a monographical study of Cassatt, focusing on the contemporary response to her mother and child pictures and their historical and cultural context in a manner far broader than any previously attempted. But it is also an exploration of ideas about the female artist and the gendering of certain aspects of artmaking and interpretation as they arose simultaneously with her career—ideas that ensured her marginalization with regard to the modernist canon, in spite of her formal innovations.

In order to bridge Cassatt's practice and the discourses of connoisseurship and formalism, I will also seek to uncover the uncanny aspects of her mother and child subject matter. The notion of a disquieting or haunting feeling induced by the reappearance of something that has been forgotten or repressed—and in particular, a memory of the infant's original closeness to the mother's body—is best known through Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay, "The 'Uncanny.'"[6] The idea had actually begun to attract interest as a field of scientific study much earlier, as in the writings of William James, whom Cassatt admired, and at the same time that she first began to explore maternal imagery.[7] Linked etymologically to the root of connoisseur—*connaître* ("to know")—which is itself derived from *naître* ("to give birth"),[8] the uncanny encompasses issues regarding unease about

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[6] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), reprinted in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1955), 218-32. Sarah Kofman provides an important account of Freud's ideas on the uncanny in relation to aesthetics in *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics*, trans. Winifred Woodhull (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

[7] See, for example, William James, "Rationality, Activity and Faith," *Princeton Review* 58 (July 1882), 58-86. James later addressed aspects of the uncanny in *The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature* (New York, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902). For a discussion of his treatment of the concept, see James Winchell, "Century of the Uncanny: The Modest Terror of Theory," *Paradoxa* 3 (1997), 515-9. Freud, who was influenced by James, was also deeply indebted in his 1919 essay to ideas expressed by Ernst Jentsch in "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906), trans. Roy Sellars, *Angelaki* 2 (1995), 7-16.

During the late nineteenth century the uncanny was frequently studied as a phenomenon of parapsychology, which was a respected subfield of psychology; this idea will be explored further in Chapter Five. Cassatt was fascinated with parapsychology, hoping it would prove the existence of life after death.

[8] The common root of these words was described in the definition for "Connaître" in the *Grande Dictionnaire universelle du XIX^e siècle*, vol. 4 (Paris: Adminstration du Grand Dictionnaire universel,

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physical bodies (and their representation) and about bodies of knowledge that are germane to the study of Cassatt's maternal imagery. A close analysis of Cassatt's mother and child pictures shows that she frequently took this most familiar of themes and made it seem strange, subverting expectations regarding its form and content while also refusing to conform to traditional ideas regarding the female artist's inherent suitability, physical and emotional, to the depiction of maternal imagery.[9] Moreover, these aspects were frequently noted by her first critics, but rarely figure into discussions of her work published after 1913.[10]

1866), 953: "*Connaître* comes directly from the Latin *cognoscere*, which comes itself from the Sanskrit root *gnà*. . . . it can be seen in all the Aryan languages that the correlative roots of *gnà*, meaning *connaître*, and *gan*, meaning *naître*, are confounded enough in their forms and derivatives that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them with sureness. This leads one to presume a primitive affinity between their meanings." ("*Connaître* vient directement du latin cognoscere, qui vient lui-même de la racine sanscrite gnà . . . on a remarqué dans toutes les langues aryennes que les racines corrélatives à *gnà, connaitre*, et à *gan, naître*, confondent si bien leurs formes et leurs dérivés, qu'il est parfois difficile de les distinguer avec sûreté. Cela conduit à presumer une affinité primitive entre les significations.")

My original thoughts on the relation of *connaître*, *naître*, and connoisseurship were inspired by Jane Gallop's important and provocative essay on psychoanalytic art criticism and Freud's interest in Giovanni Morelli's attributionary method, "A Good Lay," in *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 135-48.

[9] Freud begins his 1919 essay with the admission that the perception of the uncanny is a highly subjective experience, one that can be invoked by a wide variety of stimuli. As such, it is difficult to discuss or define; and indeed, as Sylvia Kelso points out in "The Postmodern Uncanny: or Establishing Uncertainty," *Paradoxa* 3 (1997), 456-70, undecidability is one of its central qualities. I have focused on the uncanny as experienced in two ways: before the female/maternal body (and its image), and in relation to knowledge. My understanding of the uncanny as it arises in relation to the female/maternal body is deeply indebted to Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), and Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992). The uncanny is also very productively employed in a manner germane to this dissertation by Margaret Iverson, "In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny," *Art History* 21 (September 1998), 409-29. Iverson uses the uncanny to counter "a prevalent but mistaken reading" of Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad*, 1925 (Museum of Modern Art, New York) as "sentimentally nostalgic" (410), and she concludes, "No object, it seems, can be unequivocally uncanny or nostalgic," which may help explain why this painting can figure into both a "nostalgic narrative of America's simpler, more innocent past and in [Alfred] Hitchock's uncanny narrative in *Psycho*, where a dreadful past erupts violently amidst the apparent banality of the present" (427).

[10] It is interesting to consider that the two articles which serve as the most notable exceptions to this point were written by women who come from literary rather than art historical backgrounds: Mary Gordon's "Mary Cassatt," *Art & Antiques* (December 1985), 46-53; and Harriet Scott Chessman's "Mary Cassatt and the Maternal Body," in *American Iconology*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 239-58.

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The mother's body, while serving as a reminder of the blissful sense of oneness at the beginning of life, is also the site of the child's first experience of dissatisfaction and loss, and points as well toward the ultimate loss: corporeal death. Because it is "the former *heim* [home] of all human beings . . . the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning," in Freud's words,[11] the maternal body is that which we knew most intimately but can no longer fully remember. As such, it is the figure *par excellence* of knowledge that has been repressed or forgotten and can never be completely recovered. The mother's body thus represents "estrangement as well as origin," as Madelon Sprengnether has usefully phrased it.[12]

Images of maternity in Western art have tended to emphasize its supportive and protective aspects over the conflicts and rupture of unity also inherent to motherhood. Cassatt's maternal pictures, in contrast, often suggest the uncanny doubleness of the mother, depicting her simultaneously as a figure of primal unity and sustenance and as a prompt to individuation: the first figure against whom the child must struggle to define him- or herself. And while many interpreters, like Segard, have understood Cassatt as a painter of children more than of mothers, I will demonstrate how she represented maternity from the mother's point of view in a number of pictures, evoking the ecstasy in her intimacy with the child as well as her fear of being absorbed in their relationship to the point of losing her own identity. Furthermore, Cassatt achieves these emotional doublings not simply by depicting gestural or expressive interactions between the figures but also through her technical means. Her facture in particular does not always function to create mother and child images that are untroubled and whole; within the same picture it can build and caress while also appearing agitated and leaving the figures incomplete. By

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[11] Because I prefer the Alix Strachey translation of "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), in *Studies in Parapsychology*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 19-60, all quotations from this essay will be derived from the Rieff edition. The page references will also be given for the slightly different translation that appears in The *Standard Edition*. This quotation can be found in *Studies in Parapsychology* on p. 51, and in the *Standard Edition* on p. 245.

[12] Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother*, 233.

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considering Cassatt's handling we will see how she used texture (in combination with color) to accentuate the complexity of the child's physical and psychological relation to the mother. I will also show that Cassatt kept the figure of the mother visible in an era when most scientists and psychologists—including Freud—little acknowledged the maternal role despite their profound fascination with infant development.[13]

The uncanny, which is often manifested in the appearance of doubles, in the confusion between original and copy, in unexplained resemblances, and in unstable identities and concealed origins, can also be used as a tool for prying open art historical systems of inquiry and scholarship, particularly in relation to questions of sources, influence, and originality, in addition to authenticity and the genealogies of national and stylistic schools.[14] It can assist in exploring what art history seeks to know and what it seeks to repress, what it chooses to see and not to see, how its bodies of knowledge are constructed and who is authorized to construct them, and how these things might be interconnected, as well as how they might be inflected by gender. In this way we can consider, for example, how formalism works to exclude not only the sentimental depiction of maternity but also almost any type of emotion or expression that can be associated with femininity, and how Cassatt has come to be understood as an artist who contributed to but ultimately stands outside the mainstream of modernism. This introduction, then, will be employed to flesh out the idea of the uncanny, particularly with regard to late nineteenth-

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[13] That mothers are generally absent from Freud's account of child development is the thesis of Sprengnether's *The Spectral Mother*; yet, as she suggests, the mother "haunts" his arguments, and makes her most compelling appearance in his essay on "The 'Uncanny.'" Sprengnether also observes that the mother is no more significant to the theories of Jacques Lacan, nor even to many object relations theorists, who see the mother as the most important figure to the child, but only when she is self-sacrificing and self-effacing.

[14] There is an important precedent for this project in an essay by Linda Nochlin, whose work in general has been one of the most important formative influences for my own thinking. In "Courbet's *L'Origine du monde:* The Origin without an Original," *October* 37 (Summer 1986), 76-86, Nochlin characterizes art historical practice as a Freudian scenario driven by "the founding notion that through the logic of research—i.e., the repetitive act of searching over and over again—one can finally penetrate to *the* ultimate meaning of a work of art" (77). Freud believed the repetition-compulsion to be a symptom of the uncanny.

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century anxieties about the sense of touch and its association with so-called "women's ways of knowing," and to outline its usefulness for analyzing Cassatt's work and the discourses of connoisseurship and formalism.

* * *

As a number of scholars have recently argued, the uncanny first emerged during the Enlightenment, as the drive to account for all aspects of existence by means of rational thought gave rise to Romanticism and a fascination with the inexplicable and the intangible, such as ghosts and the mysteries compelling them to haunt houses.[15] The Romantic celebration of the individual spirit also led to an ambivalence about the body. The more one's emotional investment in another person approaches the sublime, the greater the fear of being separated from or losing that person. As a result, Romantic art works often substituted a disembodied, visionary image of a perfect and unchanging other for sensuous, corporeal contact with a mortal human, typified by Gothic novels involving a husband's obsession with a beautiful but dead wife.

Anthony Vidler has tracked the uncanny into the nineteenth century, describing its manifestations as "a significant psychoanalytical and aesthetic response to the real shock of the modern," particularly as experienced by the bourgeoisie, "a newly established class, not quite at home in its own home."[16] I will take this idea further, looking at how the uncanny arises in relation to late nineteenth-century attempts to establish woman's place as exclusively within the home, for Freud's coupling of *Heim* and the maternal body with regard to the uncanny is not incidental. (Freud's original German term for uncanny, *unheimlich*, literally means "unhomelike.") It is important to recognize that the question of women's roles in family and society began to be contested to an unprecedented degree

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[15] My discussion of the uncanny during the Enlightenment and of the uncanny in general has been greatly informed by Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1992).

[16] Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, 3-4, 9.

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beginning around 1880, and that both the advocates and opponents of expanded rights for women called for a new emphasis on motherhood during the years 1880–1914[17]—the same period during which Cassatt produced her images of child care (1878–1915). A wide range of efforts to construct and to resist the woman's sole identification as *femme du foyer*, housewife, homemaker, or *hausfrau* will be considered here because aspects of this debate frequently spilled over into the realm of aesthetics—something that can be readily seen in the reception of Cassatt's work.

Discussions of women's roles and aesthetics often intersected around claims regarding touch and intuition that were employed to assert women's innate aptitude for certain, usually domestic, occupations. A highly receptive sense of touch was considered to be a feminine quality and related to gaining knowledge through embodied means (*connoître*), in contrast to the more masculine and disembodied sense of sight, which produced the type of knowledge associated with reason and logic (*savoir*).[18] Intuition, too, was commonly conceptualized as a mental correlative to touch and considered to be inferior to masculine reason yet also to exist in the realm of uncanny powers of perception (a "sixth sense"). Women were commonly viewed as receptors of knowledge that "they cannot tell how they came by," as an article on "Feminine Intuitions," published in the British *New Monthly Magazine* of 1871, phrased it.[19]

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[17] On this topic, see Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen, eds., introduction to the chapter "Nationalism, Materialism, and Motherhood, 1880–1914," in *Women, the Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents*, vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 9.

[18] Hermann von Helmholtz, whose papers on vision were utilized to position Impressionism as painting that privileges optical values over the depiction of figural or emotional content, noted in 1868 that *connaître* and *kennen* (its German equivalent) refer to attaining knowledge through instinctual and embodied means, as opposed to arriving at knowledge through logic: *wissen* in German or *savoir* in French. Helmholtz observed that the greater dependence of *wissen/savoir* upon language often leads to claims of its preeminence over *kennen/connaître*, which is a matter of impressions not easily expressed in words (much like the uncanny). See Hermann von Helmholtz, "The Recent Progress of the Theory of Vision" (1868), *Popular Scientific Lectures* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 178-82.

[19] "Feminine Intuitions," reprinted from *New Monthly Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 109 (1 April 1871), 23. *Littell's Living Age*, a Boston periodical, reprinted articles from a variety of British magazines. Cassatt's friend Eliza Haldeman, in a letter of October 28, 1866, quoted in *Cassatt and Her Circle: Selected Letters*, ed. Nancy Mowll Mathews (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 38, reported that "today [Cassatt] came to see me and staid [*sic*] two hours at least and brought me some Litells [*sic*] and

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Nevertheless, this gendering was by no means stable (intuition also being considered a "second sight") and was frequently reversed, especially when it was to male advantage to possess a well-developed sense of touch or instinct. On rare occasions, a woman claimed characteristics usually gendered masculine in order to assert the mental equality of her sex. Sarah E. Henshaw, for instance, in an 1869 article asking "Are We Inferior?," proposed a variation on the "Feminine Intuitions" model of knowledge, stating that a man "approaches his conclusion step by step through a slow and sometimes devious way of reasoning, and reaches it by degrees of approximation."[20] A woman, on the other hand, "darts upon hers at once, is sure of it instantly, she does not know how, and *afterward* seeks to prove it."[21] At the same time, Henshaw remarked, while men complain that women "never *reason* about anything," it could be argued that men themselves "never *see* anything," and the "difference between his mode at getting at truth, and hers, is as the difference between groping along by the sense of feeling, and flying by the help of sight."[22]

The *New Monthly* writer on "Feminine Intuitions" similarly reported that "a woman sees a thousand things which escape a man; that physically even, she is quicker sighted; that mentally she takes in many more impressions in the same time than a man does," while explaining, "this superior discernment in character is merely a female *instinct*, arising from a more delicate sensibility, a finer tact, a clearer intuition, and a natural abhorrence of every appearance of evil."[23] The type of knowledge described as "tact" was implicitly associated with embodiedness; as an *Atlantic Monthly* writer put it in 1885,

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Blackwood magasins [*sic*] to read. . . ." [Mathews retained the original spelling, syntax, and punctuation of these letters in *Cassatt and Her Circle*; I have quoted them as they appear in that volume with the addition of "*sic*" when appropriate regarding spelling but not grammar or punctuation.]

In this dissertation I will quote extensively from a wide range of primary sources, especially those published in France, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. Not only was Cassatt's work linked by critics to cultural and aesthetic traits of all of these nations, but writers of the period demonstrated a great deal of self-consciousness about the similarities and differences between their nationalities, and were often remarkably well informed about the main currents in international literature.

[20] Sarah E. Henshaw, "Are We Inferior?," *Galaxy* 7 (January 1869), 126.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 127.

[23] "Feminine Intuitions," reprinted from *New Monthly Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age*, 24-5.

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"Etymologically, as we know, tact is touch, and it may be called, therefore, the deft way of handling people. It is born with some men and women, like the supple, delicate fingers of the artist's hand, and those who have it use their gift instinctively."[24]

That women were considered more likely to be born in possession of "tact" was frequently invoked to justify limiting their place to the domestic realm. An 1868 *Blackwood's Magazine* article on "Clever Women" proclaimed:

> The ideal woman confines herself to her circle, her family, her home, and herself as the centre of all. Within this restricted range the mind's touch is endued [*sic*] with an exquisite sensibility, because it is restricted. In larger, remoter questions, tact and instinct go for nothing—they are consciously at fault; and therefore all that concerns art, literature, politics and religion, and all great public questions are accepted by the "very woman," from lover, husband, or whatever man is selected as guide, with real implicitness and docility, however these submissive qualities may be veiled with a feint of choice and self-will.[25]

These beliefs were espoused by many of the most influential scientists, sociologists, and philosophers of the nineteenth century in addition to writers in the popular press. In 1871 Charles Darwin wrote, "It is generally admitted that with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation."[26] Herbert Spencer similarly attributed such abilities to women's lack of progression from a more primitive state: "In barbarous times a woman who could from a movement, tone of voice, or expression of

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[24] "The Contributors' Club," *Atlantic Monthly* 60 (January 1885), 137. This writer also added, "Tact ought not be confounded with *savoir-faire*," *savoir* being characterized as a more rational and therefore "masculine" way of knowing.

[25] "Clever Women," reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 99 (26 December 1868), 773.

[26] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 326-7.

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face, instantly detect in her savage husband the passion that was rising, would be likely to escape dangers run into by a woman less skilled in interpreting the natural language of feeling. Hence, from the perpetual exercise of this power, and the survival of those having most of it, we may infer its establishment as a feminine faculty."[27] But in the same era, these uncanny "powers of intuition" and "rapid perception" were seen not as innate and primitive but rather as the product of an intellectual education when possessed by figures such as the (male) detective, who was remarkably able to make quick and accurate judgments without being able to "convey to another any adequate reasons for his assurance, which depends upon the impression made upon his Ego by minutiae of look, tone, gesture, or manner, which have little or no significance to ordinary observers, but which his *specially-cultured* common sense instinctively apprehends," as Dr. William B. Carpenter explained in 1871.[28]

Spencer, who insisted that women were morally obligated to become mothers, felt that maternal instinct precluded an ability to make objective, abstract judgments, for it "delights in yielding benefits apart from deserts [*sic*]; and being partially excited by whatever shows a feebleness that appeals for help (supposing antagonism has not been aroused), carries into social action this preference of generosity to justice."[29] By the late 1860s, however, women had begun to chafe against the demands of their purportedly natural or instinctual roles, to the point that a *Saturday Review* article on "Modern Mothers" warned,

> With some of the more intellectual and less instinctive sort, maternity is looked on as a kind of degradation. . . . This wild revolt against nature, and especially this abhorrence of maternity, is carried to a still greater extent by American women, with grave

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[27] Herbert Spencer, "The Study of Sociology. No. XV.–Preparation in Psychology," *Contemporary Review* 22 (September 1873), 527.
[28] Dr. W[illiam] B. Carpenter, "What is Common Sense?," *Contemporary Review* 19 (February 1872), 415 [emphasis added].
[29] Spencer, "The Study of Sociology," 530.

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> national consequences resulting; but though we have not yet reached the transatlantic limit, the state of feminine feeling and physical condition among ourselves will disastrously affect the future unless something can be done to bring our women back to a healthier tone of mind and body.[30]

The discourse of "modern" or "scientific connoisseurship," initiated by Giovanni Morelli during the 1870s,[31] was characterized by an effort to disassociate the attribution and evaluation of artworks from the intuition and subjectivity associated with women. "Scientific" connoisseurs sought a method based in logic and objectivity, as if anxious to sever the practice from its roots in an embodied and instinctual *connaître*. As Morelli scoffed of such an approach in *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of Their Works*, "all art-historians, from Vasari down to our own day, have only made use of two tests to aid them in deciding the authorship of a work of art—intuition, or the so-called general impression, and documentary evidence; with what result you have seen for yourself."[32]

Beginning in the 1860s connoisseurs and critics were also increasingly concerned to determine the significance of the artist's touch, especially in relation to the belief, derived from physiognomics, that the "handwriting" of the artist allows for the reading of identity and even personality within his or her physical and stylistic traces. This growing interest in facture often involved specifically gendered ideas. For example, the year after Cassatt began to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, an editorial in *The Crayon*, quoting an article originally published in the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, declared,

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[30] "Modern Mothers," reprinted from *Saturday Review* in *Ladies' Repository* 2 (August 1868), 127.

[31] Morelli, who had originally studied to be a doctor, initially published his ideas on the attribution of paintings in a series of articles that appeared in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, Leipzig, 1874–76. His first book, in which he expanded upon these articles, was *Masters in German Galleries, A Critical Essay on the Italian Pictures in the Galleries of Munich–Dresden–Berlin*, published in German in 1880 and in English in 1883. His second book, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of Their Works, The Borghese and Doria-Pamfili Galleries in Rome*, appeared in German in three volumes from 1890–93 (the final being published posthumously).

[32] Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of Their Works, The Borghese and Doria-Pamfili Galleries in Rome* (1890–93), trans. Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes (London: John Murray, 1900), 21-2.

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> The female artist, although she may not cover grand canvases, may still pursue painting profitably. What hand so delicate as that which decorates the exquisite porcelains that we love to see around us? Who can produce upon the ivory, with a like sentiment of maternal tenderness, the features of a cherished infant? And to descend to the precincts of a trade, where shall we find, except among women, the patience and carefulness required in the coloring of botanical plates and every description of illustrative art? . . . It is to feminine hands, incapable of erecting massive stone monuments, that is assigned the labor of building the pasteboard structures that supply the holiday joys of children.[33]

Cassatt's handling will be examined in conjunction with these critical ideas on the role of tactility in art, especially its inflection by gender, including Bernard Berenson's concept of "tactile values," which promoted an "ideated" rather than corporeal experience of touch in art, and Roger Fry's formalist privileging of expressive facture over content.

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Twenty years after these articles in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* and *The Crayon* pronounced upon the most suitable artistic occupations for feminine hands, Joris-Karl Huysmans, the French critic and novelist, expressed similar notions in his review of Cassatt's contributions to the 1881 Impressionist exhibition. He found her works to support his claim that "only a woman can paint childhood. There is in it a particular feeling that a man cannot render; his fingers, unless they are especially sensitive and delicate, are too thick to avoid leaving behind clumsy and brutal fingerprints; only a

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[33] Léon Lagrange, "Du rang des femmes dans les arts," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 October 1860), 34-5: "la femme peintre, alors même qu'elle ne produira pas de grandes toiles, pourra exercer la peinture. Quelle main plus délicate saura mieux décorer les porcelaines fragiles dont nous aimons à nous entourer? Qui reproduira sur l'ivoire, avec un sentiment plus exquis de la tendresse maternelle, les traits d'un enfant aimé? Et, pour descendre au métier même, où trouver ailleurs que chez les femmes la patience et le soin qu'exige le coloriage des planches de botanique, des images de piété, des estampes de toute espèce? . . . C'est à des mains féminines, incapables d'élever nos grands monuments de pierre, que l'industrie du cartonnage demande ces frèles édifices, premières joies de l'enfance"; quoted and trans. in [John Durand], "Woman's Position in Art," *Crayon* 8 (February 1861), 27.

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woman can pose a child, dress it, place pins without pricking. . . .[34] But the images he was discussing, especially the pastel *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3], do not always correspond to an ideal of a "delicate" hand reproducing "the features of a treasured infant" with a "maternal sentiment" that Cassatt would presumably experience instinctively, in spite of having no children of her own. To the contrary, *A Goodnight Hug* in particular evinces a number of uncanny qualities, taking what was generally viewed as "the eternal theme of art from the time of Giotto to down our day"[35] and making it quite strange. In fact, even Huysmans, whose approval of Cassatt's maternal images appears on the surface to be rather conventional, would go on in the same review to analogize her figures with a series of characters from the novels of Charles Dickens who were not biological mothers but rather virginal girls who served as substitutes for absent mothers.[36]

A Goodnight Hug, which is likely the first mother and child image to be exhibited by Cassatt, is as notable for the elements of this motif suppressed by the artist as for those she actually illustrated.[37] The horizontal composition is tightly cropped to focus on the

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[34] Joris-Karl Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," *L'Art moderne* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1883), 232, reprinted in Ruth Berson, ed., *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), 350: "seule, la femme est apte à peindre l'enfance. Il y a là un sentiment particulier qu'un homme ne saurait rendre; à moins qu'ils ne soient singulièrement sensitifs et nerveux, ses doigts sont trop gros pour ne pas laisser de maladroites et de brutales empreintes; seule la femme peut poser l'enfant, l'habiller, mettre les épingles sans se piquer. . . ." [When quoting reviews of the Impressionist exhibitions, I will give the original page number(s) cited, if known, followed by the Berson reprint information. The page numbers cited in subsequent references to each review refer to the Berson reprint.]

[35] "The Fine Arts, Miss Cassatt's Exhibition at the St. Botolph Club," *Boston Evening Transcript* (24 March 1898), 6.

[36] One of the characters mentioned by Huysmans, Esther Summerson of *Bleak House* (first serialized in 1852–53), has been characterized by Dickens scholar Carolyn Dever as "surely the uncanniest homemaker in Victorian fiction" because "every aspect of her identity, from name to face to family to motivation, remains unfixed and unlocatable." See *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91.

[37] Because the revised edition of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin's Cassatt catalogue raisonné, *Mary Cassatt, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors, and Drawings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970), has not yet been published, original works by Cassatt mentioned in this dissertation will be identified by the titles used in the 1970 volume. If a work is widely known under a different title, that title will be given in parentheses after the Breeskin title. Prints will be identified according to the titles used in Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, *The Graphic Work of Mary Cassatt, A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978). The Breeskin catalogue raisonné number of each work illustrated will be given in the list of illustrations, and the Breeskin number

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heads of the two figures but their faces are hidden from the viewer. In place of the human visage, the conventional central point of Western figural painting, Cassatt substituted the meeting of blank cheeks, an oversized and roughly rendered female hand, and the tiny pink ear of a baby, set against an agitated wallpaper background in acidic hues. *A Goodnight Hug* "deserves praise from [*sic*] its intense feeling," *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*'s "Lady Correspondent" commented of this picture in a review of the 1881 exhibition; "both faces are almost invisible, but one feels the love and intensity of the embrace; it is a pity more care was not put into the drawing of the hand, which is large, coarse, and ill shapen."[38] It is this hand, however, in its prominence in the composition, the enfolding gesture it performs, the choppy pastel strokes from which it is constructed, and the touches of salmon pink and royal blue which simultaneously define and blur its contours, that most thoroughly manifests Cassatt's characteristic style—the artist's "hand" in the picture.

Indeed, *A Goodnight Hug* is uncannily Morellian—all hand and ears—as if Cassatt had employed the Italian connoisseur Giovanni Morelli's schedules of these body parts [Fig. 4] as a source of formal inspiration, to make a point about her own signature style. Morelli, who introduced his controversial attributionary method in a series of articles in the mid-1870s, elaborated on the procedure in an 1890 volume, in part in response to critics who charged that he was "insensible to every deeper quality in a work of art, and regard[ed] only its external features, laying particular stress upon the form of the hand, the ear, and even, *horribile dictu*, of the finger-nails."[39] Morelli defended the attention he paid to these commonly ignored areas of a picture, explaining in language influenced by the discourses of comparative anatomy and genetics,

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for each work mentioned in the text but not illustrated will be given in the footnotes. The relevant catalogue will be identified by the traditional abbreviation: "BrCR" for the 1970 volume of original works, and "Br." for the 1978 print volume.

[38] "Our Lady Correspondent," "Art Abroad. Art in Paris," *Artist and Journal of Home Culture* 2 (1 May 1881), 153.

[39] Morelli, "Preface," *Italian Painters*, 44.

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> most painters, and rightly enough, put all the strength of their art into the delineation of the features, which they endeavour to make as striking as possible, and pupils, for this part of their work, often appropriated ideas from their masters. This is rarely the case in the representation of the hands and ears; yet they also have a different form in every individual. The types of Saints and the mode of treating the drapery are usually common to a school, having been transmitted through the master's works to his pupils and imitators; while, on the other hand, every independent master has his own special conception and treatment of landscape, and, what is more, of the form of the hand and ear. For every important painter has, so to speak, a type of hand and ear peculiar to himself.[40]

Thus, Morelli maintained, while many copyists and forgers are capable of capturing the overall sense of another artist's style, they often neglect to reproduce adequately certain details like hands and ears, which the original artist has painted according to unconscious formulae that are idiosyncratic to him or her.

Morelli also attended to the communicative function of hands, claiming, "Except the face, probably no part of the human body is more characteristic, individual, significant, and expressive than the hand; to represent it satisfactorily has ever been one of the chief difficulties which artists have had to contend with, and one which only the greatest have been completely successful in overcoming."[41] At the same moment Edmond Duranty, in "La Nouvelle Peinture," an 1876 essay celebrating the newly developed Impressionist aesthetic, advocated the modernization of physiognomics in art, asserting, "A back should reveal temperament, age, and social position, a pair of hands should reveal the magistrate or the merchant, and a gesture should reveal an entire range of feelings."[42] Edgar Degas,

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[40] Morelli, *Italian Painters*, 76-7.

[41] Ibid., 76 n. 3.

[42] Edmond Duranty, "The New Painting: Concerning a Group of Artists Exhibiting at the Durand-Ruel Galleries," (1876), trans. Charles S. Moffett, in Charles S. Moffett et al., *The New Painting, Impressionism 1874–1886* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), 44.

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whose work inspired Duranty's essay, had himself written in a studio notebook from the late 1860s, "Make of the *tête d'expression* a study of modern feeling—it's like Lavater, but a more relative Lavater in a way."[43] In keeping with her Impressionist colleague's practice, which frequently oscillated between physiognomic specificity and psychological effacement, Cassatt in *A Goodnight Hug* demonstrated an uncanny ability to make hand, ear, and cheek carry the burden of expression normally conveyed by eyes and mouth, creating the impression of an intensely intimate relationship without revealing the expected view of the figures' faces. In this pastel Cassatt turned the *tête d'expression* on its head, so to speak, repudiating classical norms of representation, and proclaimed that she too possessed a "type of hand and ear peculiar to [her]self," consciously bringing into the foreground the markers that Morelli believed were most revealing of originality because they were achieved unconsciously and in compositional elements usually regulated to background roles.

A Goodnight Hug also uncannily shares a number of qualities with Berthe Morisot's painting *Nursing* [Fig. 5], another work shown at the 1881 Impressionist exhibition. The blond infants in both pictures lack facial features, as do the women who hold them close, and there is an odd equivalence in the relationship between child's head, arm, and mother's smooth cheek in Cassatt's work, and child's head, arm, and nurse's bared breast in Morisot's painting. Moreover, these two images produced by female artists and depicting what has been considered to be stereotypically feminine subject matter are characterized by a degree of factural bravura and formal abstraction unmatched in the

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[43] Quoted and trans. in Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 265 n. 38. In this notation, Degas was referring to the academic exercise of drawing "expressive heads" according to codified physiognomic principles for the depiction of emotion. A *tête d'expression* prize was instituted at the French Academy in 1759. Johann Kasper Lavater first began publishing his widely-disseminated books on physiognomy in 1775.

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works shown by their male colleagues in 1881, a fact noted and applauded by critics at the time but not acknowledged in the literature on Impressionism until recent years.[44]

Uncanny, too, is the confusion of boundaries between animate and inanimate, self and other. In *A Goodnight Hug* Cassatt gives us two heads but denies us their features. Two embracing figures are compressed almost into a single entity, bringing to mind the period before the child has completely individuated and also a moment when this intimacy might feel too intense, when one figure threatens to swallow or absorb the other. The mother and child are embraced again within one of the upholstered chairs featured in *The Blue Room (Little Girl in a Blue Armchair)* [Fig. 6], where the furniture has an eerie personality of its own. (Segard remarked: "the figure here is not the subject of the painting. By means of an originality and even a kind of strangeness, the actual characters are the large blue poufs. They have an air of living a remote and hidden, yet all the same individual, life. . . ."[45]) And in *A Goodnight Hug*, even the wallpaper is oddly emphatic, jaggedly scribbled so as to leave the unmarked areas of the paper ground to double as wallcovering surface. This background itself could be seen as uncanny, prefiguring Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story "The Yellow Wall-paper," in which the pattern covering the walls of a room that once served as a nursery comes to embody a creative woman's unbearable domestic oppression.[46]

A Goodnight Hug thus serves to introduce a number of the uncanny qualities to be unveiled in Cassatt's work. Her facture, rarely "sensitive and delicate" in a stereotypical

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[44] Fronia E. Wissman, in "Realists among the Impressionists," in Moffett, et al., *The New Painting*, 1986, 347-50. Wissman also makes the important point that Cassatt was viewed as the most successful of the contributors to the 1881 exhibition.

[45] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 153: "le personnage n'est pas ici le sujet du tableau. Par une originalité et même par une sorte d'étrangeté, les vrais personnages sont les grands poufs bleus. Ils ont l'air de vivre d'une vie obscure et latente mais individuelle. . . ."

[46] For a comprehensive overview of this story, see *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook*, ed. Julie Bates Dock (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

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feminine manner, was often described as "virile" and even "brutal."[47] Likewise, her figures are often characterized by odd poses or distortions that undermine expectations regarding the sentimental and reverential treatment of the maternal theme, that make the mother/child relationship seem excessive, or that suggest a confusion between self and other: two featureless heads merge impossibly into one; a mirror reflection gives more prominence to a child's buttocks than to a mother's face; an arm completely lacking an elbow is stretched to impossible lengths and wrapped tightly around a child's body. As we will see, some critics associated these deviations from standard representations of motherhood with the idea of the "split personality" [*dédoublement*] and the discovery of the unconscious. The blurring of boundaries between animate and inanimate that evokes the uncanny is brought into play, too, in representations of furniture, wallcoverings, fabrics, and patterns formed by landscape elements that are characterized by an overly insistent presence, in compositional elements which "do not stay back where they belong," as one critic put it.[48]

Cassatt's work also engages the uncanny with regard to questions of sources and influences. Of course, unexplained likenesses occur in the work of many artists, and she is not unusual in this respect. Where the issue of "uncanny resemblance" becomes interesting in her oeuvre is in the way it is handled—or not handled—by critics and art historians, for the identity of her sources and influences is not usually mysterious but merely repressed. Many interpreters have failed to address visual similarities between her maternal images and Degas's brothel monotypes, for instance, or have insufficiently explored the assimilation of aspects of Correggio's "profane" art into her work because the

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[47] Mieke Bal's exploration of the reception of Rembrandt's touch—how his handling (which she calls "material seeing") has been idealized in terms of love, understanding, and human connection, despite the fact that it often depicts subjects of brutal power and sexuality—has been important to my thinking about Cassatt's complication of the facture/subject connection. See Mieke Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[48] "Miss Cassatt's Exhibition," *Boston Evening Transcript* (9 February 1909), 11. This critic was describing the flowering shrubs in *Young Women Picking Fruit* [Fig. 126], to be discussed in Chapter Six.

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source matter is considered improper to the female artist and to the mother and child theme.[49] These resemblances, we will see, are not so much uncanny but rather are made to seem so by the continuing need to repress them or by the the failure to pursue them for fear they would indicate that Cassatt knew something she shouldn't have known or understood (something "beyond ken"), or because they seem "unhomelike," even threatening to her domestic imagery.

And finally, Cassatt's imagery and its reception are well worth examining under the sign of the uncanny not so much because Freud has something to teach us about her, but because she has something to teach us about Freud, whose theories grew out of the cultural climate of the time, including its art and literature.[50] Huysmans, by explicitly associating Cassatt's images of mothering figures with certain types from Dickens's novels, "authorizes" a reading forward from Cassatt to Freud (who was himself inspired by Morelli), while also considering how her works bring to mind ideas that diverge from his theories. Huysmans's review, which idealizes a virginal maternal substitute over the biological mother, demonstrates that from the moment of their first appearance Cassatt's maternal images were mobilized in the service of various sides of the "woman question," out of which arose not only psychoanalysis but an entire complex of attitudes toward women that continue to shape political, social, and psychological reality in addition to art history.[51] This dissertation will not attempt to definitively fix the meaning of Cassatt's

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[49] Correggio's art was viewed with some suspicion during the late nineteenth century due to its factural sensuousness, the sensuality of its themes, and the seductive appeal it held for artists who followed him. For a disapproving view of the artist and his "profanity," see William J. Stillman, "Italian Old Masters. Correggio.—1494–1534," *Century Magazine* 44 (October 1892), 916-19. For an attempt to justify an appreciation for the artist despite these qualities, see Mariana G. van Rensselaer, "Correggio," *American Art Review* 2 (1881), 193-7, 233-8.

[50] This strategy echoes an important point made by Dever when she proposes that "the analysis of Victorian fiction has as much to teach us about psychoanalysis as psychoanalysis teaches us about the Victorian novel"; see *Death and the Mother*, 3.

[51] Cassatt's images continue to be invoked in support of a wide range of ideas about maternity, from the conventional to the provocative. For instance, the cover for Alexandra Stoddard's *Mothers: A Celebration* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), which features *Marie Looking Up at Her Mother* (*Nurse and Child*) [BrCR 278; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York], promises "charming anecdotes, bittersweet moments and stirring memories that shed light on the universal triumphs and trials of being a

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maternal imagery nor to suggest that she illustrates one psychological account of maternity and infant development or the other. Instead, it will seek to return to her works some of the complexity of the conditions of their emergence, while attending to the manner in which interpretations of and judgments about art are made.

The six chapters of this dissertation address the questions raised in this introduction regarding women, bodies, knowledge, and art in relation to three phases of Cassatt's production—the Salon years (1868–77), her association with the Impressionists (1877–86), and her later career (1888–1910)—with a conclusion that looks at her final pictures (1913–14). Chapter One, *"It Is a Great Thing . . . To See a Lady Artist Paint in This Firm and Decided Manner": Cassatt's Salon Career, 1868–1877*, examines her early use of Old Master sources (and in particular, their depicted gestures) in the works she did before settling in Paris, considered in light of the female artist's claim to "signature" style and beliefs about the nature of her "hand." Chapter Two, *"Miss Mary Cassatt Thinks, Feels, and Succeeds in Sharing with Us Her Intellectual Emotion": The First Impressionist Pictures, 1877–1878*, looks at the three paintings (*Reading "Le Figaro," A Woman in Black at the Opera*, and *The Blue Room*) that announce Cassatt's attainment of an Impressionist aesthetic, analyzed with regard to the growing valuation of the artist's gestures as indicative of a spontaneous and individual originality. Chapter Three, *"A Personality That Has Not Yet Completely Extricated Itself": Cassatt's First Two Impressionist Exhibitions and Her Earliest Mother and Child Images, 1879–1880*, treats anxieties about Cassatt's gender, nationality, and factural gestures expressed by critics at the Impressionist exhibitions of 1879 and 1880 as well as broader concerns about tactility, bathing, and "moral hygiene," considered in concert with her first images of child

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mother." In contrast, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), illustrated with *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3], argues that, far from being purely and innately selfless, "successful primate mothers have always combined nurturing with ambition, mother love with sexual love, ambivalence with devotion." (Quotations from publishers' promotional materials.)

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care. Chapter Four, *"Only a Woman Can Paint Childhood": Cassatt at the Impressionist Exhibitions of 1881 and 1886*, studies the artist's mother and child pictures of these years and the critical response to them, especially that of Huysmans, within the context of increasing attempts to limit a woman's right to define herself outside the home and family. Chapter Five, *"A Beautiful Science of Movements" and "Modern 'Holy Families'": The Natural and the Symbolic in Cassatt's Mother and Child Images, 1888–1893,* examines her "Modern Madonna" imagery and Japoniste color prints in relation to Symbolism while also considering the non-verbally communicative gestures depicted by the artist and perceptions of the mother's role in the acquisition of language. Chapter Six, *"No Attempt at Anecdote, No Assault on Sentiment": Cassatt's Mother and Child Images, 1893–1910, and Modern Connoisseurship,"* discusses those late mother and child works which depend most closely upon Old Master precedents in conjunction with the development of formalism, as Bernard Berenson's writings in particular set the stage for the rejection of maternal imagery and its associated emotional content as viable subject matter for modernist artists. Finally, the Conclusion will briefly address Cassatt's final creative phase (1913–14) in relation to a 1915 exhibition of works by Cassatt, Degas, and the Old Masters held to benefit woman suffrage.

As a woman in a male-dominated profession, a somewhat latecoming American participant in what has come to be defined as "French Impressionism," and a figure painter working within an artistic movement that is now most often seen publicly in exhibitions of landscapes, Cassatt has been written out of many histories of art, with most studies of her work either taking biographical shape, concentrating ahistorically on her mother and child imagery, or bracketing her career within the category of "woman artist"—something the artist herself fought against by refusing to participate in "women only" exhibitions. While these approaches have carved out a space for the deserved recognition of an oeuvre without a comfortable art historical home, they all too frequently serve to confirm the validity of a formalist modernism that finds little of interest or value in her work. And to

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try to understand—even to celebrate—Cassatt's mother and child images outside history is to suggest that the family is unchanging or "natural" and that she has somehow managed to capture some essential truth about maternity.

"Mary Cassatt, the Maternal Body, and Modern Connoisseurship" will thus examine the artist's maternal imagery and the critical response to it within the cultural context of her time as well as in relation to continuing problem of the place of the woman artist within various bodies of art historical knowledge. The many parallels between efforts to define a woman's role as solely within the family, to give connoisseurship the status of a "science," and to theorize formalism during the artist's lifetime will be understood not merely as uncanny coincidences, but as motivated at least in part by women's efforts to assert themselves outside the home, in the political, social, economic, and artistic realms. Mary Cassatt was one such woman.

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CHAPTER ONE — *"IT IS A GREAT THING . . . TO SEE A LADY ARTIST PAINT IN THIS FIRM AND DECIDED MANNER": CASSATT'S SALON CAREER, 1868–1877*

Mary Cassatt arrived at her mother and child images not inevitably or effortlessly but only after studying art and exhibiting professionally for two decades. Any search for her artistic "origins" or the beginnings of her interest in the maternal theme is complicated by her 1906 destruction of a group of early, fragmentary, or otherwise unsaleable works—"to save my heirs the trouble," she wrote.[1] In part as a result of this act, Cassatt's earliest documented picture is her entry in the 1868 Salon, *The Mandolin Player* [Fig. 7]. No traces remain of her student efforts, although she had probably taken drawing lessons as a child and began her formal study of painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1860. By 1868, and her first Salon acceptance (her 1867 entry was refused), Cassatt had lived in Europe for almost three years, where she studied in private ateliers and copied paintings at the Louvre. Yet no pictures from this era are known to survive.

My intention here is less to bemoan a lack of information on Cassatt's earliest aesthetic development than to propose that her 1906 act of destruction also served as a self-creative gesture: by obliterating vestiges of her early career, the artist participated in the rewriting of her point of entry into art history as the moment of her first Salon acceptance. We can do no more than speculate on her earlier work; if we wish to consider the chronological development of her style or subject matter, we must begin with an image she knew had been preserved by her family—*The Mandolin Player*—which serves as the emblem of her arrival on the scene as a professional artist. I begin here with this work not only in the attempt to reconstruct Cassatt's evolution from academic painter to

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[1] Mary Cassatt letter to Louisine Havemeyer, December 21 [1906], quoted in Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life* (New York: Villard, 1994), 282, 352 n. 42. Evidently, Cassatt also saw to it that her correspondence with Degas was destroyed; see Mathews, ed., in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 13. My understanding of the chronological events of Cassatt's life as explored in this and the chapters to follow is deeply indebted to these sources by Mathews.

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Impressionist and from an artist of eclectic genre subjects to the so-called "painter of children and mothers," but also to emphasize the instability of such a reconstruction, which is always riven with lacunae and errors.

This chapter will serve to introduce matters of origin and of gesture as they pertain to Cassatt's early work and its reception during the 1860s and 1870s. Working from Donald Preziosi's assertion that the discipline of art history, far from being removed from the commercial aspects of connoisseurship, is in fact "grounded in a deep concern for juridico-legal rectification of what is proper(ty) to an artist," as well as the idea that the laws of genre in art are based ultimately in the laws of gender,[2] I would like to begin to consider how Cassatt challenged definitions of "proper" expression in the visual arts, especially which types of factural touch and visual sources and subjects were considered appropriate to female artists.

Cassatt's first professional pictures, many of them created before she settled permanently in France, will be discussed in two sections. The first treats the preparation and reception of her Salon debut, *The Mandolin Player*. The artist's use of a maternally-identified pseudonym in the 1868 Salon catalogue, ideas about the evidentiary value of the signature in both legal and artistic terms, and the importance of proper names to the genealogies of art history will be explored with the aim of problematizing the possibility of a female artist achieving a "signature" style within a male-dominated culture of art and legal rights. The second section of the chapter looks at Cassatt's pictures from 1869 to 1877, as she worked through old master sources in sometimes "unauthorized" ways. These paintings will be examined in order to demonstrate how Cassatt was already moving in a direction parallel to those artists and critics of the Impressionist circle who were

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[2] Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, 33. On genre and gender, see W. J. T. Mitchell, "Space and Time: Lessing's *Laocoon* and the Politics of Genre," *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 109-11. Ernest H. Kantorowicz, in "The Sovereignty of the Artist: A Note on Legal Maxims and Renaissance Theories of Art," *Selected Studies* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1965), points out that many of the Renaissance scholars whose ideas continue to underpin humanist discourse began their careers by studying law, including Leon Battista Alberti (352).

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contesting long-held ideas about depicted and factural gestures, and how she disputed notions that were proving more resistant to change, mainly those about the relation of art and gender. Together these two sections will set the stage for examining the first works created in Cassatt's signature style, to be addressed in Chapter Two.

I.

Dissatisfied with the quality of her stateside education and desirous of direct contact with European aesthetic tradition and the contemporary art community, Mary Cassatt moved to Paris, accompanied by her mother, at the end of 1865. By the fall of 1866 her teachers included Jean-Léon Gérôme, painter of Orientalist and historical subjects, and Charles Chaplin, a Rococo revivalist favored by the Second Empire court. Study at the École des beaux-arts was, of course, out of the question because it remained closed to women until 1897, but private lessons from Gérôme, the *chef* of one of the Academy's three painting ateliers, allowed her to experience something of its curriculum. Chaplin's upper-class English background and impeccable reputation contributed to the popularity of his studio with young women, or, more to the point, with their parents,[3] though his work often flirted with the more sensuous aspects of its eighteenth-century antecedents. As one writer described it, Chaplin "is very fond of putting as little drapery as possible upon his figures; he 'addicts himself,' to use a French phrase, chiefly to the figures of women and children."[4]

In February of 1867, Cassatt and her friend Eliza Haldeman moved to the village of Courances, near Barbizon and the Fontainebleau Forest, and then on to Écouen. (Cassatt's mother had returned to the United States in the summer of 1866.) In these countryside settings, the two young artists painted from live models while returning to Paris on occasion for Chaplin's advice. Encouraged to prepare entries for the upcoming

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[3] For more on Chaplin, see Valerie E. Morant, "Charles Joshue Chaplin, an Anglo-French Artist, 1825–1891," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (October 1989), 143-52.

[4] "Happy Days," *The Aldine – The Art Journal of America* 9 (1878), 130.

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Salon, Cassatt and Haldeman created scenes of peasant children in picturesque cottages.[5] Neither woman had a picture accepted, yet a measure of Cassatt's unabated self-confidence comes across in a Haldeman letter to her mother from May 1867: "Mary wishes to be remembered to you, she laughed when I told her your message and said she wanted to paint *better* than the old masters. Her Mother wants her to become a portrait painter as she has a talent for likenesses and thinks she is very ambitious to want to paint pictures."[6] Cassatt's remark reveals that she had already set herself into a position of rivalry with the old masters, evidently unconcerned that, as a woman artist, she would find few female role models among the figures she set out not only to emulate but to overcome.

Working through the winter of 1867–68 with the assistance of Chaplin and also that of the Écouen painter Paul Soyer, who was well-connected to Parisian arts administrators, Cassatt prepared her first successful Salon entry, *The Mandolin Player* [Fig. 7]. Haldeman's picture was selected for exhibition, too, though she was cognizant that the administrative reforms of 1868 had led to an exceptionally high percentage of works accepted and a corresponding increase in the number placed on view.[7] Cassatt's friend also showed an awareness of the growing rebellion against the academic system, commenting, "the French school is going through a phase. They are leaving the Academy

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[5] Neither work is known to survive; the subject matter has been reconstructed by Mathews on the basis of a Haldeman letter; see *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 44, 338 n. 16.

[6] Eliza Haldeman to Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Écouen, May 15, 1867, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 46.

[7] According to Jane Mayo Roos, *Early Impressionism and the French State (1866–1874)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 104-5, nearly 83 percent of the submitted works were accepted in 1868, as opposed to 56 percent in 1867 (when Cassatt was first refused), and 4200 works in total were put on view. Roos also notes that almost all the modernists exhibited at this Salon, except Cézanne.

Eliza Haldeman wrote to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Paris, May 8, 1868, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 54: "The Exposition is very poor this year as there has been 1200 more pictures accepted than usual in fact almost anything would have passed. . . . There has been especial favor shown this time to new beginners, and the old Exempts are all up at the cealing [*sic*]. . . . Quite a number of Americans exhibit this year and show a great deal of talent. And the number of women artists is legion."

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style and each one seaking [*sic*] a new way consequently now everything is Chaos. But I suppose in the end they will be better for the change."[8]

Upon acceptance at the Salon, Cassatt and Haldeman began to court the attention of the press, even escorting a *New York Times* critic through the exhibition. Cassatt, who had signed her work "Mary Stevenson" and was listed in the Salon catalogue under this name, was the first artist mentioned in the *Times*' review of the American pictures at the Salon: "A portrait of an Italian girl, by MARY STEVENSON, of Pennsylvania, has obtained a place on the line, and well deserves it, for its vigor of treatment and fine qualities of color. Miss STEVENSON has been a pupil of GEROME, and proposes shortly to visit Italy to improve herself. She is only twenty years of age."[9] (Actually, she was twenty-four.)

The romantic mood of *The Mandolin Player* reflects the figure painting of artists such as Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, while harking back to the "fancy pictures" of the English school and its Italianate mode.[10] In both subject and handling, the work also shares some qualities with one of Edouard Manet's first Salon pictures, *The Spanish Singer*, 1860 [Fig. 8], shown in 1861 and again at Manet's independent exhibition of 1867.[11] Though not nearly as boldly brushed nor as sharply broken into flat areas of light and dark as Manet's canvas, *The Mandolin Player* nevertheless exhibits a concern for value contrasts and a blocky application of creamy paint, particularly in the white blouse,

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[8] Ibid.

[9] "France," *New York Times* (7 June 1868), 8.

[10] *The Mandolin Player* is similar to works such as Corot's *La Femme à la Perle*, c. 1858–68 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), illustrated in Gary Tinterow et al., *Corot* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996) cat. no. 107. For the English school, see, for example, Henry William Pickersgill's 1823 Royal Academy picture, *"L'Improvisatrice"; Portrait of a Lady, Said to be the Artist's Daughter, in Neapolitan Dress Playing the Chitarrino*; sold at Sotheby's, New York, 14 January 1994, lot 150.

[11] *The Mandolin Player* also echoes another Manet painting from 1860, *Italienne* (private collection), illustrated in Denis Rouart and Daniel Wildenstein, *Edouard Manet Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. I (Lausanne, Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1975), no. 29. In 1884, Cassatt arranged for this work to be purchased from Manet's posthumous sale for the collection of her brother Alexander, who hung it as a pendant to *The Mandolin Player* in his Haverford, Pennsylvania, home. It is not known how early Cassatt was aware of Manet, nor whether she attended his 1867 exhibition, though she certainly must have been familiar with his oeuvre by that year.

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that speak to the predilections that would lead Cassatt to seek out the teaching of Manet's first master, Thomas Couture, later in 1868.[12]

In a letter of May 1868, Haldeman made two significant observations about Cassatt's *Mandolin Player*—that the artist had exhibited her picture under a pseudonym for reasons related to feminine propriety, and that Cassatt's entry retained its integrity as wholly her own work, unlike so many other young artists' pictures, which were routinely overpainted by teachers. Haldeman wrote, "Mary has also been successful even more so than I as her picture is well hung and was not painted on. . . . Her name in the Catalogue is Stevenson as she dont exhibit under her own name. It is much pleasanter when one is a girl as it avoides [*sic*] publicity."[13] Cassatt's use of pseudonyms and the transformation of her signatures until she settled on "Mary Cassatt" are worth following for what they can suggest both about this artist as she moved through the early phase of her career in search of fame but with some misgivings about "publicity," and about the more general problems faced by the female artist in the late nineteenth century who wished to establish a "name" for herself within an exhibition and sales system, a history of art, and a culture all dominated by the patronymic—the name of the father. In addition, the implications of this naming system for the female artist's "authenticity" and "originality" as well as its relation to the indexical quality of her "touch" as it relates to the question of the signature will be considered.[14]

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[12] On Couture, see Albert Boime, *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), especially chapter thirteen: "Couture's Influence on the Younger Generation."

[13] Eliza Haldeman to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Paris, May 8, 1868, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 54.

[14] Artists' signatures have been little studied; two useful sources include a special issue of the *Revue de l'art* (1974), devoted to "L'Art de la signature," and Béatrice Fraenkel, *La Signature, genèse d'un signe* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992). Louisa C. Matthew's "The Painter's Presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance Pictures," *Art Bulletin* 80 (December 1998), 616-48, also offers a number of productive ways to think about the relationship between artists' signatures, identity, and the marketplace.

When referring to the "indexical" quality of Cassatt's facture, I am drawing upon ideas first put forth by Charles S. Peirce in "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs" (1898), in *The Philosophy of Peirce, Selected Writings*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1940), 98-119. Peirce divided signs into three types: the "index," which shares a physical relationship with the object to which it refers (such as a physical trace, like a fingerprint as the sign of a person or smoke as a sign of fire); the "icon,"

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In 1884 the novelist Mme. Henry Gréville explained that female authors of the early nineteenth century had signed their own names because they wished "to make a noise in the world," but by 1850 a change had begun which become the rule by 1880:

> In order to enjoy greater liberty, almost all women who felt themselves pushed toward literature sheltered themselves behind a pseudonym, often a masculine one. . . . Their glory thus became less personal, was associated more with the talent than the individuality of the writer, was freer from alloy, and womanly dignity gained thereby. There is evidently an advantage in being discussed under a borrowed, rather than under one's real name. The family is not touched in the combats of the press, and may, up to a certain point, remain ignorant of the quarrels of literature, while, at the same time, the domestic hearth is benefited by the material rewards of literary labor.[15]

Cassatt was in the minority among women artists who still used pseudonyms in the 1860s, and unlike many women writers, she did not use a masculine pseudonym. In fact, she employed her middle name, Stevenson—her mother's maiden name—as her surname; "Mary Stevenson" had also been the married name of her maternal grandmother. This suggests that Cassatt's choice to exhibit under the name of her maternal lineage in 1868 could have resulted not merely from a desire to avoid drawing her family into the public "quarrels of art" but also from the private disagreements taking place about her choice of career, support for which was divided along gender lines.

The best-known example of paternal resistance to Cassatt's ambition was recorded by Segard. Her plan to study in Europe, he wrote, "was not settled without difficulties. Not very American, Miss Cassatt's father took fright at her voyage. 'I would almost rather

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which shares a physical resemblance with the object to which it refers (i.e. a portrait drawing as the sign of a particular person); and the "symbol," which has an arbitrary but mutually agreed upon relationship to the object to which it refers (such as the color red as the sign for the command "stop" when used on a traffic sign or light). For an important discussion of the index, see Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

[15] Quoted in Theodore Stanton, "France" (1884), *Selections from* The Woman Question in Europe: *A Series of Original Essays* (New York: MSS Information Corporation, 1974), 61.

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see you dead.'"[16] Once she was in Europe, her brother Alexander informed his wife Lois, "Mary's art name is 'Mary Stevenson' under which name I suppose she expects to become famous, poor child,"[17] giving us an idea of his expectations about her prospects. Robert Cassatt, though he would eventually help to fund his daughter's study trips and studio expenses, likely held conservative views on women's work. Moreover, as someone who had endeavored to achieve respectability within a social class that viewed his own profession of finance with some derision, he may very well have objected to his daughter's career choice, much as Degas's father was uncomfortable with his son's.

The trope of the oppositional father has served in artists' biographies dating back to Vasari to sever the actual family relation in order to insert the artist within an art historical structure that privileges a fictional father-master/son-student model of artistic influence.[18] This model persisted in the French Salon system through the practice of listing the exhibitor's teachers in the exhibition catalogue.[19] Degas, who altered the aristocratic "de Gas" under the belief that "In the nobility one is not used to working.

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[16] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 5 n. 3: "ne se décida pas sans difficultés. Peu Américain, le père de Miss Cassatt s'effrayait de ce voyage. 'J'aimerais presque mieux te voir morte.'" Given Robert Cassatt's peripatetic ways (the family lived in Europe in the early 1850s, for example), it seems likely that the word "voyage" is used here to signify the difficult or "unfeminine" path of the female artist rather than the overseas journey itself. It should also be noted that Cassatt's 1913 recollections, or their transcriptions as recorded by Segard, are at times inaccurate or differ from other sources treating the same matters.

[17] Alexander Cassatt to Lois Cassatt, unknown date [1868?], quoted in Nancy Hale, *Mary Cassatt* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley), 52. Hale relates this letter to Cassatt's 1872 Salon picture, which she believed to be Cassatt's first Salon entry. However, it seems more likely that the letter was written in reference to her actual first acceptance at the Salon, which took place in 1868.

[18] Paul Barolsky, *Giotto's Father and the Family of Vasari's "Lives"* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 20-1. Barolsky traces the father/son dynamic in Vasari's conception of art history, but without pursuing its gendered implications. With regard to art historical genealogies, it is also worth considering that Leon Battista Alberti, whose aesthetic treatises were instrumental in authorizing the professional practices of artists and architects, was himself an illegitimate child who could have been legitimated by his father under Renaissance law but was not. Alberti was also the author of an important tome, *Della Famiglia*, in which he outlined the responsibilities of the patriarch in relation to wife and children. On *Della Famiglia*, see Thomas Kuehn, in *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[19] Lois Marie Fink notes, "The practice of associating the names of exhibitors with their teachers helped to perpetuate the idea of continuity in French art and also tended to promote the importance of French influence to the exclusion of other sources," in *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 70.

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Since I want to work, I should therefore have a commoner's name,"[20] both acknowledged and undermined his father's name. Cassatt, by choosing "Stevenson," protected her father's name while disavowing it, emphasizing her connection to a lineage that she identified as strongly female and maternal (despite its inescapable inscription of paternal descent: "Steven's son") and to a mother who supported her aspirations and traveled from time to time as her chaperone during a period when she would be working under numerous artistic "fathers," not only Gérôme, Soyer, Chaplin, Frère, and Couture, but also Correggio, Velázquez, Hals, and so forth.[21]

A brief consideration of the early history of the signature can assist us in seeing why the permutations in Cassatt's signatures are meaningful beyond the simple story of a young artist in search of an identity. The proper name used as a mark of validation arose in the thirteenth century when overworked notaries, seeking a more rapid means for authenticating acts, began to use a simplified form of their highly ornate official signatures.[22] The *seing manuel* then spread to aristocratic circles in France, and in 1554, Henri II mandated the affixation of the signature on all notarized acts. The Fontainebleau ordinance, as this mandate was called, thus designates the moment when the irreducible self, now distinguishable by traits (of the visage, the character, and the pen), was recognized by law, and the proper name metamorphosed into a graphical sign charged with the presence of a unique being.[23] The signature draws its legal power from its indexical relation to the signer, from the presupposition that it was not only inscribed voluntarily and deliberately but also continues to exist as a trace of an individual body, in

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[20] Quoted and trans. in Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 24.

[21] It is interesting to note that Robert Cassatt had himself had changed the spelling of his surname, adding the second "t," and, according to Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 253 n. 9, it wasn't until the 1860s that the Degas family hired a genealogist "to promote the family to the ranks of nobility, replete with obscure Languedoc origins, aristocratic particle, and coat of arms."

[22] Marie-Claude Gigue, *De l'origine de la signature et son emploi au moyen âge, principalement dans les pays de droit écrit* (Paris: Dumoulin, 1863), 74-8.

[23] Fraenkel, *La Signature*, 11.

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combination with the fact that this indexical trace inscribes a symbol—the proper name—designating that very same body.

At nearly the same moment that Henri II was instituting the juridical signature in France, Giorgio Vasari utilized the analogy between handwriting and the artist's signature style in explicating his attributionary method. Like a judge, Vasari scrutinized available documentation when assigning works to artists. However, he elaborated, "I have always sought to verify [artists'] statements by a sight of the works, for the reason that long practice teaches a diligent painter to be able to recognize the various manners of craftsmen not otherwise than a learned and well-practised chancellor knows the various and diverse writings of his equals, or anyone the characters of his nearest and most familiar friends and relatives."[24] This analogy between the artist-attributionist and chancellor lends an impartial, almost testimonial quality to Vasari's activities as a connoisseur, while his invocation of the family member or friend who recognizes handwritings serves as a reminder that the type of knowledge required in the *connaissance* of painting is likened etymologically to knowing people, being *familiar* with them, rather than amassing facts in order to know (*savoir*) something in the manner of a judge.[25]

Vasari's concern for correct attributions stemmed from his need to concretely establish the "paternity" of the works upon which he would base his genealogical history of art. His conception of art's historical development as one of fictional filial transmission reflects the relatively new centrality of the family, organized under the sign of the paternal name, to the political systems of Florence, with "patronage, patrimony, and power" bestowed in great part through inheritance.[26] (That the predominant figures in Vasari's scheme—Giotto, Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo—are elevated beyond the regime

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[24] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (second ed. 1568), trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, vol. 2 (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 1066. In the sixteenth century, a chancellor was a notary or secretary to a nobleman, prince, or king.

[25] This etymological point regarding *connaissance* is made by Gallop in "A Good Lay," 135.

[26] Barolsky, *Giotto's Father*, 10.

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of the patriarchal surname evinces that system's authority.) The Fontainebleau ordinance attests to the widespread growth of the patronymic, the use of which was also made a legal requirement in sixteenth-century France. Vasari, by minimizing female figures, including mothers, in his history of art, paralleled the conventions of the newly popular hobby of genealogy, which rarely included women's names.[27] To male Florentines, particularly of the merchant class, the female half of the family line mattered little because, by the Renaissance, women were legally excluded from enjoying the material or symbolic benefits conferred by hereditary transmission, from the ownership of real estate to participation in politics.

The relevance of Renaissance inheritance law (which was itself based upon Roman law) to a consideration of Cassatt's signatures might seem tenuous were it not true that many of the same legal strictures upon women's rights to enter into contracts and to inherit, own, and bequeath property—including the right to make legal decisions on behalf of their children—remained in place throughout nations of the West in the second half of the nineteenth century. As late as 1891 it was observed that the Civil Code still classed the French woman "with idiots and minors. Like the Roman ladies of old, she remains throughout her life under male tutelage."[28] By the time Cassatt began to pursue a professional career, however, female protests against unequal treatment had started to effect changes in centuries-old laws. For instance, in 1866 fathers living in the state of New York were legally prevented for the first time from transferring the guardianship of their children to someone other than their mother without her written consent (though the

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[27] On this matter, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochraine (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 284. Significantly, the first attempt to trace Cassatt's genealogical origins, in Frederick A. Sweet's *Miss Mary Cassatt: Impressionist from Pennsylvania* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), devotes three pages to her paternal ancestors (3-5), but only one paragraph to her maternal lineage (7). Nancy Hale, in *Mary Cassatt*, 5, states that the family of the artist's mother could be traced back to an Irish-born attorney for George Washington, Alexander Johnston, after whom the artist's brother was named. Sweet does make the point that three of the Cassatt children were named after maternal grandparents (7).

[28] M[athilda] Betham-Edwards, "French and English," reprinted from *Fortnightly Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 191 (12 December 1891), 695.

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father remained their legitimate guardian, entitled to their custody, service, and earnings).[29] In France, not long after Cassatt would paint something of a personal feminist statement by portraying her mother reading *Le Figaro* [Fig. 27], Hubertine Auclert railed in *La Citoyenne* against "the absurd law that prohibits me, a woman, from owning the title or serving as publisher of this newspaper, even though I have more need than any man of a newspaper in order to denounce the abuses from which I suffer in my capacity as a woman."[30] Auclert further observed, "Women are not allowed to act as witness to the registration of a birth or a marriage, or the execution of an act of sale. What am I saying? A woman is not even allowed to attest to the identity of another woman for the notarization of a signature."[31]

While the artist's signature on a picture or sculpture cannot be strictly compared to a legal signature on a contract or a ballot, it was often employed to add an element of evidentiary power regarding authorship to works of art. Cassatt's career would take place across a half-century that saw some of the most productive feminist actions to foster women's rights, actions that the artist herself would at times come to actively support, such as woman suffrage. Her signature, therefore, not only changed in significance in relation to the personal variations on her given name that she employed through the years, but also in connection with women's rights, as the legal force embodied by the female

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[29] For a contemporary consideration of the question of women's rights which attempted to link their nineteenth-century status with legal strictures enacted by "primitive" societies, as well as the ancient Romans, whose laws greatly influenced Florentines of the Renaissance, see an article reviewing John F. MacLennan's 1865 *Primitive Marriage* and an unsigned volume from 1875, *The Rights of Women: A Comparison of the Relative Legal Status of the Sexes in the Chief Countries of Western Civilisation*, titled "The Legal Position of Women," in *Westminster Review* 105 (April 1876), 154-65.

It is interesting to note that Cassatt's painting *Young Mother Sewing* [Fig. 160] appears on the paperback cover of Mary Ann Mason's *From Father's Property to Children's Rights, The History of Child Custody in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[30] Hubertine Auclert, [article of unknown title], *La Citoyenne* (13 February 1881), quoted and trans. in *Victorian Women, A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States*, eds. Era Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen M. Offen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), 445.

[31] Ibid.

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signature grew in power and women were granted increased access to the material goods that represented their property—including works of art.

The relationship to art as property was often played out in terms of sales, and the number of artists signing their works increased in the second half of the nineteenth century in concert with a considerable expansion of the art market.[32] The movement away from public exhibitions and commissioned works into the world of private galleries and the development of a strong secondary market necessitated a greater reliance upon documentation, including the signature, once the apparently self-evident correspondence between artist and artwork facilitated by the Salon system, for example, became attenuated. In addition, the growth of the private and secondary art markets brought on an enormous increase in fakes, forgeries, and falsely attributed or signed works of art. In 1870, the *New York Times* reported that Dusseldorf artists were concerned with the many copies being made after their works, the forgers hedging by inscribing "nach" [after] in front of a faked signature, but hiding the word under the frame.[33] In 1886, one writer wryly observed of works said to be from the hand of the Barbizon painter Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Peña: "if Diaz were indeed the undoubted author of all the more or less authenticated canvases that bear his signature, he must have painted between seven and eight pictures every-day, even counting Sundays and the intercalary days of leap-year."[34]

Many nineteenth-century writers wholeheartedly endorsed the concept of "signature" style, as did a writer for *The Collector*, who declared in 1890, "There is no mistaking a true product of a master brush. It is signed all over, although it may not have its creator's name in the corner."[35] If such a concept is tenable, a signature placed on a work of art is largely redundant, except to serve as a label to introduce the proper name of

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[32] André Chastel, "Signature et signe," *Revue de l'art* (1974), 10.
[33] "Fine Arts: Picture Copying," *New York Times* (1 May 1870), 3.
[34] Edward Rudolf Garczynski, "Jugglery in Art," *Forum* 1 (August 1886), 593. The same could have been said about any number of painters at this time, including Courbet and Corot.
[35] [Alfred Trumble?], "Pictures and Pedigrees," *Collector* 1 (1 June 1890), 1.

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the artist in question to the viewer new to his or her work. In actuality, the meaning of an artist's signature is far more undecidable. What of artists who sign works created by studio assistants while leaving autograph works unsigned? Why do artists sign some works, and choose not to sign others? What of the artist who replicates another artist's work, but signs the copy with his/her own name? Or the artist who manifests profound changes in style over the course of a career?

Artists' signatures and "signature" styles are never self-evident, in the same way that the legal signature is not as stable as the judiciary grants: if the legal signature were self-evident, there would be no need for notaries. Peggy Kamuf explains, "the act of signing cannot authenticate itself because it depends necessarily on the possibility of its repeatability and thus on the possibility of an inauthentic double: copy, simulacrum, forgery, imitation, false attributions, distortions, and so forth. . . . a signature never occurs as a pure event, without precedent and without copy. Its possibility arises only from this limitation on pure singularity."[36] The artist's signature as a guarantee of "autograph" work is similarly called into question, and the female artist's signature is further complicated given the legal limits on women and property ownership at the moment of its creation.

Whether a woman artist could possess her own, sincere style was also a matter of debate in the 1860s. Émile Deschanel, in the 1864 *Physiologie des écrivains et des artistes, ou essai de critique naturelle*, cited the eighteenth-century playwright Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux on this issue:

> Marivaux said: "Style has a sex, and one should be able to recognize [the writings of] women from a single phrase."
>
> A phrase! That can hardly be. Give us half a page, and that's almost always enough.

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[36] Peggy Kamuf, *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 119.

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> But I speak of a woman who would be a woman, and not of a woman who would be a man, because one can only recognize that which exists, and the first condition for divining the sex of an author is that the author has a sex. God save us, in literature as in life, from beings whose sex is doubtful, from men who are women, from women who are neither men nor women, from the neuters, without physiognomy! How we must avoid them![37]

Deschanel found in the works of "real women" something "finer, more gracious, and also more careless; a *je ne sais quoi* more lively, more passionate, and of a lesser range, than what one finds in the works of men."[38] He then added of a woman who has this *je ne sais quoi*, "she has more character and less method; more passion and less argument; more flame and less foundation; more lightness, brilliance, flexibility, tricks, intuition, implications, malice and sometimes dissimulation, in thought as well as in style."[39]

Deschanel's book played into the fascination with graphology and autograph collecting that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, taking on an increasingly "scientific" tone in accordance with the interchange between physiognomy and physiology in the 1860s. Graphology owed its popularity in part to an obsession in this era with exposing deception or fraud,[40] but Deschanel's remarks on feminine style suggest that this obsession stemmed from more than a concern to protect oneself against

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[37] Émile Deschanel. *Physiologie des écrivains et des artistes, ou essai de critique naturelle* (Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette et Cie., 1864), 49:

> Marivaux disait: "Le style a un sexe, et l'on reconnaîtrait les femmes à une phrase."
> Une phrase! ce n'est guère. Mettons un demi-page, et presque toujours cela suffira.
> Mais je parle d'une femme qui soit femme, et non d'une femme qui soit homme; car on ne peut reconnaître que ce qui existe, et la première condition pour devenir le sexe d'un auteur, c'est que l'auteur ait un sexe. Dieu vous préserve, dans la littérature comme dans la vie, des êtres dont le sexe est douteux, des hommes qui sont femmes, des femmes qui sont hommes, et des gens qui ne sont ni hommes ni femmes, genre neutre, sans physionomie! Ayez soin de les éviter!

[38] Ibid., 50: "plus fin, de plus gracieux, et aussi de plus négligé; à je ne sais quoi de plus vif, de plus passionné, et aussi de moins bien rangé, que ce qu'on trouve dans les ouvrages des hommes."

[39] Ibid.: "elle a plus de trait, et moins de méthode; plus de passion, et moins d'arguments; plus de flamme, et moins de charpente; plus de légèreté, de brillant, de flexibilité, de tour, de finesse, de sous-entendu, de malice et parfois de dissimulation, dans la pensée comme dans le style."

[40] Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 94.

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con artists, the occasional literary counterfeit, or the brisk trade in fake autographs or forged paintings. Rather, it betrays an anxiety about the increasing difficulty in distinguishing between the sexes, now that women were being granted traditionally masculine rights. In addition, the fear of "dissimulation" discloses anxieties about class difference, as the mass manufacture of women's clothing in particular confounded the quick distinction of social status, and about sexuality, with the growing difficulties in telling the difference between the *femme honnête* and the *fille publique* from her appearance alone.

Eliza Haldeman's letter of 1868, in which she discussed Cassatt's successful Salon entry, demonstrates the uneasiness of the automatic link made between a work, the artist who created it, the style in which it was painted, and the signature placed upon it. In the same letter Haldeman described her own Salon entry, which Soyer not only repainted but sent to the jury for consideration without her knowledge. Rather than being pleased by its acceptance, she was upset, but after seeing it on exhibition, she wrote, "I feel better. . . . I feel sure I should have been accepted even if Soyer had not touched it and I think it likely I would have been better hung had it not been painted on for this year the Jury are very particular about things being painted on and have rewarded the honest ones with the best places."[41]

Berthe Morisot, too, experienced a similar situation at the hands of Manet. When she showed him the 1869–70 double portrait, *Mme Morisot and Her Daughter Mme Pointillon (The Mother and Sister of the Artist)* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), before sending it to the Salon, she wrote, "He took the brushes, added a few accents that looked quite good. . . . once he had started, nothing could stop him; he went from the skirt to the bodice, from the bodice to the head, from the head to the

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[41] Eliza Haldeman to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Haldeman, Paris, May 8, 1868, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 53.

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background. . . . my only hope is to be rejected."[42] (Morisot did not sign the painting.) Manet, though not formally Morisot's teacher, clearly felt no compunctions about altering the surface of his colleague's work, perhaps in part because she was a woman. Haldeman's letter, however, suggests that the retouching of student works by painting masters was becoming less acceptable, in keeping with a new valuation of the artist's touch and the individually expressive gesture in art arising at the time. That Cassatt's successful Salon entry was entirely from her own hand was important, then, especially given gendered expectations regarding paint handling.

In the 1860s, advice for women aspiring to careers in the fine arts warned that they would be expected to work in factural styles associated with strength and masculinity. Virginia Penny, for instance, though generally encouraging toward women artists in her 1862 book, *How Women Can Make Money, Married or Single, In All Branches of the Arts and Sciences, Professions, Trades, Agricultural and Mechanical Pursuits*, cautioned, "Few women like the physical fatigue of a painter's life. . . . It requires great perseverance for a female artist to acquire firmness of execution; she does not possess it to the same extent as man."[43] More commonly, women were encouraged to pursue only those arts and subjects to which they were believed most naturally suited. This was the case in the 1868 *Blackwood's* essay "Clever Women," which linked female efforts at self-expression to traditionally feminine needlecraft, recommending that women writers who wished to remain attractive to men should "use their pen with such skill as they have on subjects especially open to feminine treatment, as skilful women of old spun gossamer thread, or

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[42] Letter from Berthe Morisot to Edma Morisot, March 1870, quoted and trans. in Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 63. For a compelling analysis of the importance of this event seen from the point of view of Manet's oeuvre, see Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 175-99.

[43] Virginia Penny, *How Women Can Make Money, Married or Single, In All Branches of the Arts and Sciences, Professions, Trades, Agricultural and Mechanical Pursuits* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter and Co., [1862]), 79.

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made exquisite lace or embroidery, or exercised themselves in any other graceful art where delicate fingering, a soft touch, and quick perception found an appropriate field."[44]

Cassatt was recognized, however, for the "vigor of treatment" in her 1868 Salon painting, *The Mandolin Player*, and throughout the 1870s and '80s her touch, with its surprising strength and roughness, was very much at issue, for it failed to manifest the "delicate fingering" or "soft touch" believed "appropriate" to her gender and motifs. In the summer of 1868, she sought the teaching of Thomas Couture,[45] known for his concern with paint handling, which Thomas Eakins described in 1869 in a manner that stressed its sensual aspects: "Who that has ever looked in a girl's eyes or run his fingers through her soft hair or smoothed her cheek with his hand or kissed her lips or their corners that plexus of all that is beautiful in modelling but must love Couture. . . ."[46]

Although Cassatt's Salon entry for 1869, likely painted under the influence of Couture, was rejected, and despite occasional doubts through the fall of that year, she remained convinced of the rightness of her career choice. Having taken one important step in making a "name" for herself (albeit a pseudonym) in 1868 with *The Mandolin Player*, and having done so with a work that was acknowledged to be completely autograph, not overpainted by any master/father figure, and judged by critics to be sufficiently firm in execution, Cassatt was well on her way to establishing an artistic identity. Her mood comes across in an August 1869 letter in which she commented to her

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[44] "Clever Women," reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age*, 784.

[45] Given accounts of Cassatt's personality, it is tempting to believe that she was the "American girl" described by one of Couture's later students, Ernest W. Longfellow, in "Reminiscences of Thomas Couture," *Atlantic Monthly* 52 (August 1883), 239. According to Longfellow, Couture had resolved to take no more pupils, but "had broken his resolution because an American girl had come to him and said, '*Je veux prendre des leçons*,' instead of '*Je désire*,' which so amused him with its maidenly imperiousness that he yielded."

[46] Boime, *Couture*, 453: "he sought a delicate balance between summary and laboured execution, between broadly swept, untidy brushwork and a delicately precious touch." The Thomas Eakins letter is quoted in Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 56.

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sister-in-law about a friend: "although [she] calls herself a painter she is only an amateur and you must know we professionals despise amateurs."[47]

II.

In December of 1869, Cassatt moved to Rome with her mother. A painting she finished there, titled *Une Contadina di Fobello; val Sesia, Piémont* (now lost), was accepted to the Salon of 1870. During the summer of that year she moved back to the United States to avoid the Franco-Prussian conflict, but by late October, upon the installation of the Third Republic government in France, she devoted herself to returning to Europe. Her first choice was to travel to Spain.

"I have been abandoning myself to despair & homesickness," she wrote to her friend Emily Sartain in May of 1871, "for I really feel as if it was intended I should be a Spaniard & quite a mistake that I was born in America, as the German poet says 'Spanien ist mein heimats land.'"[48] Eager to be a self-supporting professional, Cassatt sought to fund her journey through commissions from churches to make replicas of Old Master paintings on religious themes, though she believed "a *little copying* is good for one; not too much however."[49] She approached the Spanish-born Bishop of Pittsburgh in hopes of receiving an assignment in his native land ("The Madonna's of Murillio [*sic*] are great favorites with Catholics," she remarked).[50] Instead, he requested a work after an Italian painter who was to become one of her most treasured models: Correggio.[51] With the idea that she would use the money earned in Italy by copying his *Virgin and Child with*

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[47] Mary Cassatt to Lois Cassatt, Beaufort sur Doron, Savoie, August 1, 1869, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 61.

[48] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Hollidaysburg, May 22 [1871], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 70. For more information on Sartain's career, see Phyllis Peet, "The Art Education of Emily Sartain," *Woman's Art Journal* 11 (Spring/Summer 1990), 9-15. This article is illustrated with student sketches and early works by Sartain, giving some idea of the kinds of works that were likely destroyed by Cassatt in 1906.

[49] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Hollidaysburg, October 27 [1871], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 77.

[50] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Hollidaysburg, October 21 [1871], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 76.

[51] Andrew Walker adds a great deal to our knowledge of Cassatt's commission for the newly erected St. Paul's Cathedral in Pittsburgh with his essay, "Mary Cassatt's Modern Education: The United States, France, Italy, and Spain, 1860–73," in Barter, ed., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, 24-31.

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Saints Jerome and Mary Magdalene [Fig. 9] to pay for a trip to Spain, Cassatt left Pennsylvania for Parma with Emily Sartain at the end of 1871.

By the start of the new year, Cassatt had hired a local artist to block out a canvas, not for her copy of the *St. Jerome*, but rather for a replica of another Correggio, the *Coronation of the Virgin* [Fig. 10]. Sartain explained, "It is large and simple in its manner of painting, and after dashing it through rapidly she will get on with so much more ease at her St. Jerome,"[52] though in fact the latter copy would never be finished. In mid-February Cassatt also began work on a Salon entry, and by early March, Sartain reported, "All Parma is talking of Miss Cassatt and her picture, and everyone is anxious to know her."[53] *Pendant le carnaval*[54] was accepted at the Salon, and Cassatt urged Sartain, now in Paris, to bring her work to the attention of the critics, writing that the publicity she had already received "has done me good and I am getting anxious to see myself in print; one gets used to anything in this world."[55]

Notice of Cassatt's picture did eventually appear in *The New York Times*, but this time, the critic, likely aware of the artist's paradoxical willingness to alert the press about her work while exhibiting it under a pseudonym, concentrated on the name issue rather than the painting. Suggestively punning on the picture's title, the critic stated, "Miss MARY STEVENSON ——, of Philadelphia, sends 'Taming the Cannibal.' Why does Miss —— withhold her family name; is she ashamed to sign it or to affix it to her production, or does she wish it changed? But the picture is not bad, as one would suppose."[56] Significantly, soon after this review appeared the artist reclaimed the name "Cassatt,"

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[52] Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Parma, January 1, 1872, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 85.
[53] Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Parma, March 7, 1872, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 95.
[54] Cassatt's entry in the Salon of 1872 may be a work that is not catalogued in Breeskin, *During Carnival* (private collection), which is signed "Mary Stevenson 1872." The picture is illustrated in Barter, ed., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, cat. 2 (but incorrectly catalogued as being signed "Mary Stevenson").
[55] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Parma, June 2 [1872], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 100.
[56] H. B., "Art in Paris," *New York Times* (30 June 1872), 3.

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signing works for the next few years with variations on "Mary Stevenson Cassatt" or the initials "M.S.C.," and often adding a location and date.

The inscription on *The Bacchante* [Fig. 11], "Marÿ/Stevenson Cassatt/Parme 1872," for example, playfully mixes linguistic references, with its oddly placed diaerisis and French spelling of Parma, as if she were reveling in the international quality of her experience, uninterested in settling into a "home"—stylistic or geographical—for the time being. The fanciful signature implies that Cassatt was enjoying her success; indeed, the popularity of *Pendant le carnaval* may have doomed her *St. Jerome* copy, and she may have seen no need to continue making replicas for money, preferring to focus on original works, such as *The Bacchante*, which she sent to the 1872 *Exposizione di belle arti* in Milan. Yet she would continue to copy for her own edification for a few more years.

If Cassatt's signatures in these years were often playful, so too were many of her subjects, such as the Italian carnival and the bacchante. While bacchantes had been depicted by a wide range of artists since antiquity, in the late 1860s this motif was most closely associated with the Rococo revival and the premier sculptor of the Second Empire's *école de fantaisie*, Jean-Baptise Carpeaux. No one familiar with the French art world in that decade could have been unaware of his scandalous decoration for the facade of Garnier's Opéra, *Génie couronnant la Danse amoureuse et la Danse bacchique*, unveiled in 1869.[57] Carpeaux continued to explore the theme into the 1870s, as in the terra cotta bust, *La Bacchante aux Roses*, c. 1872 [Fig. 12].

Even before critics denounced the "licentious can-can of Carpeaux's loose women" as inappropriate to a public monument,[58] the entry for *bacchante* in the 1866 *Grand*

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[57] On the renewal of interest in late eighteenth-century art during the nineteenth century, see Carol Duncan, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: The Rococo Revival in French Romantic Art* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976). For an eighteenth-century example of a cymbal-playing bacchante, see Jean-Simon Berthélemy's *Bacchante*, 1778 (private collection), illustrated in Eric M. Zafran, *The Rococo Age, French Masterpieces of the Eighteenth Century* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1983), cat. no. 20.

[58] Anne Middleton Wagner presents an excellent overview of the *Danse* scandal in chapter six of *Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, Sculptor of the Second Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986). This 1869 comment, from the critic P. de Saint Victor, is quoted in Wagner, 237, 305 n. 73.

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Dictionnaire universel had noted that modern painters and sculptors "generally substitute for the gracious type depicted in antique art a figure of a drunken and lascivious woman."[59] Cassatt's bacchante is neither gracious nor lascivious; the subject seems to have appealed to the artist mainly because it provided an opportunity to enliven a half-length, Italian-identified subject with a difficult, elbow-pointing pose of the type favored by Correggio and the Mannerist painters whose works were on view in Parma. At the same time, it serves as an early example of her tendency to work through subjects or models that in some circumstances might be considered inappropriate for a female artist,[60] or to combine sources and motifs that might otherwise be viewed as incompatible. Here, for instance, Andrew Walker has discerned a resemblance between Cassatt's pagan figure, her head titled back and arms uplifted, and that of the Virgin in the Correggio *Coronation* fresco [Fig. 10] that she copied.[61] Walker views such borrowings as "disguised homage" or tribute. Could Cassatt also have intended a degree of provocation in her choice of sources? Could she be alluding to the impossible extremes of contemporary women's roles through this mythological figure of promiscuity patterned to echo an image of a sacred symbol of virginity?

Perhaps this is reading too much into a work that appears rather academic, a work that might best be understood as a student effort. Yet, a consideration of some contemporaneous literary works might help us to see how such a reading is meaningful. In his book-length narrative poem of 1866, "The Picture of St. John," the American writer Bayard Taylor employed two types similar to or identical with the figures employed by

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[59] "Bacchante," *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1866), 21: "substituèrent généralement au type gracieux de l'art antique une figure de femme avinée et lascive."

[60] M. Elizabeth Boone explores this point in relation to Cassatt's Spanish paintings in "Bullfights and Balconies: Flirtation and *Majismo* in Mary Cassatt's Spanish Paintings of 1872–73," *American Art* 9 (Spring 1995), 55-71. The subject of Mardi Gras, which Cassatt depicted in *Pendant la carnaval*, was also seen as having vulgar and salacious aspects by writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James. See Walker, "Mary Cassatt's Modern Education," 30.

[61] Ibid., 31.

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Cassatt—the nun-like soul ("chaste and pale . . . whose garments know no stain") and the "bold" bacchante ("bounding to her cymbal's clang")—to represent competing impulses of the human soul, the spiritual versus the sensual.[62] This rivalry, he believed, was especially acute for the artist, and would prove the downfall of his protagonist.

Literary critics praised "A Picture of St. John," the story of a painter who loses his wife and son after impiously painting them as the Madonna and Child in a work inspired by Correggio. Still, a number of reviewers chastised Taylor for what they felt was a modern tendency to confound the sensuous with the sensual. "We do not believe in any dual arrangement of the soul, in which a 'nun' is paired off with a 'bacchante,'" stated a critic for *The North American Review*; "There is no earthly reason why an 'artist' should be allowed to avail himself of a plea of double identity. . . . That because we have particularly keen nerves of sensation we should allow our senses the dominion over us, is twaddle."[63] But despite this critic's claim that the soul is not bifurcated into "nun" and "bacchante," these were in fact the two categories into which women were usually divided, seen as either pure and unembodied or as licentious and carnal.

Ernest Roland evoked these two types in a short story from 1871, describing how his protagonist, Gaston, perceives the object of his affection, Mme. de Parny:

> She was unlike any woman he had ever cared for; there was less of earth about her than about any creature he had ever known. Her hands were so slender, and her long fingers seemed more like those of a muse to guide and point upward and onward than of a mistress to press and kiss and play with. Gaston had very positive ideas about what a woman must be to be attractive, and his ideas were not of a strictly spiritual

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[62] Bayard Taylor, *The Picture of St. John* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 31-2. This poem invokes numerous elements of the uncanny and other issues relevant to this chapter (the use of an artistic pseudonym, the brushstroke as caress, copying as part of an artistic education and the problem of paternal authority, questions of lineage, etc.).

[63] "The Picture of St. John. By Bayard Taylor," *North American Review* 104 (January 1867), 296-7. Another critic, in "The Picture of St. John. By Bayard Taylor," *Atlantic Monthly* 19 (January 1867), 127, complained that Taylor "seems to forget the subtle difference between a sensuous and a sensual picture, as well as the fact that sentiment is better than either sensuousness or sensuality. . . ."

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> type—indeed, he rather affected to care for flesh and color in a woman, and talked about the old Greek ideas with great warmth, deprecated any union but that of beauty and strength, and thought a Bacchante beauty one of the best female types. You could only say of Mme. de Parny that her soul had a body, and beyond that there was no suggestion of earth. . . . [64]

Cassatt, by bringing together the Virgin and the maenad, the muse and the mistress, in *The Bacchante*, refused to hold apart the spiritual and the sensual in the figure of her woman, even at this early date. And then, in the Spanish paintings soon to follow, she frequently subverted expectations of "this genteel woman artist,"[65] and "inappropriate" imagery frequently underlies her maternal subject matter, as we will see later.

With her *Bacchante* on view at the Milan exposition, Cassatt was finally able to travel to her spiritual "homeland," Spain, in the fall of 1872. The artist left us little information as to why she felt such an affinity for this particular country, but her reading of Théophile Gautier's Romantic tale, *Voyage en Espagne (Tra los Montes)* (1843), likely sparked her visual imagination through its vivid portrayals of the beauty of Spanish costume and art.[66] The mood of *A Mandolin Player* and its similarities to the Spanish pictures of Manet suggest that Cassatt intended to follow in the footsteps of her French colleague by steeping herself in the museum culture of Madrid and seeking out those Spanish subjects growing in popularity with artists interested in the representation of "contemporary life."[67]

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[64] Ernest Roland, "Lèse-Amour," *Galaxy* 12 (September 1871), 386.

[65] Boone, "Bullfights and Balconies," 61.

[66] Cassatt discussed Gautier's opinions on art in a letter to Emily Sartain, Madrid, October 13 [1872], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 107. On the relation of Gautier's text to Manet's oeuvre, see Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 110-4.

[67] Georges Lafenestre, in his "Salon de 1873," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 July 1873), 48, observed that "The painters of contemporary life can be divided, first of all, into two important groups: the city dwellers, those who enjoy themselves in boudoirs and ateliers, on the boulevard or at the theater; and the voyagers, those who prefer the paths of the open air, a day's march far or wide, among the peasants of France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, or the primitive populations of Asia and Africa." ("Les peintres de la vie contemporaine se divisent tout d'abord en deux groups importants: les citadins, ceux qui se plaisent dans les boudoirs et les ateliers, sur le boulevard ou au théâtre; les voyageurs, ceux qui préfèrent les

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The Prado had an immediate impact upon Cassatt. "I really never in my life experienced such delight in looking at pictures," she wrote to Emily Sartain, "no Titiens in Italy are finer, nor Rafaelles either, the Madonna of the fish is most beautiful. . . ."[68] As for the painters of the native school, she stated,

> I don't hesitate to tell you that although I think now that Correggio is perhaps the greatest painter that ever lived, these Spaniards make a much greater impression *at first*. The men and women have a reality about them which exceeds anything I ever supposed possible. . . . Such freedom of touch, to be sure [Velázquez] left plenty of things unfinished. . . . Delicacy, expression of nobility and sublimity are not striking in this school but it is the extraordinary painting. So simple such breadth.[69]

The next week she reported that she was "making a sketch from the Velasquez at the gallery. . . . I think that one learns *how to paint* here."[70]

Soon Cassatt had moved on to Seville, where she secured a studio and began to think about subjects for original paintings. "I see the immense capital that can be drawn from Spain," she wrote; "it has not been 'exploited' yet as it might be, and it is suggestive of pictures on all sides."[71] Now that she had begun to work from the live model again, her appreciation for the Italian masters and their skill at capturing the subtleties of expression and gesture deepened: "constantly the thought of Correggio's pictures returns to my mind and I am thankful for my six months study in Parma. In all of Velasquez pictures I can think of no beautiful hand, *no*! not *one*. Murillo's hands of the St Elizabeth are exquisite but even in that picture there is a boy scratching his head in the most grotesque manner;

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courses au grand air, les étapes proches ou lointaines, parmi les paysans de France, d'Italie, d'Espagne, de Suisse, ou les populations primitives de l'Asie et de l'Afrique.")

[68] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Madrid, October 5 [1872], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 103.

[69] Ibid., 103-4.

[70] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Madrid, October 13 [1872], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 107-8. In a letter of October 27 [1872] she mentions "a sketch of the little prince Balthsar Charles (Velasquez) that I made in the gallery in Madrid" (*Cassatt and Her Circle*, 110), but this work is apparently lost.

[71] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Seville, October 27 [1872], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 109.

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indeed throughout I think the Spanish school lack taste."[72] (Coincidentally, Cassatt sought beautiful hands in the works of Iberian artists just a few months after Morelli had made his own studies in the very same galleries.[73]) Murillo's *St. Elizabeth of Hungary* [Fig. 13]—or, as one nineteenth-century writer more evocatively titled it, *St. Elizabeth of Hungary Cleansing the Head of a Leprous Beggar*[74]—elevated Cassatt's estimation of the painter, despite the work's more unpleasant aspects. The large altarpiece would be important to Cassatt less as a formal source than for its subject of bathing, its treatment of hands, and its thematization of touch (in this case, closely associated with the abject).

In *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* [Fig. 14], probably one of the first works she painted during her Sevillan sojourn, Cassatt shows herself to have absorbed lessons from masters such as Murillo and Correggio while moving toward the modern genre mode. Though the pose does not appear to be derived from any strict source, the mannered arrangement of the hands suggests that she had indeed carefully studied the gestures painted by her predecessors. A "freedom of touch" learned from Velázquez enlivens the figure in a more coherent manner than in earlier works such as *The Bacchante* or *Early Portrait*[75] (Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio), in which the application of paint appears random and often unrelated to the contours of the body it is meant to represent. The color, too, with its bright hues of green, red, and orange, breaks from the more restrained palette of earlier works. By signing the work with a new variation on her name, "M. Stevenson Cassatt/Seville," she acknowledged a transition in style corresponding to her change in location. Interestingly, the signatures on her Spanish pictures suppressed her feminine first name, at the same time that she first painted male figures (since a portrait

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[72] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Seville, January 1, 1873, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 114.
[73] According to Gibson-Wood, *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship*, 188, Morelli visited A. H. Layard in Spain in early 1872. Cassatt left Paris for Madrid in late September 1872.
[74] "An Art Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 71 (November 1885), 941.
[75] BrCR 16; signed "Mary Stevenson Cassatt./à mon ami C. Raimondi."

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of her father begun in 1871[76]) and more regularly began to depict motifs with a sensuousness and sensuality generally believed to be "proper" to the male artist alone.

Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange exhibits a degree of voluptuousness not seen before in Cassatt's work, despite her sometimes bacchanalian subject matter. The figure's direct gaze (unusual in Cassatt's imagery of any period), the full, slightly opened lips, the partially unpeeled fruit, along with a convincing embodiedness and the rich, painterly surface of the canvas, invite the viewer as none of her previous pictures had done. At this moment, between *Pendant le carnaval*, which depicted women tossing either bonbons or flowers from a balcony,[77] the *Bacchante* with her cymbals, and the *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange*, Cassatt alluded to all five senses in her subject matter. In the first major work from her Spanish period, *On the Balcony During the Carnival* [Fig. 15], she would add to this sensuousness a dimension of flirtatious sensuality, which arrived in the form of the first male figure to be included in her genre work.

"My present effort is on a canvass [*sic*] of thirty and is three figures life size half way to the knee," she wrote to Emily Sartain, "All the three heads are foreshortened and difficult to pose, so much so that my model asked me if the people who pose for me live long. I have one man's figure the first time I have introduced a mans head into any of my pictures."[78] As others have suggested, the flirtations depicted in Cassatt's Spanish works may have been intended to attract American buyers.[79] Furthermore, *On the Balcony* can be connected to similar Spanish subject pictures whose female figures were seen in

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[76] BrCR 49, *Portrait of Miss Cassatt's Father (Robert Simpson Cassatt)*, oil on canvas (private collection) was likely begun during Cassatt's 1871–72 visit to the U.S., but not finished until her next visit, in 1875.

[77] In 1913, Cassatt told Segard that her first Salon painting had been accepted in 1872 and represented two young women throwing "bonbons" during Carnival (Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 7). However, we know that her first Salon picture was accepted in 1868. Whether she was also mistaken regarding the exact items being thrown (flowers rather than bonbons are seen in the work that has been proposed as the 1872 Salon picture, *During Carnival*, discussed above in footnote 54) is not known.

[78] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, January 1, 1873, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 114.

[79] Boone, "Bullfights and Balconies," 63; Walker, "Mary Cassatt's Modern Education," 37-8. Many of Cassatt's Spanish pictures were sent to the U.S. soon after completion, and *On the Balcony* was exhibited at the 1873 Cincinnati Industrial Exposition under the title *The Flirtation: A Balcony in Seville.*

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Cassatt's time as women of compromised virtue, even as prostitutes: Murillo's *Two Women at a Window* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) and Goya's *Majas on a Balcony* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).[80]

Like Manet in his *Balcony* [Fig. 16], which has been aptly described as depicting three figures "arranged in a bouquet of hands, accouterments, and outward gazes,"[81] Cassatt in her painting was concerned with the artful disposition of gestures, accessories, and glances. The work seems designed to showcase a variety of expressive movements and poses, and above all, Cassatt's ability to paint hands. Two hands are especially prominent in this composition: one that holds a skillfully foreshortened fan at the center of the composition, and another, nearly disembodied male hand, which emerges out of the shadows at upper right to break the picture plane by grasping a shutter. The artist's proficiency in the depiction of gesture was recognized when she exhibited the painting in Philadelphia in 1873: the *Evening Bulletin* critic found that the woman at right handles her fan "in the true Spanish style."[82] (Another writer of the time characterized each Spanish woman's manner of manipulating her fan to be "as expressive of herself as her autograph."[83])

While Manet's picture features enigmatic gestures that accentuate the ambivalent and complex nature of the relationships between three urbane and artistic Parisians (for instance, is the standing woman putting on or taking off her gloves?), Cassatt's work presents a more conventional social interaction, but one that was perhaps more useful to her at this moment in her career, and not simply for its appeal to American collectors. If the balcony often served in the nineteenth century as a site encompassing the simultaneous

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[80] Boone, "Bullfights and Balconies," 60-1. At least one American critic, upon viewing *On the Balcony* in 1874 at the National Academy of Design, noted the resemblance to Murillo; see "Fine Arts. The National Academy Exhibition. II," *Nation* 18 (14 May 1874), 321: "In one of these balcony-groups there is a leaning girl's head, full of sombre [*sic*] power, and painted with the best traditions of Murillo."

[81] Amstrong, *Manet Manette*, 182.

[82] "The Fine Arts: Pictures by Miss M. S. Cassatt," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (17 June 1873).

[83] "The Spanish Women and Their Fans," reprinted from *Argosy* in *Littell's Living Age* 89 (28 April 1866), 288.

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opposition and imbrication of gaze and touch, desire and contamination,[84] in Cassatt's picture these concepts are weighted toward the latter term in each of these pairs. An emphasis on tactility and proximity is underlined by the spectators' relation to the figures (which is far closer than that allowed by the screen-like railing in Manet's painting), and by the prominence of the male hand at upper right.

Given her interest in a bravura rather than slick, *pompier* facture, Cassatt may have been drawn to Spain's reputation as both European and primitive, close to France yet exotically other,[85] and to the idea that this would be manifested in a more permissive cultural attitude toward touch. Through the depiction of an expressive and sensual Spanish corporeality, Cassatt could feel at liberty to explore a painterly facture (itself associated with Spanish tradition, especially in the work of Velázquez) that might not always be considered proper for the female artist. In Spain she could immerse herself in a more sensuous and "Oriental" approach to art while remaining to great degree under the protection of European culture and tradition. That this more embodied expressiveness was viewed as characteristically "other" is evident from Cassatt's American reviews.[86] When *On the Balcony* and a related painting, *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* [Fig. 17] were seen in Philadelphia in 1873, the *Evening Bulletin* critic described the women in the balcony picture as belonging to "a lower rank" than the woman in a mantilla—despite the fact that the same model probably sat for both paintings—perhaps because she appears more demure posed alone, with her head covered.

The *Evening Bulletin* critic was also interested in Cassatt's handling of pigment and color, finding them to be unusually bold:

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[84] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 136.

[85] On the appeal of this view of Spain to Manet, see Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 94.

[86] The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* critic mentions having seen "flattering notices of Miss Cassatt's two pictures in the Paris Salon of this year, from journals of that city," but these have never been located, and Cassatt's Spanish pictures are not known to have been shown in Paris outside of the Salon.

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> The painting of the flesh, especially of the darker figures, is very different from what we are accustomed to. In the bright light where the pictures are now to be seen, every touch of the brush is ruthlessly exposed, and the broad, free, dashing use of the colors is so different from the miniature style of flesh painting which is usually aimed at that ignorant people are apt to wonder and pretend to find fault. But the effect is singularly fine when the proper distance is obtained.

The *Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph*'s critic, after recalling that Cassatt's earlier pictures were "scarcely more than studies, brilliant in color, a little over-vigorous in handling, and far from perfect in drawing," had a similar reaction.[87] Comparing her latest pictures to those of Anna M. Lea, on view at the same time, this critic found Lea's works to be "the most intellectual," while Cassatt "is the superior in technique," adding,

> Both, however, are remarkable for their vigorous handling which ought to put to shame the feeble work of some of our male artists. Indeed Miss Cassatt rather carries vigor to an extreme. and the flesh painting on the smaller of the two pictures [*Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla*] in Bailey's window has a somewhat spotty appearance from the colors not being more gracefully modulated. It is a great thing, however, to see a lady artist paint in this firm and decided manner, and we can readily forgive a fault so easily corrected for the sake of the sure knowledge and real power which it indicates.[88]

While *On the Balcony* is rather thinly painted (and perhaps somewhat abraded), *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* is remarkably ample in its facture. The woman's flesh is built up of overlapping patches, like the scales of a fish; her face has a real fullness, between the deeply shadowed eyes and the nose highlighted with a dab of impasto. The lace—ordinarily an emblem of the delicate feminine arts—is painted even more audaciously. Cassatt did not attempt through her brushwork to mimic the tiny

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[87] "The Fine Arts: Art Notes," *Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph* (16 June 1873), 5.
[88] Ibid.

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strokes employed in its manufacture; to the contrary, she represented that which is best known for its dainty intricacy though a thick and unblended application of pigment that nevertheless manages to approximate the combination of opacity and transparency inherent to lace.

Cassatt's critics were clearly ambivalent about this facture, finding it to be "ruthlessly exposed" and "vigorous to an extreme" yet acceptable when "the proper distance is obtained." One suspects that their reactions signify not simply the idea that a certain distance would help the eye to blend the color into a closer approximation of an academic facture, but also the view that a decorous Philadelphian would want to keep a certain space between him- or herself and these carousing Spaniards. Through the surrogates of her exotic (but not too exotic) figures, portrayed on the canvas in poses of "an ease, an unconstraint . . . [and] a careless grace," in the words of the *Evening Telegraph*'s critic, Cassatt was able to safely experiment with a sensuous and forceful touch that prefigures the painterly handling associated most often with her Impressionist style. That she herself recognized the achievement of a new level of competence in these works is communicated by yet another signature change, now employing solely initials: *On the Balcony* was signed "M.S.C./1873/à Seville.," and *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* bears the inscription "M.C./Seville./1873."[89]

Cassatt achieved success at the Salon of 1873 with the acceptance of another Spanish picture, *Torero and Young Girl* [Fig. 18], which was listed in the catalogue under the name "Mary Stevenson-Cassatt" and signed "M.S.C./Seville/1873." (That the artist here attempted another subject identified with Manet suggests that she may have consciously intended to set her works into dialogue with his.) Like *On the Balcony*, the subject of *Torero and Young Girl* has amorous connotations: the woman offers the

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[89] Cassatt added the signature "Mary Cassatt" to *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* c. 1924. It is interesting to note that, despite professing that Spain was her spiritual "homeland," Cassatt continued to inscribe works using the French language ("à Seville"), as she had while in Parma.

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bullfighter a glass of water, into which he dips a slice of honeycomb. Philadelphia critics again associated Cassatt's Spanish figures with flirtation as well as the working classes: when the work was exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1878, the *Daily Evening Telegraph* critic described the picture as portraying "a very life-like study of a Spanish bull-fighter coquetting with a *tabernera*, who is offering him liquid refreshment."[90]

If *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* and *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Mantilla* demonstrate Cassatt's increased fluency in the handling of pigment, *Torero and Young Girl* takes this a step further, for it reads like a catalogue of painterly effects derived from the Spanish masters, and Velázquez above all. The *torero*'s face and hat are actively worked with a round, scumbling stroke, yet the canvas is visible beneath the woman's barely washed-in face. The metallic highlights of the embroidered jacket are picked out with dabs of impasto, but the red cape pulled across his midsection is swept in with thin red pigment. Short broad strokes approximate the rough lace of the woman's collar, while angular shadows on her sleeve suggest a crisp, stiff fabric. At the center of the composition, bright streaks of white give shape to the glass. Pattern, too, fascinated Cassatt here, from the intricate geometric shapes of the male figure's jacket to the stripes of the woman's dress and the flowers of her shawl and lace collar.

The ambition of *Torero and Young Girl* is underlined by the work's more intricate composition and gestures. *On the Balcony* arranges its three figures in two parallel layers that remain somewhat flat. *Torero and Young Girl*, by contrast, situates the woman at an angle to the picture plane, her elbow pointing straight out toward the viewer, while the *torero*'s body slants toward the right background. A concern for the expressive qualities of elbows (which we have already seen in *The Bacchante*) animates Cassatt's picture, and

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[90] "The Spring Exhibition of the Academy of the Fine Arts," *Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph* (25 April 1878), 4. As Boone points out ("Bullfights and Balconies," 68), bullfighting had been associated with masculine sexual prowess since antiquity, and by Cassatt's time, bullfighters were generally drawn from the working class, especially from the ranks of cattlemen and butchers.

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the image of the self-possessed woman posing with arm akimbo brings to mind two of Manet's Spanish pictures from 1862—*Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume* (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut) and *Lola de Valence* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)—themselves derived from the Spanish tradition (Goya, Velázquez). At the same time, these pointed-elbow poses may also be borrowed from images by artists of the Northern schools. While the painterly effects in Cassatt's picture emulate those of the Spanish masters, the facture, poses, and gestures also attest to her absorption of Dutch and Flemish examples, seen while visiting the Prado collection, which is especially rich in this area of art history.

Four years after Cassatt painted *Torero and Young Girl*, Emile Duranty, in a series of articles published in the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, reflected upon similar gestures and poses in paintings belonging to the Louvre. Duranty approached these pictures with tools drawn from the new "realist-nationalist" art history, which attended to the ways in which realist images represent the social and artistic conditions of national cultures.[91] The writers involved in shaping this approach to art generally valued a Northern realist tradition (to which they related the contemporary French school) over Italian classicism.

In these articles Duranty developed a theory of "realist physiognomics," which held that a physiognomic feature was legible because it was achieved through direct sensation, being "literally *striking*, because it *struck* and *impressed* itself upon the viewer."[92] But despite his avowed preference for the easily readable "image textuelle," Duranty time and again was captivated by those poses or gestures that resist simple characterization.[93] He most frequently discovered these enigmatic expressions, "amusing to decipher," in works by Dutch and Flemish artists (as opposed to the Italians, who "content themselves with

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[91] Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 82-3.
[92] Ibid., 92.
[93] Ibid., 92-3.

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traditional gestures, a bit banal"),[94] and their example played a part in shaping his favorable response to similar images by the Impressionists.

Duranty concerned himself with the hand- or hands-on-hip stance that results in pointed elbows in a number of paintings in the Louvre. Comparing the "argumentative marketwoman" in Metsu's *Vegetable Market in Amsterdam* to Van Dyck's portrait of *Charles I* [see Fig. 19], he observed, "Two fists at the hips: a gesture that is 'coarse,' or at least vulgar; one fist at the hip: a gesture noble and royal! . . . From where, then, does this single fist on the hip draw its noble allure? . . . Mysteries that Darwin himself would have trouble linking to the manners and habits of the anthropomorphic monkeys of which he wants us to be the heirs."[95]

Another type of gesture that intrigued Duranty as well as Cassatt was the ritualized presentation of a drinking glass. In a discussion of Metsu's *Soldier Receiving a Young Woman* [see Fig. 20] Duranty hypothesized that the woman's peculiar manner of holding the glass might be traced back to a Spanish gesture relating to the Last Supper.[96] Duranty was not disturbed that the artist's lack of clarity in gesture forced him to take some time reading the picture—"as one reads a book"—before he was able to determine that the woman was receiving the soldier, and not vice versa (as stated in the work's title); Metsu had obliged him "to think, to search, to put my own feelings in play, then, when I have penetrated his thought, I am recompensed, I am charmed."[97]

Though the woman in *Torero and Young Girl* does not proffer her glass in the same awkward manner as Metsu's figure, Cassatt's choice to depict a similar motion, one

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[94] Edmond Duranty, "Promenades au Louvre: Remarques sur le geste," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1877): "amusantes à déchiffrer" (20); "se contentent de gestes traditionnels, un peu banals" (23-4).

[95] Ibid., 22: "la marchande en dispute"; "deux poings aux hanches, geste 'canaille' ou au moins vulgaire; un seul poing sur la hanche, geste noble et royal! . . . D'où donc ce poing seul sur la hanche tire-t-il son allure noble? . . . Énigmes, que Darwin lui-même aura peine à rattacher aux moeurs et coutumes des singes anthropomorphes dont il veut que nous soyons les héritiers."

[96] Ibid., 26.

[97] Ibid., 20: "comme on lit un livre"; "à penser, à chercher, à mettre mon esprit en jeu, car lorsque j'ai pénétré sa pensée, j'ai ma récompense, je reste charmé."

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that is also associated with a stylized form of flirtation, in conjunction with the hand-on-hip pose, attests to her affinity for the same gestures and attitudes that would occupy Duranty a few years later. Neither are the motions or poses as employed by Cassatt at this moment characterized by the ambiguity that so appealed to Duranty. Still, we will see that many of her mother and child pictures are distinguished by an undecidability in their expressions and poses, refusing the simple equation of maternity and happy sentimentality expected of the motif. Her attraction to these attitudes while still in Spain also anticipates her own turn toward the Northern tradition.

* * *

Soon after the opening of the 1873 Salon, Emily Sartain wrote to her father of her friend's work,

> Luminais has seen [Cassatt's] Salon picture and a couple of her sketches that I took him— He spoke of them as having a great deal of talent but mostly *talent of the brush*, as [he] called it— . . . He said too that he saw the influence of too many masters, —there was no personality in her painting,—he felt in her work, Goya, Couture, etc., etc., not Miss Cassatt— He thought she had wandered about too much,—she ought to settle down in one place, and work out her own style— . . . I don't see how he could have derived this conclusion. Her work looks to me so original— But I believe he is right.[98]

Evidently, Cassatt herself held a different opinion on the value of continued study of and copying after the old masters, for after leaving Spain in late April and spending less than a month in Paris, the artist traveled to Holland and Belgium, where she would absorb lessons from painters of the Northern school, many of whom were celebrated for bravura paint handling.

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[98] Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Paris, May 8, 1873, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 118. Evariste Vital Luminais was a Salon medalist and painter of various subjects including animals, hunting, historical genre, and the Gauls (Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 99 n. 1).

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In Haarlem, Cassatt visited the Frans Hals Museum, which had served as an inspiration for the Hals revival and its pioneering document, an 1868 *Gazette des beaux-arts* essay by Theophile Thoré-Burger in which he claimed that Hals had no need to make preparatory sketches for his subjects, for he was "sure of expressing their nature with the first stroke of his adroit and painterly brush."[99] At the museum, Cassatt made a small copy after *The Officers and Sergeants of the St. Hadrian Civic Guard Company*[100] (private collection), which functioned primarily as an exercise in blocking out areas of light versus dark. An original work painted in Antwerp, *Miss Cassatt's Mother in a Lacy Blouse*[101] (private collection), provides evidence of the artist's study of Hals and formal Dutch portraiture. While she had already been working in a broad facture, the subdued palette and somber mood represent a change from the more vivacious colors and expressions of the Spanish pictures. Again, the stylistic shifts in the work of this period are echoed in a new signature type, in which she returned to the use of her surname: the portrait is signed "M.S. Cassatt/Antwerp/1873."

Cassatt remained in the Low Countries for a few months only before traveling on to Rome, following a short visit to Paris in October of 1873. In spite of its brevity, the trip to the Netherlands and Belgium was highly significant for two reasons. First, though she had complained of Antwerp that "there is nothing else but the Rubens to admire, except one head of Rembrandt,"[102] a number of the genre subjects common to Dutch and Flemish painting—girls and women engaged in needlework, playing musical instruments, taking tea, sitting with small dogs, and of course, caring for children—would become her

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[99] For more information on the Hals revival, see Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, "Nineteenth-Century Visitors to the Frans Hals Museum, in *The Documented Image, Visions in Art History*, eds. Gabriel P. Weisberg and Laurinda S. Dixon, with the assistance of Antje Bultmann Lemke (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 111-44. The Thoré-Burger essay was published under the pseudonym Wilhelm Bürger, "Frans Hals," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1868), 219-32, 431-48; this quotation p. 226: "sûr d'exprimer la nature, au premier jet de sa brosse adroite et colorée."

[100] BrCR 25. The work is unsigned.

[101] BrCR 27.

[102] Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Antwerp, June 25 [1873], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 121.

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standard motifs after this point. And second, it was through a friend made in Antwerp that Cassatt would meet Degas. "I met here a Mr. & Mrs. Tourny," Cassatt recounted in a letter, "Mr. T. copies in water colours for Mr. Thiers."[103] Léon Auguste Tourny (who was probably creating works for the Museum of Copies, which had opened at the Palais de l'Industrie in December 1872) is said to have guided his friend Degas to Cassatt's 1874 Salon entry, *Ida*, a work she had painted in Rome.[104] Upon viewing it, Degas reportedly exclaimed, "It's true. Here at last is someone who feels as I do."[105]

Ida was also the first work to be exhibited under the name "Mary Cassatt" in the Salon catalogue, though it is signed "M.S. Cassatt/Rome/1874." Not long after this picture went on view, *A Musical Party*[106] [Fig. 21], another painting completed in Rome (but exhibiting the influence of Dutch and Flemish subject matter, and including an uncanny echo of Courbet's self-portraits), was exhibited by a Parisian gallery on the Boulevard Haussmann. Sartain described the work to her father as "superb and delicate in color,—three figures singing. The light on the chest and face of the foreground figure, a blonde, is perfectly dazzling."[107] Cassatt's touch, even bolder after the lessons of Hals and Rubens, was again at issue, for the painting, said Sartain, "is as slovenly in manner and in drawing as her Spanish pochades."[108] When the work was shown in Philadelphia two years later, the *Daily Evening Telegraph* critic similarly questioned what was seen as Cassatt's tendency toward incompletion, while praising her skill over that of male artists:

> the *Musical Party*, although exceedingly well painted so far as it goes, is not finished highly enough to be entirely satisfactory. Miss Cassatt, we believe, works upon the theory that the best way to get the effect desired is to aim for it directly and to achieve

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[103] Ibid.
[104] The picture most likely to be *Ida* is not published in the Breeskin catalogue raisonné; it is illustrated in Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 91. The work is signed "M.S. Cassatt/Rome/1874."
[105] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 35: "C'est vrai. Voilà quelqu'un qui sent comme moi."
[106] The work is signed "M.S. Cassatt/1874."
[107] Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Paris, June 17, 1874, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 126.
[108] Ibid.

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> an approximation to it with all possible rapidity. The result of this practice is that many of her pictures are scarcely more than spirited sketches, as in the case of the *Musical Party* now under consideration. Miss Cassatt, however, is an artist of great ability . . . her crudest works challenge admiration for their intrinsic qualities, such as it is impossible to give to the performances of many of her male rivals.[109]

With two pictures on view in Paris in the spring of 1874, Cassatt shocked her friends by announcing that she was searching for an atelier in that city for the winter. "She has always detested Paris so much, that I could scarcely believe it possible that she would consent to stay here," wrote Sartain, "but she says she sees it is necessary to be here, to look after her own interests. She thinks it is the fault of her picture dealer that her pictures do not sell."[110] Cassatt could not have seen the first Impressionist exhibition, held in 1874, because she did not arrive in Paris that year until after it had closed, and it is not likely that she knew Degas or his work by this point, but after eight years of travel and study throughout Europe, she realized that to be at the center of the art world would mean making her home in Paris. After spending the summer in Villiers-le-Bel for a second term of study with Couture, Cassatt and her sister Lydia, recently arrived in Europe, settled into a Paris apartment. The artist would remain a resident of France for the rest of her life.

Cassatt turned to portraiture in the winter of 1874–75, preparing Salon entries that may have been intended to garner commissions. Of two pictures submitted in 1875, a now-lost portrait of her sister in a pink dress against a red background was refused, while a portrait of *Mlle E. C.*[111] was accepted. Cassatt apparently felt that Luminais, and by extension, Emily Sartain, who was currently studying with him, were not only behind the rejection of her sister's portrait but were also gossiping about it, and she snubbed her

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[109] "The Fine Arts," *Daily Evening Telegraph, Philadelphia* (29 April 1876), 5.

[110] Emily Sartain to John Sartain, Paris, June 17, 1874, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 124, 126.

[111] The work is known today only through a caricature published in *Le Journal amusant* (26 June 1875), 3 (reproduced in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 129), which shows a child in a Little Lord Fauntleroy-type outfit leaning against a tall chair.

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friend as a result. Sartain, in her own defense, reminded Cassatt that Luminais had long felt ambivalent about her work:

> He always accorded you a great deal of talent, that you were evidently highly organized as an artist, but that in your effort after frankness you fell into brutality, and that your pictures were not "distingué." Also, the same thing that you told me Vieille had told you—that you were too easily impressed by a master whom you admired, that your painting showed the influence of several different schools of art at the same time, and as a result was wanting in "originality"—individuality—[112]

Although Cassatt's response is not known (the friendship would never be repaired), she was clearly still not ready to forgo the in-depth study of various "influences," whether old master or contemporary. The next two years would see her working through the two schools she had not yet tackled in her European travels, two schools that would help to liberate her palette from the dark old master tradition and her subject matter from the clichés of Salon painting in favor of a modernist style: the English and the French.

Judging from a caricature of the now lost *Portrait de Mlle E.C.* and another work painted later that year, *Portrait of Eddy Cassatt*[113] [Fig. 22], in 1875 Cassatt was working very much in the style of a leading French portraitist of the period, Emile Carolus-Duran, whose technique, derived from Velázquez and Hals, she found sympathetic.[114] Cassatt posed her young nephew, clad in a fashionable velvet costume of the Little Lord Fauntleroy type, a dog at his side, in front of a dramatic green curtain. At the same time,

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[112] Rough draft of a letter from Emily Sartain to Mary Cassatt, c. May 25, 1875, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 128. H. Vieille was a dealer in art and artists' supplies; Cassatt had an agreement with him by 1868 and gave his address for her entries in the Salon catalogues of 1868, 1870, 1872, and 1873 (Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 99 n. 2).

[113] The *Portrait of Eddy Cassatt* was painted during a brief visit Cassatt made to Philadelphia in the summer of 1875. Though family members generally spelled the nickname of Edward Buchanan Cassatt (1869–1922) as "Eddie," the artist inscribed this picture "Eddy/from/Aunt Mary," in keeping with her generally idiosyncratic spelling. At 60 x 40 inches, this is Cassatt's largest easel picture; *Mrs. Duffee Seated on a Striped Sofa* [Fig. 24] is one of her smallest.

[114] See, for example, Carolus-Duran's *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter*, 1874 (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), with which the *Portrait of Eddy Cassatt* [Fig. 22] has much in common.

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her painting recalls Romantic precedents, such as Sir Thomas Lawrence's *Charles William Lambton* [Fig. 23], of 1825. May Alcott, the sister of Louisa May Alcott and a Salon exhibitor in her own right, might have been thinking of this type of work when she wrote of Cassatt in an 1876 letter, "being very lively and a woman of real genius, she will be a first-class light as soon as her pictures get a little circulated and known, for they are handled in a masterly way, with a touch of strength one seldom finds coming from a woman's fingers. They wouldn't suffer if hung with the Thomas Lawrences."[115]

Cassatt continued to refine her portrait skills and had two works of this genre accepted to the Salon of 1876: an unknown *Portrait de Mme W.* and the depiction of her sister that had been rejected the previous year, its background now darkened in conformity to academic taste. The artist also began to experiment with ideas drawn from earlier French movements and the Rococo in particular. Paintings such as *Mrs. Duffee Seated on a Striped Sofa*[116] [Fig. 24] recall intimate interior scenes by François Boucher, like *The Milliner (Morning)* [Fig. 25], in subject and in palette, for both pictures are dominated by a warm red contrasted with an icy blue. The work also resembles an early Rococo picture by Jacques-Louis David, *Portrait de Marie-Josephine Buron* (Art Institute of Chicago), suggesting that Cassatt was self-consciously drawing upon Rococo models as settings for modern gowns created in the late eighteenth-century French style at a moment when she had finally settled in the art and fashion capital of the Western world. *Mrs. Duffee Seated on a Striped Sofa*, like a number of Cassatt's Impressionist pictures to follow, might be categorized as a nineteenth-century update of the *tableau de mode*, a picture genre invented in the late eighteenth century that provides a glimpse into the private world of the well-to-do Parisian *femme*.[117]

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[115] May Alcott letter, November 1876, quoted in Caroline Ticknor, *May Alcott: A Memoir* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1928), 152.

[116] The work is signed "M.S. Cassatt/Paris/1876."

[117] See Richard Rand, *Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) and the catalogue entries on de Troy (104) and Boucher (114) for a discussion of the *tableau du mode*. Oliver T. Banks, in *Watteau and the North: Studies in the*

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While Cassatt had been successful in getting two pictures into the Salon of 1876, the next year's exhibition would be a different story. If she was embarrassed by gossip surrounding the rejection of one of two submissions to the 1875 Salon, her humiliation at having both her paintings refused in 1877 must have been immense. It is not known which works were sent for consideration; perhaps *Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering* (Philadelphia Museum of Art) and *The Reader* [Fig. 26], works inscribed with yet another signature type, still employing initials for her first and middle names, but no longer using periods to set off the abbreviations: "MS Cassatt/1877."[118]

Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering somewhat incongruously combines the crimson velvet upholstery and dark background redolent of Salon portraiture with the lighter-toned color scheme and buttery paint texture that Cassatt would adopt in her Impressionist works. *The Reader*, by contrast, represents the artist's complete conversion to the light-filled Impressionist palette. With its motif of the woman reading, elegant furnishings, and fluid paint handling, the painting brings to mind hallmarks of the Rococo. But though looking back to the *tableau de mode*, it was conceived as a far more forceful statement than a tiny confection like *Mrs. Duffee* (13 3/4 x 10 1/2 inches), being grander in scale and closer in size (32 x 25 1/2 inches) to half-length Salon entries like *Torero and Young Girl* (39 3/4 x 33 1/2 inches). Cassatt in *The Reader* remade the *tableau de mode* for her own modern-life purposes, as had some of her French colleagues in the years just preceding 1877. Cassatt, though, eschewed the erotic aspects of the genre that a number of the Impressionist painters retained in their images.

Cassatt further modernized the *tableau de mode* in *The Reader* by limiting her color range to shades of white, much in the manner of James McNeill Whistler's tonalist

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Dutch and Flemish Baroque Influence on French Rococo Painting (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 13-4, makes the important point that the French *goût hollandais* of the eighteenth century was instrumental in enabling the rise of genre painting within the Academy.

[118] *Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering* is BrCR 48. *The Reader* actually appears to be signed "MS Cassatt/1877." (with a period following "1877").

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pictures. The restricted palette is enlivened by the texture of the paint, which ranges from chalky to creamy, and by the limited introduction of color: a pink tint in the dress, a suggestion of gold in the striped upholstery fabric, and a fresh blue for the ribbon at collar and cuffs. The quiet refinement of Cassatt's model, her relatively unadorned gown, the formality of the striped chair, and the monochrome palette make it easy to overlook the daringly loose paint handling also found in this picture. The freedom of brushwork in areas such as the lacy cuffs and collar is emphasized by comparison with the soft and delicate modeling of the face and hands, whose shapes, and particularly the woman's elegantly tapered fingers, recall the works of Correggio she had so carefully studied in Parma. Moreover, a bright, Courbet-like bit of impasto forming the turned-down corner of the book cover found at the center of the composition brings the scene to vivid life with a bit of trompe-l'oeil that at the same time confidently proclaims its presence as paint. The picture's importance to the artist is in this case communicated by a double signature: it appears she first signed the work at lower left, but likely finding this inscription to be difficult to read, placed a second signature in a more prominent position at right.

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The year 1877 represented one of the lowest points of Cassatt's career, with the rejection of two works by the Salon jury; the same year also marked her definitive turn toward the artistic confrères and the style that would lead her oeuvre to its highest points. In 1877 Cassatt would finally choose to break with the Salon system and accept Degas's invitation to exhibit with the Impressionists. Her relationship with these innovators clearly benefited her art; yet, as we have now seen, she was already moving toward many of the same ends years before coming into contact with the Impressionists or settling in France. Denied the traditional education available to male artists, Cassatt embarked upon a ten-year self-guided apprenticeship to the masters that was in many ways far more rigorous than any Academic course of study, especially given the constraints upon women in general and women travelers in particular. By choosing to emulate painters renowned for

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their expressive gestures and freedom of paint handling, and by selecting genre subjects at odds with the grand pretensions of Salon style, Cassatt found herself in step with Manet, Morisot, and other painters, as well as critics like Duranty, who were, as Eliza Haldeman described it, "seeking a new way" apart from the Academy. And as a woman artist, she challenged expectations for her sex not only in her career choice but also in her choice of sources and in her technique, which was seen as somewhat suspect by critics because rough and incomplete, but was also characterized as rivaling the facture of most male artists in its "vigor." Since the late 1860s having worked through antecedents provided by a broad assortment of artistic "father figures" and having been found at times wanting for "'originality'—individuality," Cassatt in 1877 was on the cusp of developing her signature style, signaled by the return to her birth name: "Mary Cassatt."

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CHAPTER TWO — *"MISS MARY CASSATT THINKS, FEELS, AND SUCCEEDS IN SHARING HER INTELLECTUAL EMOTION WITH US": THE FIRST IMPRESSIONIST PICTURES, 1877–1878*

Cassatt's 1878 painting *The Blue Room (Little Girl in a Blue Armchair)* [Fig. 6] was little known when Achille Segard set to work on his 1913 biography of the artist, yet he recognized the picture as one of the most significant achievements of her career. Although Segard had subtitled his book *Un peintre des enfants et des mères*, he did not mean by this description to imply that the artist did not possess great technical ability, and his appreciation of *The Blue Room* was largely formal, to the point where he declared, "Even the painting's subject shies away from any idea that might be foreign to the art of painting; it is painting for painting's sake."[1] But whereas he stated that Cassatt's "real motif" in the picture was "the pleasure of making various blues sing, one next to another, by arranging them in scales, and deliberately pushing their gradation and variety to the extreme,"[2] Segard found his attention drawn to other—uncannier—areas of the picture, especially the furnishings. "By means of an originality and even a kind of strangeness," he stated, "the actual characters are the large blue poufs. They have an air of living an obscure and latent yet all the same individual life, in the manner of certain creatures not endowed with movement, whose primitive organism is scarcely differentiated from the primitive life of plant masses."[3]

Chapter Two will address the works that manifest Cassatt's attainment of her signature Impressionist style, prior to her first depictions of the mother and child theme,

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[1] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 155-6: "Le sujet même du tableau écarte toute idée qui soit étrangère à l'art de peindre, c'est de la peinture pour de la peinture."

[2] Ibid., 154-5: "vrai motif"; "le plaisir de faire chanter des bleus les uns à côté des autres, de les disposer par gammes et de pousser volontairement jusqu'à l'extrême leur gradation et leur variété."

[3] Ibid., 153-4: "Par une originalité et même par une sorte d'étrangeté, les vrais personnages sont les grands poufs bleus. Ils ont l'air de vivre d'une vie obscure et latente mais individuelle tout de même, à la manière de certaines bêtes non douées de mouvement et dont l'organisme élémentaire ne se différencie guère de la vie élémentaire des masses végétales."

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but involving an important picture of her mother, *Reading "Le Figaro"* [Fig. 27], and culminating in her first significant Impressionist image of a child: the uncanny *Blue Room.* Segard's analysis of this picture encapsulates a number of issues to be discussed here: how Cassatt managed the tensions between form and content, sight and touch, the strange and the familiar, the "scarcely differentiated" and the "individual," the intellect and the emotions. Indeed, Segard concluded of the painting, "Even when she compels herself to think solely through color and to revel in this pleasure alone, Miss Mary Cassatt thinks, feels, and succeeds in sharing her intellectual emotion with us."[4]

Chapter Two is comprised of three sections. The first outlines the increasing valuation of the individual artist's touch in its function as an index of the self from 1860 through the early 1880s. The second considers *Reading "Le Figaro"* and another significant work from this period, *A Woman in Black at the Opera* [Fig. 31], with regard to their authorship by a female artist who has depicted women engaging in activities associated with the traditionally masculine domains of the intellect and the gaze. The third section then turns to *The Blue Room* and to questions of Cassatt's sources and influences, specifically, Degas's imagery of the "home," ranging from that of the Bellelli family to the "maisons" of prostitutes. In this way, the relation of gender, sexuality, the private interior, and the public aspects of art-making as they pertain to the matter of Cassatt's efforts to achieve "'originality'—individuality"[5] will be explored.

I.

The concept of individuality in art, which had arisen during the Romantic period, took on a new charge around 1860, at the same time that Cassatt embarked upon her

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[4] Ibid., 156: "Même quand elle s'astreint à penser uniquement par la couleur et à s'enivrer de ce seul plaisir, Miss Mary Cassatt pense, éprouve, et réussit à nous faire partager son émotion intellectuelle." William James used the term "intellectual emotion" in his 1890 *The Principles of Psychology* in relation to the disinterested approach of the art connoisseur, an idea discussed in greater detail in my Chapter Six.

[5] Rough draft of a letter from Emily Sartain to Mary Cassatt, c. May 25, 1875, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 128; this quote makes reference to Vieille's belief that Cassatt had not yet distinguished her style from those of the painters whose works she had been studying.

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formal art studies. An increase in the size and wealth of the middle class in France, a shift in the art market from public commissions to private buyers, growing numbers of "middle-brow" collectors, an explosion in the numbers of paintings being produced (estimates suggest 200,000 "reputable" works for each decade in the second half of the century), the decline of the Academy, and the spread of financial speculation to the art market resulted in the installation of the individual artist rather than the grand historical painting, destined for purchase by the state, at the center of the French art world.[6]

A general surge of interest in "individuality" was stimulated by the publication of Jacob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* in 1860. Burckhardt popularized not only the idea of the Renaissance as a historical phenomenon but also the discovery of the individual (a person with a sense of self-conscious uniqueness as opposed to being aware of himself [*sic*] only as a member of a larger group, such as a family or race) as its most significant achievement.[7] In other words, the importance of the Renaissance for Burckhardt was found in its "exuberant originality" rather than in the rediscovery of antiquity, and in each person's ability to establish a career or status on merit rather than inheritance. Burckhardt was not completely comfortable with the term "Renaissance"—derived from Vasari's "*rinascita dell'arte*"—believing that it overemphasized the idea of the revival of antiquity within the modern world.[8] Yet the term is apt, for it suggests the notion of the "reborn" individual who draws value from his self-generated culture—his "originality"—which not only elevates him above the

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[6] For an important discussion of this shift, see Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), especially chapter three, "A New System Emerges." The estimate regarding the number of works painted in each decade is found on p. 83.

[7] My understanding of Burckhardt's concept of individualism is indebted to William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 9-12. While many recent scholars have begun to re-examine and reassert the role of the family in the development of the Renaissance, Burckhardt's accentuation of the individual, and individual originality, represented the most current thinking on the subject during the late nineteenth century.

[8] Kerrigan and Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance*, 9-10.

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undifferentiated masses of the medieval era, but also above his animal origins in the maternal body.

This anxiety about a masculine-identified spiritual rebirth of the individual versus one's physical birth of woman was given voice in 1861 by the German ethnographer J. J. Bachofen in his influential volume, *Mother Right*. Bachofen stirred up a great deal of controversy by positing that early societies were organized according to matriarchal principles. Nonetheless, he believed that the invention of patriarchy and its reckoning of kinship through paternal relations rather than maternal blood ties represented the entry of humankind into civilization. According to Bachofen,

> the triumph of paternity brings with it the liberation of the spirit from the manifestations of nature, a sublimation of human existence over the laws of material life. . . . Maternity pertains to the physical side of man, the only thing he shares with the animals: the paternal-spiritual principle belongs to him alone. Here he breaks through the bonds of tellurism and lifts his eyes to the higher regions of the cosmos. Triumphant paternity partakes of the heavenly light, while childbearing motherhood is bound up with the earth that bears all things. . . .[9]

Bachofen emphasized that the Roman concept of *patrem ciere*, the ability to name one's father and thereby be designated as a "legitimate" and "authentic" individual, signified "a great and necessary turning point in the lives of peoples."[10] But paternity here, as in Freud's theories, signifies not a blood tie but a fictive relationship because it cannot be confirmed by evidence of the senses; *patrem ciere* is the result of a creative gesture rather than a procreative act. Theorists would spend the next 60 years debating the relative significance of the "mother right" stage of human history, but nearly all—including

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[9] J. J. Bachofen, "Introduction, *Mother Right*" (1861), in *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 109-10. On the gender politics of the nineteenth-century ethnologists, see Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

[10] Bachofen, "Introduction, *Mother Right*," 97-8.

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Freud—agreed that the mother played little role in the development of culture.[11] Bachofen's "heliocentric" argument (one that privileges a realm of spiritual or intellectual opticality and "enlightenment" achieved through a self-fashioned masculine rebirth marking a break from the mortal female/maternal body and the sense of touch) gave new and seemingly scientific support to the long-standing belief that only men were truly capable of being recognized as "legitimate" and "authentic" individuals.[12]

At this same moment, the most current physiological and psychological theories regarding sensation, perception, and expression played a part in promoting the value of the individual artist (who was by definition male).[13] For example, after a general lack of interest in physiognomy for some decades and a discrediting of the notion that an individual's character could be read in the particular forms of his or her body parts, the 1860s saw the publication of a number of influential texts on body expression. These books attempted to integrate the latest findings of science with aesthetics by way of a retooled physiognomy that sought to understand how the mind reveals itself through the body: in facial features, gestures, handwriting, and even facture in the case of artists.[14] A

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[11] The issue of "mother right" led to an enormous amount of debate in a wide range of fields in an era spanning 1861 to 1927 (Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents*, 47-8), a period almost exactly contemporaneous with the years between the start of Cassatt's career and her death. Sprengnether, in *The Spectral Mother*, 88, 110-1, observes that Bachofen was a significant influence on Freud, though this fact was insufficiently acknowledged by Freud himself.

[12] On the question of heliocentrism, which has its roots in ancient philosophy, and its gendered implications, see Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), especially the section entitled "Plato's *Hystera*," as well as Cathryn Vasseleu's useful discussion of Irigaray in *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

[13] My discussion of this topic is deeply indebted to Nicholas Green, "Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic Field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Art History* 10 (March 1987), 59-78.

[14] Among these books were Guillaume-Benjamin-Armand Duchenne's *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine, ou Analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions applicable à la pratique des arts plastiques* (1862), Émile Deschanel's *Physiologie des écrivains et des artistes, ou essai de critique naturelle* (1864), a new and augmented edition of Louis-Marie (Abbé) Lambert's *Le langage de la physionomie et du geste mis à la portée de tous* (1865), Pierre Gratiolet's *De la physionomie et des mouvements d'expression* (1865), J.-B. Delestre's *De la physiognomie* (1866), and in Germany, Theodor Piderit's *Wissenschafliches System der Mimik und Physiognomik* (1867).

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wide range of theorists maintained that various sciences—particularly but not limited to physiology and anatomy—would prove indispensable to visual artists and their critics.

The celebration of individual temperament in art continued to gain favor in the late 1860s. Many critics, now writing in an increasingly biographical mode, positioned the works of the Barbizon painters above all as the sincere and truthful emanations of individual personalities, in opposition to academic pictures, which were seen as conventional, clichéd, and impersonal. The application of scientific ideas to the promotion and criticism of Barbizon painting, undertaken by writers who were seeking to raise the status of the art historian to a new level of professionalism and working closely with the newly important dealers and auction houses, dovetailed effectively with Third Republic moral values, educational strategies, and emphasis on bourgeois individualism.[15]

Individuality was increasingly believed to reside within the artist's brushwork, an idea supported by the application of physiological findings first to graphology and then to art criticism and history. Jean-Hippolyte Michon, the most influential of the graphologists, took credit for transforming his field from a conjectural pastime into "a state of reasoned science, having its principles, laws, classification" in 1871.[16] He believed his method to be

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For a detailed consideration of the discourses of body expression, see Tory Hoff, "Theories of Body Expression in their Historical Relationship to Psychological Concepts" (Ph.D. diss., York University, 1990), especially chapter seven, "Theories of Expressive Movement after 1860."

[15] Green, "Dealing in Temperaments," 71. Cassatt, of course, spent some of her first years in France studying with artists loosely affiliated with the Barbizon school, and eventually would be represented by Galeries Durand-Ruel, the commercial firm at the center of many of these changes. As Robert Jensen has shown, Paul Durand-Ruel was the first to reinvent himself as an "ideological dealer," who marketed an artist not by emphasizing contemporary reputation (as did the "entrepreneurial dealer"), but rather by predicting that this artist would eventually take an important place in history. The ideological dealer could thus claim a status above that of mere merchant; he was now the defender of a type of art valuable above all for its "authenticity." Durand-Ruel first pursued this strategy while achieving near monopolies on the works of Barbizon artists Jean-François Millet and Théodore Rousseau. For more on this subject, see Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49-54. Jensen's concept of the "ideological dealer" is suggested in part as a means of approaching questions he believes were left unanswered by the Whites in *Canvases and Careers* regarding the collapse of the Salon system in favor of the "dealer-critic" system.

[16] Jean-Hippolyte Michon, *Système de Graphologie, L'art de connaitre les hommes d'après leur écriture* (Paris: Jules Lecuir et Cie, 1875), 13: "état de science raisonnée, ayant ses principes, ses lois, sa classification."

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so infallible that "[o]ne can write to me in a language unknown to me, and the intellectual and moral portrait, detailed in nuances, that I make of the intimate nature of the person who wrote the letter is of such rigorous exactitude that it is a true photograph of the heart, having, in terms of the character of the judged person, the same accuracy as the physical photography which returns the features of the face as would a mirror."[17] Morelli, in turn, analogized the signs of an artist's individual style with calligraphic flourishes and the connoisseur with the physiognomist and graphologist in his 1880 *Italian Painters*:

> As most men, both speakers and writers, make use of habitual modes of expression, favourite words and sayings, which they often employ involuntarily and sometimes even most inappropriately, so almost every painter has his own peculiarities, which escape him without his being aware of it. It does even happen that an artist reproduces certain of his own physical defects in his work. Anyone, therefore, intending to study a painter more closely and to become better acquainted with him, must take into consideration even these material trifles (a student of calligraphy would call them flourishes), and know how to discover them. . . .[18]

But as Morelli's passage suggests, in spite of these efforts to make various aspects of the arts and art criticism/connoisseurship into scientific, "perfectly rational" endeavors achieved by means of an objective "eye," the process by which the personality of an artist manifested itself through facture and form was believed to be unconscious and even somewhat suspect, frequently conceived as a betrayal rather than a more benign revelation of character. One writer went so far as to define Morelli's method as being based upon the

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[17] Ibid.: "On peut m'écrire dans une langue qui m'est inconnue; et le portrait intellectuel et moral détaillé jusque dans les nuances, que je fais de la nature intime de la personne qui a écrite la lettre, est d'une exactitude si rigoureuse, qu'elle est un véritable photographie de l'âme, ayant, pour le caractère de la personne jugée, la même justesse que la photographie physique qui rend les traits du visage comme pourrait le faire un miroir."

[18] Morelli, *Italian Painters*, 75. Jaynie Anderson has convincingly demonstrated that Morelli's concentration on "insignificant details" or "material trifles" when making attributions parallels the importance given by Darwin to "trifling characters" when making evolutionary classifications. See Jaynie Anderson, "Giovanni Morelli et sa définition de la 'scienza dell'arte,'" *Revue de l'art* (1987), 52.

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idea that "in the identification of the painting, as in that of the criminal, it is the trivial detail that betrays."[19] Moreover, the relationship of the objective eye/mind and the subjective hand/body was repeatedly associated with a "*je ne sais quoi*," an "indescribable" or "undefinable" quality that escapes conscious knowledge because it is uncanny. How this quality could be encouraged or transmitted through the artist's training or education when it presumably must arise automatically and unconsciously, how it could be kept from association with feminized intuition and instinct, and how it could be accounted for in the language of critical literature were among the related questions touched upon in much art writing of the late nineteenth century.

An article titled "Bearings of Modern Science on Art," published in *The Westminster Review* in 1871, suggests another reason for the growing emphasis placed upon individuality in art, particularly as manifested in works produced by "hand": the growing popularity of mechanically-reproduced art works. The *Westminster* critic, claiming, "The eye has hopelessly outstripped the hand: it is becoming microscopic, while the fingers suffer an incurable rusticity," favored an optical and "Mechanical Art" intended for reproduction and infinite dissemination:

> Not fully to enjoy the witnessing of loveliness or grace unless it is accompanied by little subsidiary inflations of personal feeling, arising out of the fact of rarity, or difficulty of access, or exclusiveness of beholding, is adulterating the proper passion [for art]. It is a mistake to think that this is cultivating the pure artistic sentiment; rather, it is making the pretext of doing so an opportunity for indulging petty egoisms. Mechanical Art will free us from this narrowing, debasing dead-weight of ownership in the sense of monopoly. Owing to the way in which it lends itself to universal reduplication, the only means of stimulating the enjoyment of a beautiful effect beyond the limits of its own proper luxury, will be to fall back upon the new picturesqueness

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[19] "Reconstructive Criticism." *Atlantic Monthly* 75 (April 1895), 557.

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> of its wide spread—to dally with the thought that a million of one's fellow-beings are simultaneously witnessing it. Art will, at last, become perfectly social by being made utterly public; while it will be obliged to derive a more dignified novelty from the multiplication of species of beauty, instead of seeking freshness in mere variations of departure from type in individual examples, as so often happened of old.[20]

As a result of this process, the author concluded, "Beauty will be the witness and the joyous celebrant of all Science, when the latter is fully mechanicalized, and Art, in this way, is made perfectly rational."[21] These opinions were held by a minority, of course, but they raise a number of interesting points regarding the aesthetic and exchange value of the original art work as the emanation of an individual artist, in addition to questions about the relation of art to science, which would continue to be at issue throughout the rest of the century.

Among the various writers to promote the value of facture as an expressive gesture, few devoted more attention to the subject than the critic Eugène Véron in his 1878 book, *L'Esthétique*,[22] described by a reviewer as "a plea for sincerity in art, by the spontaneous manifestation of the personality of the artist as opposed to the artificial stimulus given by academical discipline."[23] Véron drew upon ideas articulated by predecessors in the "realist-nationalist" branch of art history, and quoted approvingly from Thoré-Burger's 1863 *Salon*:

> In works which interest us the authors in a way substitute themselves for nature. However common or vulgar the latter may be, they have some rare and peculiar way of looking at it. It is Chardin himself whom we admire in his representation of a

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[20] "Bearings of Modern Science on Art," reprinted from *Westminster Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 111 (18 November 1871), 439, 440-1.

[21] Ibid., 441.

[22] Eugène Véron, *L'Esthétique* (Paris: C. Reinwald, 1878); in English as *Aesthetics*, trans W. H. Armstrong (London: Chapman & Hall, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1879). All quotations from this volume are taken from this English translation.

[23] Henry van Brunt, "The Latest Literature of Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 46 (August 1879), 161.

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> glass of water. We admire the genius of Rembrandt in the profound and individual character which he imparted to every head that posed before him. Thus did they seem to him, and this explains everything simple or fantastic in his expression and execution.[24]

To Thoré-Burger, brushwork manages to simultaneously capture both the individuality of Rembrandt's sitter and the individuality of Rembrandt himself.[25]

Véron also quoted extensively from *Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, the 1876 book in which Eugène Fromentin considered the masters of the Dutch and Flemish schools and their relevance for contemporary French art, as Thoré-Burger had looked to Hals in the previous decade (and as Cassatt had sought out painters of the Low Countries in her personal studies). Fromentin, who was for the most part opposed to the growing anti-academic movement in French art, expressed a fear that true "handicraft and method" had become a lost art. He explained, "individualism in method is nothing more, really, than the effort of each [artist] to imagine what he has not learned," and cited the "perfect unity of the schools in which the same family likeness is found in very different and lofty personalities" as proof that a better system of transmitting method had once existed.[26]

Fromentin offered his view of the current situation regarding execution:

> If we pay careful attention to certain contemporary pictures, whose merit, at least as an attempt, is often more real than we think, we shall perceive the hand is no longer counted for nothing among the agents the mind makes use of. According to recent methods, to carry out a piece of work is to fill up a shape or form with a certain tone or intensity of colour whatever may be the tool which directs this action. The

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[24] Quoted in Véron, *Aesthetics*, 108.

[25] The reputation of Rembrandt, like that of Hals, was being revived at this time, and he was the subject of a book titled *Rembrandt et l'individualisme dans l'art*, by Ath. Coquerel fils, published in Paris in 1875. For more on the Rembrandt literature of this period from a contemporary point of view, see "The Works of Rembrandt," *Edinburgh Review* 150 (July 1879), 151-93.

[26] Eugène Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time, Dutch and Flemish Painting from Van Eyck to Rembrandt* (1876), trans. Andrew Boyle (London: Phaidon Press, 1948), 130, 132. The essays that make up this volume were originally published as articles in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1876.

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> mechanism of the operation seems of no import provided that the operation is successful, and it is wrongly supposed that the mind or thought can be served just as well by one instrument as by another.[27]

He then recommended a consideration of Northern painters, and above all Rubens, in order to counter this notion:

> It is this very absurdity that all the skilful painters—that is to say, all the painters of feeling—in this country of Flanders and Holland have answered in advance by their technique, the most expressive and most feeling of all. And it is against this same error that Rubens raises a protest with an authority which ought to have extra weight. Take away from Rubens's pictures . . . the genius, variety, peculiarity of each touch, and you will take from it a word of significance, a necessary accent, and a trait of expression—indeed, perhaps you will take from it the only element which infuses spirit into so much matter and transfigures a host of ugly images; for you will thus suppress all feeling, and referring things back to their primary cause, you will destroy its life, you will make it a soul-less picture.[28]

Northern positivism is thus transformed into art by means of a "feeling technique," an expressively tactile quality which moderates the excessive opticality of realism.

Véron would go much farther than Fromentin in his concern for questions of handling, first naming those who had denied it a place in their aesthetics: "neither Plato, nor Kant, nor Schelling, nor Hegel, nor Jouffroy, nor Cousin ever thought of entering upon such an inquiry. Pure philosophy despises such realities, as pure beauty spurns any alloy of human passion!"[29] He then justified his attention to the subject with a turn to physiognomy, observing, "We can even, to a certain extent, judge the character and intelligence of a man by the way in which he carries his head, folds his arms in walking, or

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[27] Ibid., 39.
[28] Ibid., 39-40.
[29] Véron, *Aesthetics*, 263.

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places his feet—and yet the hand of the painter is to be denied the power of manifesting the sentiments and emotions of his individual soul!"[30] To Véron, touch was valuable for its connection to body and spirit, a view he put forward in opposition to the heliocentrism of the metaphysicians and philosophers of the "disinterested" who spurned tactility.

For his definition of style, which was located ultimately in the correspondence between the artist's personality and facture, Véron again borrowed from Fromentin. The artist, according to Fromentin, possesses a "*je ne sais quoi*" which allows him or her, "naturally and without conscious effort," to subordinate him-/herself to the model, "inquiring only how it may demand to be represented."[31] These words, to Véron, express "the whole theory of style": "The indescribable quality, the 'je ne sais quoi' of which Fromentin speaks, is precisely the assemblage of qualities, the condition of being and temperament which caused Rubens to see things differently [than] Rembrandt."[32] Like Fromentin, Véron praised Rubens, but he found in Hals an even more compelling match between personality and handling that to his mind equaled style: "His touch in itself betrays so clearly the character and temperament of the man, that we can easily imagine him as he sat at work; at work so interesting, fascinating and individual, that we leave it with the greatest regret."[33]

To Véron, the academic system was to blame for the lack of individuality and originality in contemporary art: "We see why young men who enter the school with the strongest instincts of independence and sincerity, rarely leave it otherwise than *cabanellised*—slaves to routine, emasculated, and lost to art."[34] The licked surfaces of Cabanel and his ilk were thus not only derivative, mechanical, and insincere, but also

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[30] Ibid., 275.
[31] Fromentin, quoted in Véron, *Aesthetics*, 139.
[32] Véron, *Aesthetics*, 139.
[33] Ibid., 278.
[34] Ibid., xviii.

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lacking in masculinity. As a corrective, Véron offered Hals, and his obstinate, rough facture:

> Not only does he always put himself forward, never allowing himself to be forgotten for a moment, but we must also acknowledge that he does so with an amount of insistance [*sic*] and freedom which is a little brutal, and not without an appearance of excess which must scandalize over-fastidious purists. Such a fault, however, does not shock us in the least; it only springs from a little exaggeration, and we prefer it greatly to that affectation of impersonal perfection which modesty extols—for others—but which possesses no comprehensible utility. When the workman is allowed to sign his name at the foot of his finished work, it is absurd to forbid him to imprint his handwriting upon its body.[35]

Surface here is in no danger of being effete or dissimulating, for it emerges "without conscious effort" directly from the personality of the self-possessed, unfussy artist; the "handwriting" of his facture thereby makes his signature redundant.

The uneasy relation between the science-minded realist approach to art developing in the 1860s and 1870s and the concurrent fascination with a personal response to nature embodied in the individual artist's facture emerged in writings on the Impressionists from the moment of their first exhibition. The Impressionist works on view in 1874 were understood to be the products of a positivistic, objective vision; yet, they were also seen as subjective, resulting from each individual artist's physiology, from the way in which the exterior world impressed itself on that artist's sense organs and the manner in which the artist translated that impression into an image through his or her hand. When critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary proposed that these painters should be characterized by "the new term *impressionists*" because "they render not the landscape, but the sensation produced by the

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[35] Ibid., 278-9. Fromentin, in contrast, scoffed of Hals, "His method serves as a programme for certain doctrines, in virtue of which the most commonplace exactitude is wrongly taken for truth, and the most perfect practical carelessness is taken for the last word in knowledge and taste" (*Masters of Past Time*, 167).

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landscape . . . they leave reality and enter into full idealism,"[36] he meant by idealism not a world of universal concepts or essences but rather one of "*individual* ideals, sensations, and imagination, a world he associated with the aims of earlier romantic artists."[37]

But while Castagnary was generally supportive of the Impressionists, he felt that their "*nouveauté*" comprised not a revolution, nor even a school, for the latter derives "from ideas and not its material methods, it distinguishes itself by its doctrines and not by its processes of execution."[38] What then was this *nouveauté* of the *impressionnistes*? "A manner and nothing more. . . . And of manners in art, what is their fate? It is to remain the property of the man who invents them," he declared.[39] As this remark implies, "manner" retained a pejorative connotation in this era; according to the 1866 *Grand Dictionnaire*, "manière" had both a good and bad sense, understood as the difference between possessing a "characteristic way of doing things, a habitual facture" and *over*doing things or copying the habitual facture of another.[40] Most often, however, having a "manner" simply signified being "mannered." Morelli further distinguished between "mannerism" and "individuality" in form and execution by proposing that a unique, personal style must emanate from an unconscious ("inward") source rather than a habitual practice:

> This outward form in the representation of the human figure is by no means accidental, as many contend, but is determined by inward conditions; whereas the mannerisms of some artists are simply the result of chance or habit. The typical, or

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[36] [Jules-Antoine] Castagnary, "Exposition du boulevard des Capucines: Les Impressionnistes," *Le Siècle* (29 April 1874), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996), 17: "le terme nouveau d'*impressionnistes*. . . . ils rendent non le paysage, mais la sensation produite par le paysage. . . . ils sortent de la réalité et entrent en plein idéalisme."

[37] Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4.

[38] Castagnary, "Exposition . . . Les Impressionnistes," 17: "d'idées et non de moyens matériels, se distingue par ses doctrines et non par ses procédés d'exécution."

[39] Ibid.: "Une manière et rien de plus. . . . Et les manières en art, quel est leur sort? C'est de demeurer le propre de l'homme qui les invente. . . ."

[40] "Manière," *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* vol. 10 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1866), 1077: "un faire caractéristique, une facture habituelle." The entry also quoted Denis Diderot's comment that "*Manner* is in the arts what corruption is in the morals of a people." ("La *manière* est dans les arts ce qu'est la corruption des moeurs chez un peuple.")

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> fundamental, form (*Grundform*) of hand and ear is characteristic in the works of all independent masters, and affords valuable evidence for identifying them, while mannerisms may, at most, serve to distinguish those of painters wanting in individuality.[41]

It is thus not surprising that Castagnary ended his discussion of the 1874 exhibition with praise for Berthe Morisot, proclaiming that she "has wit to the tips of her fingers, above all to the tips of her fingers. What fine artistic feeling! One wouldn't know how to find images handled more with grace, deliberation, and delicacy than the *Berceau* and *Cache-cache* [Fig. 28], and I would add that here the execution is in perfect agreement with the idea to be expressed."[42] The feminized manner in this case is therefore both the "property" of the woman who invented it, and "proper" to her maternal subject matter.

How the artist could acquire an execution that was individual without being mannered remained a topic of debate, in the end usually being explained by recourse to genius, instinct, or "*je ne sais quoi.*" The American art critic Mariana van Rensselaer addressed this question in an 1878 article, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Art." To Van Rensselaer, artists had become too self-conscious of past styles in art's history and of the need to find a place in that history, a situation that had come to threaten the "spontaneous development of art-instinct in the people, a spontaneous desire for more beauty in their surroundings, a spontaneous knowledge of how it is best to be obtained."[43] Among her concerns was the great preference among English critics and the public in France and England for "*l'anecdote*," for this "denotes the theory that a picture is not first to please

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[41] Morelli, "Preface," *Italian Painters*, 45.

[42] Castagnary, "Exposition . . . Les Impressionnistes," 17: "a de l'esprit jusqu'au bout des ongles, surtout au bout des ongles. Quel fin sentiment artistique! On ne saurait trouver pages plus gracieuses, plus délibérément et plus délicatement touchées, que le *Berceau* [*The Cradle* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)] et *Cache-cache*, et j'ajouterai qu'ici l'exécution est en rapport parfait avec l'idée à exprimer." For further discussion of this issue, see Tamar Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism," *Perspectives on Morisot*, ed. T. J. Edelstein (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1990), 57-66.

[43] M[ariana] G. Van Rensselaer, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Society* 22 (December 1878), 714.

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the sense, but to catch the fancy or the intellect or to touch the heart."[44] The art of Whistler was a "desperate reaction" to the anecdote, going too far in its appeal to the senses alone, and works by the "French 'impressionist' clique," though similar in spirit to Whistler's, were "less outré in practice" but also more dangerous because they might lead aesthetically uneducated viewers to think they too were capable of such "untechnical technique."[45] Van Rensselaer argued that interest in the anecdote, no matter how compelling it may seem at the moment of the work's creation, will eventually fade, while technical excellence will retain its worth indefinitely. To this end, she sought to instruct her audience on execution, crediting its spontaneity to an unconscious interdependence between hand and eye.

The artist, van Rensselaer wrote, possesses a double "physical endowment," the "power of eye and power of hand." The "dexterous hand, winged with lightness and steady as steel, sensitive as a blind man's finger-tips, yet unerring in its stroke as the piston of a steamship," she stated, is somewhat mechanical and can be "improved and developed by practice and patience."[46] The "power of eye," however, is instinctual and mysterious, consisting of

> simple vision exalted into a special gift, a special appreciation of line, an ultra delicate and profound perception of color, and an exact, unconscious memory. This last is not imagination nor imaginative memory, but an automatic power, if I may so say, of the retina—as unconscious as is the pianist's memory of his notes, and as unerring. It is not the power to fix in the mind by conscious effort the objects before one, and to recall them deliberately, inch by inch, and any time, but the power, when the brush pauses trembling for the signal, to put down unerringly facts learned God knows where, or imagined God knows how. Automatic, I repeat, this power must be.

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[44] Ibid., 710.
[45] Ibid., 713-4.
[46] Ibid., 710.

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> The tongue might not be able to tell, nor the mind deliberately to recall in cold blood, what was the depth of blue on a distant hill or the vagueness of its outlines, or what the anatomical structure of a mistress's fingers. But the brush knows, as nothing but the brush of an artist can. . . .[47]

Van Renssalaer's description of the interdependence between hand and mind brings together a masculine-identified but odd combination of mechanical functioning, visual powers, and blind (tactile) desire: a hand "unerring in its stroke as the piston of a steamship" yet "sensitive as a blind man's finger-tips," capable of tracing out "the anatomical structure of a mistress's fingers" through "simple vision exalted into a special gift." Contrary to her belief in the power of aesthetic education, her language resonates not with the scientific eye and hand but rather with an uncanny "physical endowment," able to reproduce "facts learned God knows where, or imagined God knows how" with a brush that "knows, as nothing but the brush of an artist can. . . ."

The growing importance of the individual artist was also supported by a vast growth in the amount of art criticism and art history being practiced in museums, universities, galleries, auction houses, and in more popular forums such as art journals, which encouraged an "individualization" of art appreciation. The increase in the amount of literature on art was inextricable from technological innovations enabling the affordable dissemination of reproduced imagery, and a situation had emerged by which art had come to play a role in the everyday life of an audience far greater in size than the traditional elite. As S. R. Koehler explained in the *American Art Review* in 1881:

> The art journal is a modern invention, born of modern necessities. Two causes seem to have been mainly instrumental in calling it into being:—the awakening of the historical spirit, and the transplanting of art from public to private life. The latter cause especially accounts for the existence of the modern artistic periodical of

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[47] Ibid., 709-10.

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> popular tendencies. The individualization of life and the individualization of art, the—in a certain sense—retrogressive movement of society which threatens to break it up again into the units out of which it was organized, made it desirable that each man or woman should be enabled to satisfy his or her longings for art in the privacy of home, and the demand is best answered by the periodical which popularizes what would be otherwise unattainable to all but an insignificantly small portion of the public.[48]

It was within this milieu, then, that Cassatt sought to establish her signature style, to distinguish herself from the past masters whose work she had copied by establishing her own "'originality'—individuality" without falling into the trap of *manière*. She sought to do this at a moment when the "individualization of life" and the "individualization of art" had intersected, when art had been "transplanted" from public to private life. Yet this was also a period of increasing tension regarding women's roles in the public and private spheres, which put additional pressure on Cassatt's struggle to establish her artistic individuality. How, as a woman, was she to find an individually expressive style that required a unfeminine sense of public self-possession, and how was she to do so in the service of a newly "private" conception of art? First, by creating two paintings which demonstrated that intellect and the gaze could be appropriated by women and women artists (*Reading "Le Figaro"* and *A Woman in Black at the Opera*), and then, by making individuation a subject of her work (*The Blue Room*). It is to this first of these strategies that we now turn.

II.

While Cassatt was able to decide in 1877 to shun the official channels for artistic advancement in favor of exhibiting with a group of radical innovators who had for some time opposed the teachings of the Academy and the Salon juries, she acceded to social

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[48] S. R. Koehler, "The Art Journals of Europe," *American Art Review* 2 (1881), 256.

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expectations in one respect, by settling in Paris not alone but in the company of her family. (Her sister Lydia, who had spent summers with the artist during the previous two years, might have sufficed as a chaperone, but by 1877 her health had begun to fail.) Mrs. John Sherwood, an American etiquette expert, commented on the situation of unmarried women at the time:

> In our own country we have almost abolished the idea that a companion is necessary for women of talent who are physicians or artists or musicians; but to those who are still in the trammels of private life we can say that the presence of a companion need not destroy their liberty, and it may add very much to their respectability and happiness. There is, no doubt, a great pleasure in the added freedom of life which comes to an elderly girl.[49]

However, Sherwood reported that the rules of propriety were still quite strict in Europe, and despite her belief that "there is in art itself an ennobling and purifying influence which should be a protection," she recommended that women under the age of 35 visit (male) artists only in the presence of a companion.[50] Cassatt (who turned 34 in 1877), though both an American and a "woman of talent," appears to have believed that the presence of her family was required in order to facilitate her acceptance as a member of French society, even as she rejected the strictures of the Academic system.

By October of 1877, Robert, Katherine, and Lydia Cassatt had moved into a Paris apartment with Mary. Once settled, the artist began to work again, on a picture that announces the full-fledged achievement of her modernist style: *Reading "Le Figaro"* [Fig. 27]. By the time the painting was completed, Cassatt had established a home in Paris, internalized her allegiance to the Impressionists, and finally emerged from a long, self-guided apprenticeship to art's greatest masters with a style she could call her own. That she realized she had survived a difficult transition to accomplish something consequential

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[49] Mrs. John Sherwood, *Manners and Social Usages* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884), 228.
[50] Ibid., 224.

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is legible in the signature she placed on the work. Unlike the two pictures most likely to have immediately preceded it, *Miss Mary Ellison Embroidering* and *The Reader* [Fig. 26], which display variations on the complex inscription types she had used for more than a decade, *Reading "Le Figaro"* is autographed with a simple, confident, and definitive "Mary Cassatt," the signature that nearly all her paintings will carry from this point forward. And though she had dropped the "Stevenson" or initial "S" associated with her maternal forebears, her first major statement in a fully modernist style represents, not insignificantly, her mother.

Linda Nochlin, in an important discussion of *Reading "Le Figaro,"* posits that Cassatt's depiction of her mother is "a portrait-homage not to the maternal body, but to the maternal *mind*."[51] In works like this, according to Nochlin, Cassatt demonstrates that for some women the "spaces of femininity" (the private sphere of women's family and social interactions), though generally believed to exist outside the realm of masculine reason and power, might "actually serve as sites of intellectual and creative production, and eventually, even of political militancy."[52] Nochlin's contention—that Cassatt succeeds in representing mothers both as nurturers and as the bearers of intellect and culture—can be productively expanded, to see how *Reading "Le Figaro"* specifically argues against the Bachovian/Freudian view of maternity as limited to the physical realm, and to understand the painting's significance to Cassatt as she sought her signature motifs and style.

Reading "Le Figaro," though sharing a theme and certain formal elements with *The Reader*, represents a dramatic step forward for the artist. Unlike the earlier picture, which retains a degree of rococo fantasy with its pastel tints, gold-toned upholstery, and anonymous, pretty model, *Reading "Le Figaro"* is a masterfully modern statement of

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[51] Linda Nochlin, "Mary Cassatt's Modernity," in *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 192.

[52] Ibid., 194. When discussing the "spaces of femininity," Nochlin is working from Griselda Pollock's ground-breaking essay, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 50-90.

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personality. Though based upon genre traditions such as that of the *tableau de mode*, there is also here an element of the portrait, or at least, an effort to endow the figure with a strong psychological presence, even if the work was not intended to serve as a portrait per se. The composition exhibits a new sophistication for Cassatt and introduces two types of furnishings employed as devices that will frequently recur in her later work: a mirror that complicates spatial and psychological relationships, and an armchair that encloses the figure in overstuffed arms, forcefully corporealizing the space of the picture to the point that it evokes a maternal embrace. The palette still owes much to Whistler's experiments in white, but Cassatt utilized the single-hued tonality to far different effect. The generous use of gray, echoing the paper's overall graphic appearance, imbues the painting with a gravity in keeping with the sitter's seriousness as she employs two hands to grasp the paper.

The author of an 1882 article on "Parisian Newspapers" asked of Katherine Cassatt's reading matter, "Who does not know the *Figaro*? Nine out of ten travellers consider French genius of the nineteenth century to be represented by *Le Figaro*: not by Chateaubriand, not by Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Michelet, Auguste Comte, Renan, Claude Bernard, Pasteur—but by *Le Figaro*."[53] Mrs. Cassatt, an extremely intelligent woman who had been raised to be fluent in French, is thus depicted at ease within Gallic intellectual culture. That she reads a newspaper instead of a novel, whether by one of the male luminaries listed above or the more licentious authors whose amorous tales were thought to be corrupting women's minds in the late nineteenth century, or lighter ladies' fare, is telling. Not that *Le Figaro* was completely staid; rather, "it is for its society gossip that we take it up, for its indiscreet way of taking peeps at private life, for its theatrical news, its green-room gossip, its bits of scandal, and especially when we believe them false."[54] Yet this was not gossip of the feminine sort; the reading of *Le Figaro* was more

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[53] Joseph Reinach, "Parisian Newspapers," *Nineteenth Century* 12 (September 1882), 355.
[54] Ibid.

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of a masculine ritual: "You like it as you like the good barber of Seville, who tells you the news whilst cutting your hair or shaving you. There are very often days when *Le Figaro* is worthy of its name."[55]

By representing her mother wearing a pince-nez, Cassatt further distanced her picture from the feminized, romance-novel ambiance of many other images depicting women readers. An 1880 article in *The Saturday Review* opined, "as a rule, we do not consider glasses becoming to ladies. They are apt to give a semi-masculine, semi-scholastic, semi-clerical appearance to female wearers, which is not particularly prepossessing."[56] Depicting her mother with head held almost upright (not tipped farther down, as in many Rococo depictions of women readers), pince-nez anchored securely on her nose (not held up to her eyes somewhat more delicately, as Cassatt herself is posed in a 1903 photo),[57] and the newspaper brought close to her face (not resting on a pillow, as the book is placed in *Mrs. Duffee Seated on a Striped Sofa* [Fig. 24]), Cassatt maximized an impression of serious absorption that is not common to images of women reading. The black ovals of the pince-nez and the newspaper's masthead serve as the darkest notes within the picture, and a rhyme made between the lens frames and the "*o*" of *Figaro* visually links an instrument of the gaze to an instrument of the word. In addition, the hands holding the newspaper also have no-nonsense appearance. The blocky fingers, built with unblended touches of red, gold, and white pigment, could not be less elegant than the outstretched, impossibly tapered digits (à la Correggio or Parmigianino) that the artist painted in *The Reader*. The inclusion of a third hand in the mirror reflection, along with the focus of the gaze through the pince-nez, accentuates Katherine Cassatt's "grasp" of French culture.

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[55] Ibid.

[56] "Spectacles," reprinted from *Saturday Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 31 (18 September 1880), 761.

[57] Illustrated in Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 274.

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The sitter wrote to her son Alexander that the picture "makes me look so much younger than I am that I am sure that it will mislead them & Katharine [his daughter] will say as she did of the one painted at Antwerp—'Grandma you are all rough & that picture is all smooth,'"[58] but in fact the paint surface of *Reading "Le Figaro"* is "all rough." The treatment of the white gown and the lace at the end of the left sleeve in particular recall the bold brushwork of Hals and other Northern painters copied by Cassatt during her Salon years and lauded by Fromentin and Véron for manifesting an individual personality through facture. The shorthand recording of the flowers and leaves of the upholstery fabric in the form of rapid strokes that remain on the surface of the picture plane rather than curving around the form of the chair will become a signature device in Cassatt's Impressionist pictures. The abstraction of this area, the lower right quadrant of the picture, is matched by the mirror reflection at upper left, which is treated in such a peremptory manner as to be nearly incomprehensible, save for the presence of the hand holding the newspaper.

When Cassatt sent *Reading "Le Figaro"* to be shown in New York at the exhibition of the Society of American Artists in March of 1879, critics focused on her facture, as they had when discussing her Salon-era works. F. B. Fuller-Walker, *The Aldine*'s critic, already identified the artist as an Impressionist, though she would not take part in her first official exhibition with the *Indépendants* until the next month. Fuller-Walker recapitulated the English artist and critic Philip Gilbert Hamerton's broad definition of the Impressionists:

> Hamerton designates them as a class of artists who endeavor to render, not objects in themselves, but the impression which the objects produce on the retina and on the mind. He believes it is not an injustice to describe these artists as rejecting all the

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[58] Katherine Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, October 18, 1878, quoted in Suzanne Lindsay, *Mary Cassatt and Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1985), addendum (n.p.) n. 6. The portrait painted at Antwerp is *Miss Cassatt's Mother in a Lacy Blouse* (private collection), BrCR 27.

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> aids of anxious mental effort in the analysis of nature, and also as eliminating manual labor so far as it possibly can be eliminated from such an art of painting. The result is a kind of oil sketching, appearing strangely confused at first, but which, after it has been examined for some time, begins to resemble broken and distorted images of something really seen by the artist in the natural world.[59]

To Fuller-Walker, *Reading "Le Figaro"* was a consummate example of this manner, for, he explained (not without a touch of sarcasm), "the labor of the artist was concentrated upon the head and face of the woman, the chair in which she sat, and the left hand, nearest the spectator. The rest of this picture was regarded as non-essential, and therefore was treated without the aid 'of anxious mental effort.'"[60]

The Nation's reviewer also described the picture as manifesting an aesthetic of subtraction rather than addition, but to more positive effect:

> Miss Mary Cassatt's portrait of "Mrs. Cassatt" . . . is an admirable work of indicative painting: it is constructed as if on a wager to tell the greatest number of truths with the smallest number of strokes; and yet—a characteristic in which this showpiece of good French technic differs from the superficial Munich technic all around—there is a recognition of the essentials of anatomy, and the stroke that defines a cartilage, or a knuckle, or a muscle has its own summary way of specifying what is the organic structure it means to express.[61]

This account of Cassatt's execution—largely inspired, it seems, by the manner in which she painted the hands in *Reading "Le Figaro"*—brings to mind the ideas of Morelli, who studied comparative anatomy before focusing his attention upon connoisseurship. Like Fuller-Walker, the *Nation*'s critic understood Cassatt's method as eliminating all but the most essential elements in a picture. But whereas for Fuller-Walker this resulted in a

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[59] F. B. Fuller-Walker, "Society of American Artists," *The Aldine – The Art Journal of America* 9 (1879), 278.

[60] Ibid.

[61] "Fine Arts. Exhibition by the Society of American Artists.–II," *Nation* 28 (3 April 1879), 238.

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"broken and distorted" image that failed to add up to anything much—a head, a chair, a hand—the *Nation's* critic saw her execution not as cutting up the image but as cutting through, bringing out structure through the process of taking away, using a brush like an anatomist's knife. If the hands Cassatt painted in *The Reader* still looked back to old master precedent (and not insignificantly, to that of the "Mannerists"), in *Reading "Le Figaro"* she achieved a type of hand that is, in Morelli's terms, "peculiar to [herself]." From this point her hands will be characterized by critics not as pretty and pink like those of Correggio but as overly large, brutally drawn, and often oddly masculine. Furthermore, Cassatt achieved this *Grundform* not in the depiction of just any model's hands, but through the representation of the very hands that once performed upon her the mothering gestures that would eventually become one of the major motifs of her art. The importance of these hands can be read in the mirror reflection, and as much in what it does not depict as in what it does.

The mirror has long served in art as a device to provide the viewer with an illusion of possession and plenitude, doubling a subject (usually a female figure) to present more than one view for visual inspection.[62] By promoting the fiction of the exact visual replication of reality, the mirror would seem to belong to the realm of opticality rather than tactility. At this moment, however, artists of Cassatt's circle had begun to invert this trope, exploiting the mirror instead as a site of painterly artifice associated with the cosmetic surfaces of femininity and the touch that simultaneously reveals and obscures its subject. Morisot, for instance, employed the mirror to reflect feminine accouterments but not the figure in *Woman at Her Toilette* [Fig. 29], using brushwork to dissolve even as it creates. Manet, too, even more self-consciously elided the usual reflective function of the

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[62] On this issue, see Leo Steinberg, "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 180-1, and also Carol Armstrong's essay, "Facturing Femininty: Manet's *Before the Mirror*," *October* 74 (Fall 1995), 75-104, which has been very important to my thinking in this dissertation in general, especially with regard to such questions of the tensions between facture, form, content, and gender. The account of mirrors in the works of Morisot and Manet to follow derives from this article.

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mirror in order to analogize the production of facture with the self-fashioning of women while also undermining the expectation that facture will work toward rather than against painterly illusion in *Before the Mirror* [Fig. 30].

Reading "Le Figaro" can also be understood as engaging questions of the "self-fashioning" of women, not so much with regard to the adult artifice of cosmetics and couture, but rather at an earlier stage, when the female child "mirrors" her mother in the process of shaping her own self-image.[63] The French in particular were recognized as promoting a system in which the daughter would be raised in such close contact with her mother at all times that she would eventually become her "exact reproduction." A *Blackwood's Magazine* article explicated:

> the direct action of the mother becomes all the stronger from the almost universal custom of keeping her children with her day and night. Many a girl in France has never slept outside her mother's chamber until she leaves it to be married, and, at the worst, she is no farther off than the next room, with an open door between. Such unceasing neighbourhood brings about an action which may be not only intellectual and moral, but possibly physical and magnetic too. The mother passes into the daughter, the daughter absorbs the mother, their essences get mixed; and hence it is that Frenchwomen exercise such singular power over their girls, and that the girls so generally become an exact reproduction of the mother under whose constant eye they have grown to womanhood.[64]

While Cassatt's upbringing cannot be described as strictly French, it was conducted in accordance with Gallic tradition. Katherine Cassatt, who lost her own mother at a young age and was educated by an American woman who had been raised in France, sought out

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[63] Nancy Mowll Mathews addresses issues of the mirror in art, female beauty, and Cassatt's self-image in the interesting article, "Beauty, Truth, and the Artist's Mirror: A Drypoint by Mary Cassatt," *Source* 4 (Winter/Spring 1985), 75-9.

[64] "French Children," reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 112 (3 February 1872), 261.

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a European-style education for her own children, and the family spent a number of years living in France and Germany (1851–55).

Blackwood's Magazine also observed, "the radical demarcation which exists between [French] men and women asserts itself from the cradle . . . the special masculine and feminine peculiarities of their national temper are distinctly visible in their children. Excepting the United States, no country exhibits a divergence of ideas and objects between the sexes such as we recognize in France."[65] But the Cassatt family, and Katherine in particular, clearly did not adhere to the strictest conception of gendered behavior or Mary likely could not have imagined—nor would have been allowed to pursue—a career as an artist. Katherine Cassatt represented to her daughter not so much a nurturing figure after whom she must pattern herself as an "exact reproduction" by becoming a mother herself, but rather the woman who mothered her while also bringing culture to her, the culture through which she could shape herself according to her own desires. The mirror in *Reading "Le Figarc"* reflects that which Cassatt had mirrored from her mother, the mothering hand that also handed her the word, and in particular, the French language (in this case, figured by the masculine-identified *Figaro*). Through the maternal gift of culture, Cassatt was enabled to choose another path than the "reproduction of mothering,"[66] to become an artist who nonetheless specialized in images of mothering figures. The uncanny interdependence of hand and eye required of the artist is materialized in the mirror reflection, which not only depicts a strange third hand grasping an emblem of intellect but memorializes the artist's power to represent the world through tactile means, to announce her individual presence through the production of her

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[65] Ibid., 259.

[66] I am thinking here of Nancy Chodorow's argument, made in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), that women take on the labor of mothering not simply due to biological imperative but also because they are socially and psychologically propelled to do so.

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own hand. The picture is a double portrait, in the sense that Thoré-Burger intended when discussing Rembrandt: representing the individuality of both the artist and subject.

* * *

Cassatt also treated questions of hand and eye in another picture from this same period, *A Woman in Black at the Opera* [Fig. 31]. When sent to Boston for an exhibition in 1878, along with *Torero and Young Girl* [Fig. 18] and *A Musical Party* [Fig. 21], the theater picture received a great deal of attention for its modernity (much as it would over a century later when it was rediscovered and adopted as something of an emblem for feminist art history).[67] A reviewer for the *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote admiringly:

> Of the same group [including works by Hans Makart and William Merritt Chase] is one of the striking figures of Miss Cassatt, originally of Philadelphia, now of Paris, whose works surpass the strength of most men—a lady in black bonnet and dress gazing from an opera box through black lorgnettes. A dazzling blonde beauty, with ample white throat and chest displayed by the turn of the chest upward and backwards towards her music teacher is another picture not far off by the same artist, that has all the breadth of treatment, color and handling characteristic of old masters. Miss Cassatt is certainly one of the leading stars of this exhibition.[68]

The artist was awarded a prize for her contributions, and her father noted in a letter, "I believe she was the only woman among the silver medals."[69]

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[67] This picture has been especially important to the work of Griselda Pollock, who first discussed its radicality in *Mary Cassatt* (London: Jupiter Books, 1980), 10, 66, and then employed it as a central figure in her argument about "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" (chapter three of *Vision and Difference*), and in "The Gaze and The Look: Women with Binoculars—A Question of Difference," in *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision*, eds. Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock (New York: Universe Books, 1992), 106-30. The work also serves as the cover illustration for the paperback edition of *Vision and Difference*, and has more recently been similarly employed as the cover for Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Art (The Short Guide Series)* 6th ed. (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1999), attesting to the high degree to which the methods of feminist art history have become standard practice in the discipline.

[68] "The M. C. M. A. Exhibition. The Art Gallery The Oil Paintings," *Boston Evening Transcript* (3 September 1878), 4.

[69] Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, December 13, 1878, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 143.

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In many ways *A Woman in Black at the Opera* could not be more different from the contemporaneous *Reading "Le Figaro."* The motif is one that Degas frequently treated in this period, but the dominance of black tones and a sketchy execution are more suggestive of Manet. When the painting was shown in New York in 1895, critics consistently made the link between her work and his. Montague Marks, for instance, observed, "Manet's influence was most strikingly shown in 'La Loge,' a portrait of a lady in her box at the opera, low in tone and broadly but sympathetically handled."[70] The figure, who appears to be clad in afternoon or mourning dress, recalls Manet's *Berthe Morisot with a Bunch of Violets* (private collection), while the summary treatment of the spectators visible in loge boxes in the background is reminiscent of the audiences depicted in his bullfight pictures.

In *A Woman in Black at the Opera* as in *Reading "Le Figaro,"* Cassatt has concentrated attention on the female gaze, symbolized by the pince-nez and the lorgnette. But it is a gaze that is also associated with tactility. The recurrent use of the word "striking" by critics in association with the theater picture brings to mind Duranty's conception of the realist *trait saillant*, the physiognomic feature that conveys "a striking individuality [*une individualité saisissante*], the contemplation of which was brimming with ideas and sensations."[71] The adjective *saisissante*, derived from *saisir*, has the literal and figurative meanings of "to seize," to "grasp," and "to understand." In both of these works, Cassatt pictures a woman using a prosthesis to magnify or intensify the sense of sight, while at the same time the accessories amplify our sense of the figures' bodily presence. these women who eagerly seize the lorgnette or grasp the newspaper in order to take in the world.

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[70] Montague Marks, "My Note Book: Exhibitions," *Art Amateur* 32 (May 1895), 158.

[71] Duranty, "Notes sur l'art," *Réalisme* (10 July 1856), 2; quoted and trans. in Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 92: "une individualité saisissante, dont la contemplation était grosse d'idées et de sensations."

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At the same time, the use of such instruments could represent a breach of feminine propriety, an idea that is evident from the *Saturday Review* article on "Spectacles" quoted above, which stated, "although we are far from agreeing with the prudish old adage that a woman should never look straight into the face of a man, we are not fond of being deliberately stared at by a spectacled lady."[72] Presumably, given the claim that glasses give to women a "semi-masculine, semi-scholastic" appearance, the threat of this spectacled gaze targets a sense of male intellectual superiority. In contrast, Constantin Guys's circa 1865-67 watercolor, *The Balcony* [Fig. 32], accents the sexualized dimension of the female gaze as intensified through the use of opera glasses. Exaggeration of the woman's lorgnette makes it more like her breasts than a phallic extension, while advertising the rapacious desire attributed to the courtesan.

As for the exchange of gazes in such situations, Robert Tomes, an etiquette expert, argued, "We doubt whether the free interchange of glance between those of opposite sex, so common even among the pretenders to good breeding, can be justified by the principles of true decorum."[73] Moreover, he complained, "There is to be noticed in the public promenades, the ballrooms, the operas, the theatres, and even in the churches, a wondrous familiarity of look between our beaux and belles, who, though strangers to each other, thus seem to have established, in the twinkle of an eye, an intimacy of intercourse they would never acknowledge."[74] This "free eye," he claimed, "is a marked characteristic of the libertine," and he recommended, "all modest women should turn persistently from its roving and unlicensed glances."[75]

These views make evident that Cassatt's figure challenges the rules of propriety by employing her gaze with a great deal of intensity. But at the same time, the artist has kept

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[72] "Spectacles," reprinted from *Saturday Review* in *Littell's Living Age*, 761.
[73] [Robert Tomes], *The Bazar Book of Decorum: The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette, and Ceremonials* (1870) (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 116. The writings in this book first appeared as articles in *Harper's Bazar* [*sic*].
[74] Ibid., 116-7.
[75] Ibid., 117.

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her physicality under wraps, portraying her in hat and gloves, and giving her a solid body while playing down any shapeliness through the broad use of black, which allows her to blend into the surroundings if she so wishes (generally a male prerogative). Cassatt's woman participates in the exchange of sexualized glances criss-crossing the theater, but also refuses it by pointedly ignoring the tiny figure of a man who aims his lorgnette at her. A sense of self-possession radiates from the taut energy of her figure, emphasized by the sharp angle of her elbow and the triangular shape of her body, which dominates the right-hand portion of the composition and plays against the circular sweep of the theater tiers. Her fan is kept tightly closed, and her elbow is held within the confines of her loge, as opposed to the man who ogles her, whose elbow escapes the box as he leans forward, his other arm raised in an open and relaxed pose. In fact, Cassatt's picture reads almost as a deliberate reversal of certain gendered features from a theater picture by Manet's pupil Eva Gonzalès, *Une Loge aux Italiens* [Fig. 33]. In contrast to Gonzalès's lovely, flower-adorned young lady, her radiant white flesh presented for the delectation of the viewer while her own lorgnette rests limply on the balcony rail, Cassatt's figure is depicted in the more typically masculine role, shown in a sharp profile pose wearing a dark suit, the gentleman's crisp white shirtfront having been condensed into a bit of lace at collar and cuffs and the gleam of a pearl earring.

The contrast between women who take in the world through their gaze and those who offer themselves to be taken in by the gaze of others was made evident in 1878 in the *Boston Evening Transcript* critic's comparison between *A Woman in Black at the Opera* and the *Musical Party*. The "lady in black bonnet and dress gazing . . . through black lorgnettes" is aligned in the same sentence with the idea that Cassatt's works "surpass the strength of most men." The *Musical Party*, on the other hand, is described in terms of her visibility, her "dazzling blonde beauty, with ample white throat and chest" that are "displayed by the turn of the chest upward and backwards." In the pairings of

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strength/beauty, black/white, and gazing/displayed made by the *Evening Transcript* critic the distinction between Cassatt's Salon-era works and her modernist style is announced.

The idea that to depict a woman in firm possession of the gaze circa 1878 was an intrepid act, especially on the part of a woman artist, has been treated at length elsewhere in relation to this picture.[76] My intention is to explore the relation between this gaze and the sense of touch in Cassatt's pictures. In both *Reading "Le Figaro"* and *A Woman in Black at the Opera* the artist associated the powers of sight and intellect with the tactile realm, giving us female figures who resist objectification by taking the gaze into their own hands, so to speak. If Cassatt explored a sensuous, corporeal facture in her Spanish paintings through flirtatious Sevillian surrogates from whom she could remained safely distanced due to their "otherness," in *A Woman in Black at the Opera* she aligns herself more closely with the modern woman as bearer of the gaze.

Yet the work cannot be reduced to a simple statement in favor of a woman's right to look; it is also about that which the brush refuses to expose to the gaze. As much as *A Woman in Black at the Opera* is about seeing, it is also about what cannot be seen. Even before Cassatt created *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3] (1881), in which two faces efface each other, she made the normally visible invisible in this painting, suppressing facial features, especially the eyes. The main figure holds her lorgnette up to her eyes, augmenting her own vision but obstructing the spectator's ability to see her full profile. Her body is prominently figured, forming a black triangle that fills the lower right portion of the composition, but the black is completely unrelieved, giving no sense of the feminine figure underneath the clothing and inverting the conventional trope of the theater balcony as a frame for the display of the female body. The degree to which this figure is "buttoned up" is accentuated by the treatment of the gloved hand holding the lorgnette, painted to

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[76] See, for example, the writings of Griselda Pollock discussed above, as well as Eunice Lipton, *Looking Into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 9-11, 68.

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resemble either a flesh-colored fabric or lace through which flesh tone is visible, and set against a bit of the hand's flesh, seen in a small circle of exposed skin on the heel of the hand, just above the glove's buttons. This bit of revealed but barely noticeable flesh serves to emphasize the degree to which this woman's body is covered.

The back of the bonnet worn by Cassatt's main figure in turn blocks out the features of a woman seated in the box to her right, who appears as nothing more than a blank cheek surrounded by a bit of hat, bow, and hair. The face of the ogling man across the theater is obscured, too, by a slash of black representing his opera glasses, and the faces of the other figures are reduced to blank daubs of pinkish paint. As the woman using the opera glasses in the theater picture adjusts them in order to control the distant view, so too does the artist, in this case, conspicuously a woman artist, use her brush (brought to mind here by the opera-goer's closed fan) to reveal. But she also refuses to reveal, resisting conventional ideas about finish and about the exposure of the female body, challenging propriety while remaining safely within its bounds.

III.

In *Reading "Le Figaro"* Cassatt began to question the fictions of the mirror and the exactitude of its reflections, doing so in a picture of a private interior, and through the figure of her own mother. In *A Woman in Black at the Opera*, she began to trouble notions of feminine display and the gaze within the public arena (at the theater), and through a figure who could be understood as a surrogate for the artist herself. And in a third painting of these same years, *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6], she further explored issues of display and surveillance, reproduction and individuation, but this time in relation to the private interior as the "principal theater of moral life" for women,[77] and through the figure of a child. She clearly intended the work—one of her largest, at 35 1/2 x 51 1/8

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[77] Philip Nord discusses this idea in the excellent essay, "Republican Politics and the Bourgeois Interior in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France," in *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Suzanne Nash (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 197.

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inches—as a major statement, having prepared it for the 1878 *Exposition Universelle*; its rejection by the jury was a major disappointment.

Judith A. Barter has recently written of pictures like *The Blue Room*, "The physicality in Cassatt's work seems to have made some uncomfortable."[78] The physicality in this painting is most intense in three places: the open pose of the girl, with her left elbow uplifted and sharply pointed, her right elbow slightly crooked, and her legs spread quite widely; the overstuffed and insistent forms of the furnishings; and the artist's gestural presence in the brushwork. Taking the matter of the pose first: art historians have long linked it to that of the odalisque, whose arm-above-head attitude offers maximum exposure of the breasts and displaces the opening of the legs to the upper torso. The odalisque has signified sexual availability and complete submission to the gaze in works ranging from Giorgione's *Venus Sleeping in a Landscape*, c. 1508 (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) to John Vanderlyn's *Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos*, c. 1812 (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia) and Alexandre Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* [Fig. 34], shown at the Salon of 1863. Yet, in works such as Cabanel's *Venus*, the elbow-over-head is also associated with source, origin, or birth of an asexual nature, and in other paintings it has been used to suggest the effort to shake off sleep or to awaken, figuratively as well as literally (as in the awakening of one's senses or sexuality), and to depict figures who are daydreaming or lost in reverie.

Barter takes issue with recent interpreters of *The Blue Room*, such as Harriett Chessman, who understand the girl's odalisque-like position to intimate her adult sexuality, or Rosemary Welsh, who sees the pose as a reference to the 1870s obsession with prostitution and the international trade in children and child pornography.[79] Barter argues,

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[78] Judith A. Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," in Barter, ed., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, 72.

[79] Chessman, "Mary Cassatt and the Maternal Body," 249-51; Rosemary Welsh, "Sign and Self in Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* of 1878," in *Images of the Self as Female*, eds. Kathryn N. Benzel and Lauren Pringle De La Vars, *Women's Studies* 4 (1992), 164-76. Barter mentions Chessman, but not Welsh. Welsh's conclusion—that in *The Blue Room* Cassatt was concerned "to forge an identity of self

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"in fact it seems that the meaning of this image lies in its naturalism. Children are less self-conscious than adults; they continually rearrange their clothes and limbs and are often unaware of social conventions. Thus the work can be seen to reflect the then-current view of children as pure and unfettered beings."[80] Keeping a daughter pure was certainly one of the main concerns of the mother, and a bourgeois girl of this age would have received constant instruction in feminine decorum and dress to this end. Cassatt's work reads as if painted to illustrate a passage published in *The Century* in 1881, describing a "stage" experienced by girls between "Five and Fourteen":

> At five years old, or thereabouts, the period of babyhood is past, while the period of girlhood is not yet reached, and, between the two, comes a time of anarchy and chaos. The little soul is now bursting its shackles and trying to readjust itself to new conditions. The child is ceasing to be a mere pet and plaything, and is beginning to live an individual life. Nothing is more common than to see a docile, well-trained child suddenly develop, without any apparent reason, a willfulness and insubordination entirely at variance with its previous habits.[81]

The mother's responsibility in dealing with the rebellion of a "soul which has seemed to draw its life from hers" is to foster "the perfect development of this individuality,"[82] while ensuring, of course, that the child will mature into a loving mother herself. The girl must never be allowed to act in too headstrong a manner, for, as Tomes put it, "The bold and flaunting girl can never become the orderly housewife and patient mother, for will she be contented to perform the quiet duties of home, and accept the secret approval of her own conscience, after having been accustomed to public display and notoriety?"[83]

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beyond the parameters of the society of late nineteenth-century Europe which permitted only whore or housewife as roles for women" (175)—though reached by a different path ultimately concurs with my interpretation of the work.

[80] Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 72.

[81] S. B. H., "Five and Fourteen," *Century Magazine* 23 (November 1881), 147.

[82] Ibid., 148.

[83] [Tomes], *Bazar Book of Decorum*, 119.

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Cassatt's girl appears as if she has just outgrown her status as "mere pet and plaything" (in contrast to the little dog slumbering in an adjacent chair), and has been banished for the moment from the company of the rest of her family, perhaps as punishment for "little impertinences" or "saucy retorts."[84] Addressing the type of behavior exhibited by the girl in this picture, Tomes proclaimed, "Sprawling of all kinds is avoided by well-bred people, who shun excessive ease as much as excessive formality. It may not be amiss to remind the heedless and the young that, on entering the room of the house of a stranger or that of a visiting acquaintance, it is not becoming to throw themselves at once on the sofa and stretch out their legs, or into the Voltaire or easy-chair, and sink into its luxurious depths."[85] Like Degas in his ballet and brothel pictures, Cassatt in *The Blue Room* is interested in the gestural life of young women, especially those moments when the strict rules of feminine behavior are relaxed or resisted. The girl is not unaware of such social conventions; she is ignoring or intentionally subverting them (and doing so even when alone or in her own home would still be considered a breach of propriety). That *we* know *she* knows she's not sitting in a proper, ladylike position adds to the work's appeal.

Indeed, even if children, and girls especially, were believed to be "pure" in this era, they were anything but "unfettered," physically or mentally, even before reaching the difficult phase between "Five and Fourteen." A book written by an American woman and published in London in 1882 instructed mothers, "girls as well as boys must be brought under subjection *before they are seven years of age*. The mother who does not begin to exact obedience from the child in the cradle, is only preparing trouble for herself and her child. She is culpable and cruel, while she flatters herself that she is most tender."[86] Girls were to be kept under the mother's constant gaze, as *Appleton's Journal* explained: "If

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[84] S. B. H., "Five and Fourteen," 147.
[85] [Tomes], *Bazar Book of Decorum*, 97.
[86] Rhoda E. White, *From Infancy to Womanhood, A Book of Instruction for Young Mothers* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882), 29.

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there be one undoubted, indisputable merit of a Frenchwoman, it is her devotion to her girls, and her resolute effort to keep them pure. The watchfulness never ends, and is carried into the domains of thought and feeling, as well as into the actual details of life."[87]

The maintenance of purity was closely linked to instruction in the physical aspects of comportment, including expression and gesture. Another *Appleton's* article discouraged parents from laughing at, and thereby encouraging, "all traits of singularity, oddness, or affectation, which children may exhibit, as marks of genius which ought not to be repressed. . . . For nothing so soon hardens into second nature as juvenile eccentricity; and few things are more injurious to success in life than marked oddities of manner and gesture when they reach the point of grotesqueness."[88] Elbows were to be held close to the body, in keeping with a tradition dating back to one of the first texts on comportment for children (actually for boys alone), Erasmus's 1532 *De civilitate morum puerilium*. As Duranty had hinted in his discussion of arms-akimbo in his "Promenades au Louvre" essays, many pointed elbow poses—in life as in portraits or genre scenes—have gendered connotations, suggesting strength, self-possession, and control in men, but excessive pride or argumentativeness in women.[89] In the 1870s, a *Blackwood's* writer noted that "where the real *femme du monde* is unrivalled outside France is in the admirable dexterity, the catlike grace, the consummate intelligence with which she wields her arms"[90]—presumably without pointing her elbows in an unseemly manner.

This sharply angled joint, however, was used by Degas in other ways, to indicate that some women were outside the restrictions of bourgeois manners—the laundress yawning in exhaustion, the ballet dancer scratching her back, the prostitute relaxing on a

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87 "Miscellany: French Children," *Appleton's Journal* 7 (27 January 1872), 108.

88 "Miscellany: The Management of Children," *Appleton's Journal* 5 (3 June 1871), 662.

89 This matter of the gendered connotations of pointed-elbow poses is discussed by Joneath Spicer in "The Renaissance Elbow," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 84-128.

90 "French Manners," reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 113 (4 May 1872), 303.

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brothel sofa—or to lend to certain women or girls of the upper classes precisely the sense of self-possession that advice on comportment warned them against projecting. Significantly, one of the bourgeois women he portrayed with an arm akimbo has been identified as Mary Cassatt. Another was his niece, Giulia Bellelli. In *Two Studies of Mary Cassatt at the Louvre* [Fig. 35], done at about the same time as *The Blue Room*, Degas posed the artist, back to the spectator, arm on hip, absorbed in an act of viewing. In more finished versions of these depictions of Cassatt at the Louvre, Degas replaced the sharp point of the bent elbow with a longer, more acute angle formed by the artist's straightened arm and the thin-handled parasol upon which she leans, yet the effect similarly captures the piercing visual acuity and intractable personality of the artist.

So too does the arms-akimbo pose of Giulia Bellelli in Degas's *The Bellelli Family* [Fig. 36] make a particular "point" about his niece's disposition. The willful spirit of the slightly disheveled Giulia can be read in the elbows that separate her from both parents but especially her mother, while her sister remains sheltered by the mother's body. *The Bellelli Family* actually served in substantial ways as a precedent for *The Blue Room*: in portraying her subject (the daughter of a friend of Degas), Cassatt reworked the figure of Giulia; made the little dog slinking out of the Degas's picture at lower right into a sleeping companion; and combined the blue wallcovering and psychologically freighted furnishings of the Bellelli home into the "strange blue poufs" populating this *salon bleu*.

The heightened presence of the interior appointments of *The Blue Room* brings to mind the Republican notion that the private domestic environment should be decorated in a "tasteful" manner so as to shape the public virtues of the child, a notion that provided a site of intersection between ideas about child-rearing, consumer goods, and aesthetics.[91] This was especially true in the case of a number of texts on interior decoration written by art critics with political ties, such as Charles Blanc and Henry Havard. The writer Karl

[91] For more on this topic, see Nord, "Republican Politics and the Bourgeois Interior."

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Hillebrand, in an 1872 essay on "French Home Life," elaborated on the relationship between interior decoration and virtue:

> we are all of us, more or less, morally and materially influenced by the objects which constantly surround us. And if this be true as a general rule, it is especially so of such emotional, sensational people as the French. . . . The girl or boy who grows up amidst harmonies of form and colour, and intelligent application of material, imbibes therefrom a spontaneous notion of what is meant by practical taste in its everyday uses; and it is not going too far to say that the art-dispositions of such a child are fined down, and are rendered more delicate and more subtle, by early association with good models, and that its power of appreciating the beauties of nature is, in consequence, strengthened and extended.[92]

The main responsibility for the purchasing, decorating, and educational activities associated with this aspect of domestic life fell to the mother, who was to prepare the home so that it would appear to the husband returning from work to be a "charming picture in which his wife is the central object."[93]

At this time, however, the private house had come to represent more than a space in which the moral lessons of taste were unconsciously instilled: it was also the site within which the new "Oedipal" family reduplicated itself, each child in the image of his/her same sex parent, seeking a mate in the image of the opposite sex parent. In contrast to family relations of the early modern period, which often involved the repression of bodily desires by means of brutality, the new emotional configuration of the bourgeoisie presented the child with the choice between the pleasurable sensations of its own body and parental love.[94] The child-rearing observations and advice quoted above, then, regarding the strict

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[92] [Karl Hillebrand], "French Home Life: No. III:—Furniture," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 111 (January 1872), 39, 43.

[93] Ibid., 45.

[94] My understanding of the Oedipal family and its emergence among the European bourgeoisie in late nineteenth-century France is deeply indebted to Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), especially chapter four: "The Language of the Family."

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control of corporeal movements and the mother's constant surveillance of her daughters, ring through with Oedipal overtones: children who must be discouraged from "marked oddities of manner and gesture," girls who become "an exact reproduction of the mother under whose constant eye they have grown to womanhood." The private home championed by Republican politicians and art critics therefore provided the site of and material for the moral education of children while also serving as the locus for the inculcation of an Oedipally-structured sexuality that in turn delimited the options available to women, who were expected to take on a procreative rather than creative role.

The gendered dynamic behind the replication of the nuclear family can be viewed in a work that uncannily resembles—but also significantly diverges from—*The Blue Room*: Alfred Cluysenaar's *A Vocation; Portrait of André Cluysenaar, Son of the Painter* [Fig. 37], which was accepted to the Belgian section of the 1878 *Universelle Exposition* at the same time that Cassatt's painting was rejected by the American jury. Though Cluysenaar's portrait, like Cassatt's, features a child sprawled on a padded armchair, the identification of the figure by a proper name and the accouterments underscoring this identification give the work a very different inflection. André, appearing spent and still clutching the tool with which he created the crumpled drawing that appears to have just slipped from his hand, conforms to expectations about the young (male) artist of fertile creative abilities. The breach of etiquette implied by his pose is in fact acceptable as a "mark of genius," given the knowledge that he is the son of artist, and representative of the successful transmission of talent from father to son, and also from master to pupil.[95]

The difference between the self-possessed boy and the more equivocal emotional state of the girl in *The Blue Room* is also evident in the comparison between Cassatt's

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[95] This is unlike Boucher's case, for example, for while he possessed a nearly procreative gift for drawing, he felt a "secret grief" for having failed to educate his son as a history painter "who would be worthy of the inheritance of his father's fame," according to the Goncourts; see Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *French Eighteenth-Century Painters* (1875), trans. Robin Ironside, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981), 93.

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picture and a work I discussed earlier in relation to her *Portrait of Eddy Cassatt*: Sir Thomas Lawrence's *Charles William Lambton* [Fig. 23]. Lawrence placed his sitter at the base of an enormous tree that has grown into a shape recalling a throne, upon which the boy reclines with an air of confidence. Early nineteenth-century critics interpreted his elbow-behind-head gesture to signify "lofty contemplation" or the enjoyment of "a waking dream of childhood."[96] Although Lawrence's picture ultimately derives from Sir Joshua Reynolds's pastoral portraits, which emphasized the gravity and purity he attributed to the child, the artifice of the natural setting around Lambton and the confidence of his demeanor show that the more immediate innocence of Reynolds's children had come by the 1820s to seem uncomfortable or threatening, and no longer desirable in such works.[97] Many nineteenth-century artists drew from Reynolds's child portraiture a structure allowing for the co-existence of the apparently opposing states of innocence and sexualization, angelic cleanliness and pitiful poverty (a structure that informs us more about the adults that painted, purchased, and interpreted these pictures than about the actual children portrayed in them).[98]

If the self-possessed boy, *Charles William Lambton*, is viewed as enjoying a "waking dream of childhood," then the girl of *The Blue Room*, surrounded by anthropomorphic, uncannily repeated chairs, hovering floor, and glowing windows, might be seen as experiencing a waking nightmare of childhood, the underside of the Republican furnishings-as-values concept, or as poised between resistance against and submission to the fulfillment of the Oedipus complex and the reduplication of the family. Though isolated, she is not entirely alone in the strange room; though lost in her thoughts, she is

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[96] Quoted in James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830* (Berkeley: University of California in association with University of Washington Press, 1995), 93.

[97] Ibid., 91-4.

[98] Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 184, 188. On this issue, see also Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

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not alone in them either—as John Durand described the maternal surveillance of the French girl, a surveillance replicated by those viewing Cassatt's picture: "Wherever the place, the mother is practically justified in stating that her daughter has always remained under her own eye. The enjoyments of the French girl, the occupations of her leisure moments, the indulgence of her tastes and emotions, are those of her mother."[99] The protective presence of the blue chair in which the girl sits and the padded and overstuffed ambiance that Charles Blanc in his 1882 *Grammaire des arts décoratifs* promoted as emblematic of "domestic peace"[100] are simultaneously comforting and menacing, mothering and smothering, particularly to a willful child (like the girl Cassatt once was) as she awakens to the sensuous and sensual world.

Her pose, in fact, is quite similar to that of an odalisque in a work associated both with wicked sensuality and the purifying powers of art: Correggio's *Jupiter and Antiope* [Fig. 38]. In 1857 an engraved print of this painting had been employed by Lord Lyndhurst (son of the American painter John Singleton Copley) to argue in Parliament against a bill allowing for the seizure and destruction of obscene material. Lyndhurst made the point that giving police officers the power to determine which materials are "abominations" might lead to the condemnation of great works of art and literature, including the *Jupiter and Antiope*, which, "without any extraordinary pruriency of imagination, might be classed with the obscene."[101] In 1867 the Reverend St. John Tyrwhitt mentioned the work when outlining his quarrel with "sensualism," as it was practiced by the painters of the Renaissance, by Hippolyte Taine in his recent writings

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[99] John Durand, "French Scenes, Customs, and Characters. II.," *Galaxy* 15 (January 1873), 38.
[100] Quoted and trans. in Nord, "Republican Politics and the Bourgeois Interior," 206.
[101] Lord Campbell, "Lyndhurst and Brougham," reprinted from *Quarterly Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 100 (13 March 1869), 658. Lynda Nead discusses this case in "Bodies of Judgment: Art, Obscenity, and the Connoisseur," in *Law and the Image: The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law*, eds. Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 209-12. In *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 20, Nead demonstrates how Sir Kenneth Clark, in his art historical writings, attempted to characterize Correggio's *Jupiter and Antiope* as being "as seductive as possible" yet "the reverse of obscene."

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(which he saw as supporting a "non-moral" theory of art), and by contemporary artists working in a positivist vein, for "Positivism means materialism, and that in art means sensualism."[102] Tyrwhitt believed Correggio's "hand was good," and

> so was his knowledge, so were his colours, so were his brushes, and he misused them all alike. His sin was great in misusing his indescribable power over beauty, but could not deprive him of it. The excellence of his work is distinguishable from its evil purpose. He might have spared the satyr and the Cupid, and the suggestive languor. As to the glowing colour, it half redeems the work, it does not lower it. Do you think Correggio, being the painter he was, could not have made his Antiope as beautiful without its evil?[103]

William J. Stillman felt that Correggio was dangerous due to the appeal of his sensuous touch, stating, "A great painter he certainly was, with certain powers developed to the highest degree attained by Italian art, but with a seductive technical mastery which has been a false light to all students who have come after him."[104] Mariana van Rensselaer, on the other hand, argued that Correggio's work embodied sensuousness, not sensuality, in paintings such as *Jupiter and Antiope*:

> We learn from Correggio—or we might learn if we would—that the sensuousness of the Renaissance, wide and deep though it was, irresponsible and unmoral as it frankly professed itself to be, was yet a very different thing from the sensual depravity of an Asian court, or of Rome in her decadent days. The key-note that is struck through all the wide variations of Correggio's themes—from the Passion of Christ to the amours of Jupiter—must show this. His satyr is not coarse, if his Christ-Child is not divine. Antiope, Leda, Io, Danae, are not brutalized, are not consciously transgressing; they

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[102] Reverend St. John Tyrwhitt, "Ancilla Domini: Thoughts on Christian Art," *Contemporary Review* 5 (August 1867), 418, 436.
[103] Ibid., 422.
[104] Stillman, "Italian Old Masters. Correggio," 918.

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> are simply natural, and joyful, and unreflecting,—living only for the day and its delights.[105]

Cassatt's girl, though posed similarly to Correggio's Antiope, appears to be reflecting, her eyes open and head slightly tipped down (like Mrs. Cassatt reading the *Figaro*). Her elbows are raised and bent not to signify her willing acquiescence to the gaze but rather her defiance of the cultural constraints that will increasingly inhibit her sensuous and sensual experience of the world, and especially of her own body, as an adult and a woman.

These constraints would include the knowledge that to be a woman also meant to be constantly subject to the gaze, even within the intimacy of the home. If the domestic interior had become the locus of one's most personal and private Oedipal struggles by the late nineteenth century, it was also a site for public display, for receiving guests and exhibiting collections. Men were encouraged to express their individuality in their homes through the acquisition of art works and *bibeloterie* (as long as they stopped short of becoming dandies); women were expected to serve as aesthetically desirable objects themselves.[106] In an 1877 essay Reverend Tyrwhitt discussed the relationship between women and the home interior as mediated by art and morality:

> in principle, all domestic art depends on dress; for all the decorative part of the house is meant to become the women of the house. There is nothing within its walls more important than its mistress and her daughters; they ought to be the central ornaments of their own drawing-room; and its walls, carpet, and curtains depend on their dress; and that on their style. . . . Character above all in furniture and ornament, the stamp of a genuine taste, of something loved or fancied and enjoyed, something that shall tell of heart, or brains, or delicate senses, or well-taught choice—where that is seen,

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[105] Van Rensselaer, "Correggio." 237-8.

[106] On this issue, and for a larger consideration of the relation of furniture and gender in this period, see Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

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> all is well. It is a curious proof of the morality of art, that the word Character sums up, in fact, all that can be done in ornaments of house or furniture.[107]

At the same time, installing women as ornaments of display within the home also participates in their objectification, making them into possessions of a sort, and closing the distance between them and "kept" women. Even in the intimacy of their own homes, women were always on exhibit.

This idea that women themselves were decorative accessories to be displayed in the domestic home is emphasized by the *mise-en-scène* and composition of Cassatt's painting. The room is strangely empty of *objets d'art* other than the outsized furniture, which directs the viewer's focus toward the girl as its central ornament, as does the vertiginous raking of the floor. In fact, the angled floor and radiant windows resemble the rehearsal rooms depicted in many of Degas's ballet scenes. Cassatt's work shares with those images a sense that we are being allowed to see something that is ordinarily hidden from view—the work that takes place behind the scenes to produce an effect of effortlessly elegant comportment—while at the same time, the tilt of the floor and the spatial compression of the composition have been manipulated to ensure that the depicted bodies are offered fully to the spectator's gaze.

Furthermore, *The Blue Room* not only resembles Degas's ballet pictures but has much in common with his brothel monotypes, particularly *Waiting for the Client* [Fig. 39] and *Repos* [Fig. 40], filled as they are with commodious furnishings and sprawling figures, and employing as they do similar spatial distortions. Yet this type of visual comparison is rarely pursued in the Cassatt literature. Barter, for example, after noting that the pose of a woman in Cassatt's print *The Visitor* [Fig. 41] is "startlingly close" to that of a naked prostitute in another Degas monotype from the same years, *Room in a Brothel* [Fig. 42],

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[107] R[everend] St. John Tyrwhitt, "Artists and Artisans," *Contemporary Review* 26 (May 1877), 1052. The main argument of this essay attempts to answer the question: "why and how does mechanical multiplication destroy the love of the work, the soul of the work, and the true pleasure of hand and eye?" (1047).

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quickly retreats from exploring visual similarities to assert difference, stating, "Cassatt and Degas each pictured a world the other could not know."[108] Could the Degas print be considered as a "source" for Cassatt—or vice versa, given that neither work can be concretely dated—or is the resemblance simply an uncanny coincidence? If fortuitous, can these undeniable visual similarities between Degas's images and those of Cassatt still have meaning? Or are they only significant if they meet our expectations as to what is "proper" to the artist and his or her gender? Despite Barter's attempt at contextualization in her interpretation of *The Visitor*, a disjunction between form and content remains in full effect, as if the sexuality of Degas's prostitute might contaminate Cassatt's bourgeois woman were any formal affinities between the works to be addressed. By calling attention to resemblances but refusing to examine them, Barter does not neutralize the threat of Degas's images but actually compels them to haunt Cassatt's pictures.

It seems probable that Cassatt knew Degas's brothel imagery, given the closeness of the relationship between the two artists at this time, the similarity between many of their prints during the period, and the fact that she owned one of the monotypes: *Girl Putting on Her Stocking* [Fig. 43]. (Degas, in turn, owned all thirteen proofs for *The Visitor*.)[109] While she may not have had any direct knowledge of the world depicted by Degas in these prints, Cassatt was likely intimate with his depictions of it; moreover, the aesthetic strategies of both artists at this moment serve in similar ways to question the relation between propriety and sexuality, public and private, albeit through figures from very different worlds. And in the case of *The Blue Room*, Cassatt explained in a letter, "I had done the child in the armchair, and he [Degas] found that to be good and advised me on the background, *he even worked on the background*—."[110] While some accounts of this

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[108] Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 67. *The Visitor* is discussed by Barter under the title *Interior Scene*.

[109] Barbara Stern Shapiro, "A Printmaking Encounter," in Ann Dumas et al., *The Private Collection of Edgar Degas* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 240.

[110] Mary Cassatt to Ambroise Vollard, Mesnil-Beaufresne, [1903] (original in French), trans. in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 281.

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picture reduce Degas's role to merely that of an adviser (if they mention him at all), Cassatt, repeating and underlining that "he even worked on the background," implies that she may have permitted him the unusual intimacy of touching his brush to her canvas. But even if he did not literally touch her picture, his "fingerprints" are all over it.

Linda Nochlin has observed how Degas's brothel scenes can be read as parodic counterpoints to his images of the bourgeois family, in which he contrasts the intimacy, warmth, and embodiedness of the prostitutes in their "maisons" to the disaffection and chilly demeanor of the families he portrayed in their homes (in the case of the Bellellis, his own kin), while also analogizing two sites where women are exchanged for money.[111] In a like manner, *Room in a Brothel* can also be understood as an ironic commentary on the bourgeois woman's relation to her own body. The prostitute, though alienated from her corporeal self in her work when she offers her body for sale, is nonetheless "at home" within her physicality in a way that none of the Bellelli women nor a bourgeois model of the type represented by Cassatt could be in hers. These women were discouraged from attaining knowledge of their intimate bodily functions, particularly those regarding sexuality, and even from viewing their own nakedness while bathing. Women were expected to be uncomfortable simply viewing the female nude at the Salon, as one reviewer claimed: "In general, women don't intentionally stop before pictures that represent the female nude, especially when it is an isolated figure; if they see one, they pass by and say nothing. It seems that they want to be on guard against admiring it, and there is in such a work something that troubles and disturbs them, and that instinctively and vaguely gives rise in their thoughts to their own personal nudity."[112] The very sight of

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[111] Linda Nochlin, "A House is not a Home: Degas and the Subversion of the Family," in *Dealing with Degas*, 43-65.

[112] Anatole de Montaiglon, "Le Salon de 1875," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 May 1875), 510: "En générale, les femmes ne s'arrêtent pas volontiers aux tableaux qui représentant une femme nue, surtout quand c'est une figure isolée; si elles regardent, elles passent et ne disent rien. Il semble qu'elles veuillent se défendre d'admirer et qu'il y ait là pour elles quelque chose qui les trouble et les inquiète, en leur donnant instinctivement et vaguement lieu de craindre pour elles-mêmes la pensée de leur nudité personelle."

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a painted nude might thus make a woman feel "exposed," even commodified, like the painting (or prostitute) available for sale.

Cassatt's *The Visitor* offers a similarly ironic point of view as that expressed by Degas in the brothel monotypes, linked here to feminine social rituals. While the print has been characterized by Barter as depicting "a homey space where women exchange confidences,"[113] the formal social call was not often an interaction during which women "let their hair down," so to speak. Tomes explained in the early 1870s:

> Every dame nowadays has what is called a visiting list. This is composed of a number of persons of her own sex who spend money, dress, and make calls very much as she herself does. . . . They need not be friends; it is not, in fact, necessary that they should be acquaintances, and we actually know of two dames who not long since met in the street and looked into each other's face as perfect strangers, though they had been on visiting terms for the last ten years or more. There is so little substance in this kind of social relationship that its obligations can be as well performed by a mere symbol as the person it represents, and thus a bit of card-board, with nothing but a name upon it, frequently serves every purpose.[114]

In fact, Tomes continued,

> It would seem to be the object of modern fashion to interpose as many formalities as possible between the members of society, in order to prevent intimacy of contact. This, perhaps, is a necessary result of the immense expansion of the great cities, and the consequent widening of the social relation. It would be manifestly impossible, if every fashionable acquaintance became an intimate friend, and thus entitled to the freedom of familiarity, to retain any of that personal reserve which is essential to self-respect.[115]

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[113] Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 67.
[114] [Tomes], *Bazar Book of Decorum*, 235.
[115] Ibid., 238.

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But despite the lack of true intimacy and friendship in many social calls, Tomes nevertheless insisted upon the necessity of respecting their formalities, which he believed to be essential to the moral fabric of the culture.

That women were able to enjoy close relationships despite the system of social visits is not to be denied; nevertheless, various formal aspects of Cassatt's *The Visitor* create an atmosphere more suggestive of "personal reserve" than intimate exchange. The main figure takes care in this setting, which represents as much a "theater of moral life" as a "homey space," to "act" her part according to the scripted rules of comportment; she wears an elaborate "costume" including hat and gloves and stands upon a floor tilted by the artist so that it resembles a raked stage. Though turned toward the viewer, she reveals only the slightest bit of her "self," visible between the high collar of her jacket and her hairline. The light that streams in through the lacy curtain at back fails to illuminate the features of either woman; their faces are obscured by shadows. And while the standing woman might very well be making herself "at home" in another woman's house, she is neither "home" in that interior nor "at home" in her own body in the same way that Degas's prostitutes could be. A comparison of Cassatt's finished print with the preparatory drawing[116] [Fig. 44] used to trace the composition onto a softground-covered plate demonstrates how she stiffened the standing woman's pose, suppressing a suggestion of creases along the bottom of the dress and regularizing its pleats so that the figure in the print appears even more trapped within a rigid column that extends to the outfit's high waist. Indeed, though Barter ends her discussion of this print with the comment that it represents a "homey space" of pleasant personal exchanges, she began it with the idea that this interior—like the head-to-toe costume—appears "suffocating" and "claustrophobic," to the point that such images may have influenced the "intensely seductive, domestic scenes" of Edouard Vuillard.[117]

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[116] This work, *Drawing for "Interior Scene,"* was not catalogued by Breeskin.
[117] Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 66-7.

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The girl in *The Blue Room*, however, has not yet been completely buttoned up in the costumes of feminine adulthood nor completely estranged from feeling "at home" in her own body as are the women in *The Visitor*. She appears to be faced here with a choice: to give in to the sensuous temptations of her surroundings or to accept the rules of adult feminine comportment in which she has already been trained. Karl Hillebrand discussed the relationship between furniture styles and moral values, including the enticements of well-stuffed furniture, in his 1872 article on "French Home Life":

> People whose chairs and tables date from the Consulate, who possess one dim looking-glass, a cuckoo clock, and no carpet, cannot anyhow be identical in their views of life or their fashion of expressing them with families of 1871, whose *fauteuils* exude softness and friendship, who regard bright light as a necessity of life, and who hate imitations of bird cries. The former will probably be sternly virtuous; the latter will be by no means stern, and possibly not virtuous either, but they will be pleasant, and "of their epoch." Wooden furniture is provocative of lofty principles, and of what we should call in England Low-Church tendencies; while padded sofas and their adjuncts may be said to conduce to worldly views, and to no Church tendencies at all. But where would be the use of their faculty of resistance to temptation if our neighbours let themselves be beaten by arm-chairs?[118]

The chairs in *The Blue Room*, simultaneously animate and inanimate, resonate with this double identity: as enticements to and guardians against the kinds of unbridled, embodied behavior generally forbidden to the bourgeois woman. As examples of the best "taste" of their time, they can "morally and materially" influence the child; yet, this morality may already be compromised by the libertine culture in which they were created. Furthermore, the welcoming, plush comfort of *The Blue Room*'s *fauteuils* invites the kinds of improper sprawling exhibited by the prostitutes in Degas's brothel monotypes, but at the same time,

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[118] [Hillebrand], "French Home Life: No. III:—Furniture," 45.

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their repetitive and somewhat menacing presence invokes parental surveillance, the sense that a girl is never alone.

The gestural liberty with which *The Blue Room* is painted, in combination with the lack of feminine restraint in the girl's pose—a pose with a long history of association with sensuality—further suggests that Cassatt at this time was herself fascinated by and struggling with issues of properly gendered behavior, particularly with regard to questions of the female artist's touch. As a woman artist and a member of the bourgeoisie, Cassatt negotiated a difficult balance between the freedom of gesture required for the creation of art and the bodily decorum expected of a woman of her class. The physicality of the girl in *The Blue Room*, when considered alongside a nineteenth-century photograph of a French dancer [Fig. 45], makes obvious the degree to which a woman's relaxation or flaunting of the rules of decorum is considered to signify sexual availability. Legs closed, elbows in—the girl or woman must not risk opening or projecting anything, for to open or to project is to offer oneself. The female body must not only be closed within the proper "spaces of femininity," it must be closed in upon itself. How, then, might Cassatt's touch, her method of handling paint or pastel, have also been restricted by gendered strictures upon bodily movement? And did this in turn have any implications for her choice of subject matter?

Desiring to paint the female body and to investigate the tactile qualities of her materials, but having little access to the traditional form through which this was pursued, the female nude, Cassatt would soon turn to a subject, mother and child, through which she could explore the textures of infant skin, and which she could "properly" claim as her own. But at this moment, she looked to substitutes for skin in the patterned coverings associated with the domestic roles of women, such as fabric and wallpaper. In *The Blue Room* she played with surrogate surfaces, concentrating her energies not only on the material qualities of brushwork but also on the shimmering blue of the "poufs" and the

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flowered patterns that levitate like fireworks above the upholstered objects they are intended to decorate.

Instead of using fabrics to symbolize weaving and needlecraft activities in their stereotypically feminine forms, Cassatt used facture, pattern, and color in *The Blue Room* to overdo or undo traditional associations and painterly illusions. The plaid sash served as an emblem of the Angel Annunciate in old master paintings, and children were dressed in white muslin to emphasize a sense of purity;[119] yet, while this combination of textiles may allude here to the "purity" of the child, it fails in this instance to signify "unfettered." The white dress echoes the light-filled windows at the back of the room, which promise the freedom of the world outside the domestic interior, but the broad, dark sash tethers the girl to her chair. Fabric and wallpaper patterns would play this role a number of times in Cassatt's work of these years, serving as textural and chromatic settings within which figures are subsumed and, simultaneously, against which they are outlined, functioning like screens that protect figures from outside threats but also trap them within the domestic interior, anticipating, as Barter posits, Vuillard's Nabi images.[120] The girl here is enveloped in a high-key blue, yet the white of her dress and in her flesh tones, along with the sharpness of her pointed elbow and the corporeality of her legs, which dangle heavily now but just might kick through the picture plane in a fit of pique, endow her figure with a presence (emphasized by the pointing of her left toe directly out of the canvas) that resists the engulfing quality of the oceanic ambiance.

If the girl in *The Blue Room* appears somewhat resistant to the strictly gendered rules of comportment, the extreme gesturality of Cassatt's facture succeeds in breaking free from expectations about feminine propriety as well as conventional method. Throughout her career Cassatt created figures as she has done here, giving the greatest

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[119] Welsh, "Sign and Self in Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* of 1878," 169.

[120] See, for example, *Five O'Clock Tea* [Fig. 52], *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61], *Profile Portrait of Lydia Cassatt* [Fig. 62], and especially *Baby in Blue in His Carriage* [Fig. 63], all to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

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amount of attention to the depiction of the facial features, and loosening her stroke as she moves outward from the visage. In *The Blue Room*, the paint application grows more and more unrestrained as she works toward the foreground, in the end refusing to finish the surface, leaving patches of bare canvas to show through the loose strokes of pigment. These exposed areas, with their bright color and woven texture, have an insistent presence that works against the illusions of paint; their existence along the bottom edge of the canvas threatens to turn the entire image into a flat curtain that asks to be tugged down in order to achieve completion.

Segard, in his 1913 biography of Cassatt, understood *The Blue Room* primarily as a work of "painting for painting's sake,"[121] an interpretation that is certainly supported by a formal analysis of the work's coloristic, compositional, and factural strategies. By pronouncing that Cassatt's "real motif" here was "the pleasure of making various blues sing, one next to another, by arranging them in scales, and deliberately pushing their gradation and variety to the extreme,"[122] Segard seems to be positioning the work as the fulfillment of Walter Pater's claim, made in the same period as *The Blue Room*, that "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."[123] To Pater, music represented the culmination of art's end, in which "form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the imaginative reason."[124] At the same time, Segard found *The Blue Room* to be strange or uncanny, especially its "large blue poufs," implying that some aspects of the picture pulled against its characterization as a nearly abstract, music-like composition, and that the artist did not completely succeed in achieving Pater's complete "union or identity" between form and subject.

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[121] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 156.
[122] Ibid., 154-5.
[123] Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione" (1873), reprinted from *Fortnightly Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 135 (10 November 1877), 363.
[124] Ibid., 364.

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Segard viewed this picture as the ultimate example of Cassatt's individuality in her art, to great degree because this individuality is expressed unconsciously. "A surge of love!," he proclaimed in his discussion of *The Blue Room*: "One feels it even in those subjects where the artist believed no doubt that she was putting in nothing of herself."[125] What Segard formulated as a question of the tension between the ostensible subject of the picture and the less important but equally compelling background elements like the chairs ("That which seduced the artist—one feels it well—was to raise these defiant padded chairs to the role of figures"),[126] between the undifferentiated and the individual, is also a matter of the tension between form and content. The subject here, the mood of the girl, which is denied by Segard as the work's actual subject, is repressed only to return in the uncanny chairs, the fantastic blue "poufs" whose formal role is overwhelmed by their "personality." Also at issue here is the matter of the female artist's struggle to individuate, a struggle that is more complicated than the male artist's efforts to the same end. *The Blue Room* speaks to the personal and public difficulties experienced by Cassatt as she sought to establish an individual identity: on a social level, within a culture that expected a girl to reduplicate her mother by becoming a mother and that no more than tolerated the presence of women artists; and on a personal level, apart from a mother who, while supportive of her daughter's creativity, had never ventured a public career of her own. That Cassatt painted this work shortly after her family had settled with her into a Paris apartment (and not long after finishing the portrait of her mother, *Reading "Le Figaro"*) may be more than coincidental.

According to Carol Armstrong, who compares Degas's pictures of his family's New Orleans cotton business to the brothel montoypes, he functioned under a belief that "to make for and sell to a public is to 'prostitute' one's art and one's self," in keeping with

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[125] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 152: "L'élan d'amour! On le sent même dans les sujets où sans doute l'artiste croyait n'avoir rien mis d'elle-même."

[126] Ibid., 154: "Ce qui a séduit l'artiste—on le sent bien—c'est de hausser jusqu'au rôle de personnages de braves fauteuils rembourrés. . . ."

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the modern idea that "art is private practice, that its basis is sexuality more than it is sociability, and that sexuality and sociability must be considered separate domains of the self—and any connection between the two must be illicit."[127] If art was "private"—and increasingly privatized within the family home during the Impressionist era, as was sexuality—then the links between art, the family, sexuality, and commerce must have been highly conflicted for Degas.[128] Though Cassatt's views on the family, and on the relation between the family and artmaking, may never have reached the point of what has been called Degas's "deeply negative equation between art and sexuality,"[129] she created *The Blue Room* at a telling moment in terms of her own family and art practice. Her decision to establish herself in France in 1877 was motivated in great part by the need to sell her work; from Paris she could both develop relationships with dealers in that city and oversee the promotion of her work in the U.S. from a stable home base. But taking these decisive steps toward a professional reputation among the "Independents" ironically required making concessions with regard to her personal independence, even as she remained unencumbered by the restraints placed upon women in conventional marriages. While etiquette writer Mrs. John Sherwood promoted the advantages of an "elderly girl" having a companion as including "added freedom of life," the presence on a day-to-day level of Cassatt's parents and sister, all in varying degrees of poor health, involved many compromises, to the occasional detriment of her creativity.

And while her family certainly provided a measure of psychological and economic security to a woman in a difficult profession, finances also appear to have been a point of contention between the artist and her parents, whose assets were considerable but by no means enormous. By the end of 1878, Robert Cassatt wrote to his son Alexander: "I

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[127] Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 72.

[128] On the growing association between the art gallery and the private domestic space, especially as promoted by Galeries Durand-Ruel, which handled works by both Degas and Cassatt, see Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *Art Bulletin* 73 (December 1991), 599-622.

[129] Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 72.

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have said that the studio must at least support itself. This makes Mame [Cassatt's family nickname—another pseudonym, in a sense] very uneasy, as she must either make sale of the pictures she has on hand or else take to painting *pot boilers* as the artists say—a thing that she never yet has done & cannot bear the idea of being obliged to do."[130] Cassatt's need to sell—an act that was doubly improper for someone of her gender and class—might not have led her to make a conscious analogy between herself and the prostitute, but, as a woman who had decided not to marry and who was expected to support herself to some extent, she was surely aware of the advantages and limitations of the family as an economic as well as an affective unit.

Through its obstinate physicality—in the girl's pose, the strange furniture that surrounds her, and the artist's gestural brushwork—*The Blue Room* contradicts the fantasy that painting can ever be Pater's "matter of pure perception,"[131] especially for the female artist, who must risk improperly embodied behavior if she is to achieve the necessary degree of stylistic originality. The female artist is always "fettered" to a greater degree than the male artist by gendered expectations. *The Blue Room* places us at the scene of individuation, the private interior within which the child's original relation to sexuality is first shaped, and also the site where the female child internalizes—or, as in Cassatt's case, begins to resist—her role in the reproduction of mothering. By choosing as her subject a figure poised between childhood and maturity, Cassatt unsettles our sense of relation to the girl. Situating her figure on the canvas in an odalisque-like pose, and building her presence and her setting with a highly physical touch, but making her too old to touch as one would touch an infant, and too young to touch as a sexual object, the artist calls into question the traditionally assumed consonance between the representation of the female body and the brushstroke as a substitute for and invitation to the artist's/spectator's

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[130] Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, December 13, 1878, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 143.
[131] Pater, "The School of Giorgione," 364.

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imagined erotic caress. The sexualized dimension of the painterly touch is emphasized in a negative way.

Cassatt's works circa 1877–78—*Reading "Le Figaro," A Woman in Black at the Opera*, and *The Blue Room*—provide evidence of her first attempts to discover the boundaries of her relationship with the female body as a subject for art as presented through optical and tactile means. In his brothel monotypes Degas employed his factural touch and depicted gestures of touch in order to explore the slippery boundaries between self and other, abjection and sexual desire, representation and abstraction, figure and ground. The larger part of his oeuvre, however, might better be described as being concerned to depict a sense of isolation, separateness, and disjunction. Cassatt, in her works of the early 1880s, also created a number of images suggestive of isolation and separation (with one notable exception, *A Goodnight Hug*). It would not be until the mid-1880s that she would begin to depict the mother/child dyad that is considered to be most typical of her oeuvre, in works that have been interpreted by some as trivial in significance, given their association with the maternal, and by others as a celebration of the maternal. I hope in this chapter to have set the stage for complicating our ways of looking at these kinds of work by examining the artist's struggle for independence regarding family, societal expectations, and the art of the past at the moment she joined the Independents, seen in the context of her era's notions about individuality in art.

The Blue Room epitomizes the uncanny, undefinable quality of Cassatt's best work, for, in addition to capturing a sense of the difficulties experienced by girls as they navigate the borders between childhood and adulthood, self and (m)other, it also speaks to the difficulties of the female artist in achieving the individuation and individual freedom necessary to participate in the socially and bodily transgressive activities of the avant garde. By assimilating art historical sources considered improper for the female artist and inappropriate for use in depicting a child, by portraying a girl who both accedes to and resists proper female socialization, and by refusing herself to yield to gendered

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expectations regarding facture, Cassatt in *The Blue Room* has created a picture that is about painting, about female experience, and about a female experience of painting.

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CHAPTER THREE — *"A PERSONALITY THAT HAS NOT YET COMPLETELY EXTRICATED ITSELF": CASSATT'S FIRST TWO IMPRESSIONIST EXHIBITIONS AND HER EARLIEST MOTHER AND CHILD IMAGES, 1879–1880*

One of the aims of this dissertation is to show that Mary Cassatt did not become the so-called "peintre des enfants et des mères" immediately or inevitably, but only after more than twenty years of study and professional activity. Indeed, though she began to first paint child care subjects circa 1879, at the very moment that she publicly affiliated herself with Degas and the Impressionists, she did not put any pictures of this type on public display until her third exhibition with the Independents, in 1881. In 1879 and 1880 she was both admired and excoriated for her portraits (some depicting children), for her theater scenes, and for her images of women in domestic interiors and outdoors, but it would not be until the 1881 Impressionist exhibition that she would show a work specifically identified as *Mère et enfant* [Fig. 3; *A Goodnight Hug*], and it was not until this exhibition that she began to be associated with a "signature" subject in combination with a signature style.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first examines Cassatt's contributions to the Impressionist exhibitions of 1879 and 1880 and the critical responses to them, which were divided between those finding her female theater-goers in particular to be "dirty" and "eczemic," and those characterizing her figures as "elegant" and "aristocratic" as well influenced by recent trends in English painting toward domestic subject matter and free paint handling. The chapter's second section treats Cassatt's earliest known paintings on the subject of child care, completed in these same two years: *The Nurse* [Fig. 53] and *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* [Fig. 56]. These works will be studied with regard to debates at the intersection of morality, cleanliness, and sexuality, as the nurse came to be increasingly associated with "dirt" and improper sexual knowledge and the mother to be made into a symbol of asexual purity. *Mother About to*

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Wash Her Sleepy Child will also be considered in relation to Correggio's Madonnas (which were described in 1881 as "the most simply and sensuously and radiantly earthly of all Madonnas"),[1] Degas's monotypes of prostitutes bathing, and Freud's writings about his "two mothers," his biological mother and his nurse.

I.

It is not known exactly when Cassatt met Degas (at some point after the 1877 Impressionist exhibition), but it is clear that from the moment he invited her to exhibit with the Independents she took an active part in the group's organizational activities, among them the effort to put on a show in 1878. A measure of her involvement is found in her response in March of that year to J. Alden Weir's invitation to participate in the first exhibition of the Society of American Artists in New York. She refused, apologizing that she needed all her work for the next Impressionist exhibition, and adding, "You know how hard it is to inaugurate anything like independent action among French artists, and we are carrying on a despairing fight & need all our forces, as every year there are new deserters."[2]

The 1878 exhibition never materialized, due to factors such as the defections of Cézanne and Renoir in favor of the Salon and the terrible prices achieved at the sale of the Hoschedé collection, which included works by Monet, Sisley, and Pissarro. The 1879 exhibition did open, albeit without Cézanne, Renoir, Morisot, and Sisley. Lists in Degas's notebooks suggest that he assisted Cassatt in deciding which of her pictures to place on view, and critics, whether or not informed of their friendship, frequently linked their contributions. George Lafenestre, for example, wrote in the *Revue des deux mondes*:

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[1] Van Rensselaer, "Correggio," 238.

[2] Cassatt to J. Alden Weir, March 10, 1878, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 137. Ronald Pickvance discusses the Impressionists' failed attempt to hold an exhibition in 1878 and the circumstances surrounding the organization and reception of the 1879 exhibition in "Contemporary Popularity and Posthumous Neglect," in Moffett, et al., *The New Painting*, 1986, 243-65.

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> M. Degas and Mlle. Cassatt are perhaps the only artists whom we can distinguish among this group of submitted independents, who possess some attractiveness and some excuse for the pretentious display of sketches and childish scribbles amidst which one is almost surprised to encounter their negligently handled but vivaciously observed canvases. Both of them have a sense of life in their luminous decompositions of Parisian interiors; both of them find a singular fineness of coloration with which they render the aspect of female flesh exhausted from evenings out and the light shudder of the daily toilette.[3]

Gabriel Monod, founder of the positivist journal *La Revue historique*, had a similar response in a review published in the English periodical *The Contemporary Review*:

> The impressionists . . . or, as they now call themselves, the "independents," see nothing but the general *ensemble*; they disregard the detail and the outline altogether, and paint in masses and spots. When, like M. Degas or Mlle. Cassatt, they have great talent, they furnish useful indications of effect, colour, and light to those painters who endeavour to represent Nature, not as she appears at a hasty glance to any mere simpleton, but as she reveals herself to the soul of the artist who gazes at her long and lovingly. The majority of pictures exhibited by the independents are, however, mere worthless, monotonous daubs, even devoid of a sincere impression.[4]

Characterizing the critical response to the 1879 Impressionist exhibition in general, Robert Cassatt reported to his son Alexander, "Every one of the leading daily French papers

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[3] George Lafenestre. "Les Expositions d'art: Les Indépendans [*sic*] et les aquarellistes," *Revue des deux mondes* 33 (15 May 1879), 481-2, reprinted Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 226-7: "M. Degas et Mlle Cassatt sont pourtant les seuls artistes qui se distinguent dans ce groupe d'indépendans [*sic*] soumis, et qui donnent quelque attrait et quelque excuse au prétentieux étalage de pochades et de barbouillages enfantins au milieu desquels on est presque surpris de recontrer leurs toiles négligées, mais vivement observées. Tous deux ont le sens vif des décompositions lumineuses dans les intérieurs parisiens; tous deux trouvent des finesses singulières de colorations pour rendre l'aspect des carnations de femmes fatiguées par les veilles et le frémissement léger des toilettes mondaines."

[4] Gabriel Monod, "Contemporary Life and Thought in France," *Contemporary Review* 35 (August 1879), 937.

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mentioned the Exposition & nearly all named Mame—most of them in terms of praise."[5] When all the critical responses to the exhibition are considered, it appears that almost as many reviewers ignored her contributions as discussed them, but of those who did treat her work, the positive notices outnumbered the negative at a ratio of about two to one.[6]

The Italian critic Diego Martelli, a friend of Degas and a positivist critic working in the mode of Taine, Thoré-Burger, and Zola, found much by Cassatt to admire, stating that she, "like Degas (perhaps she is his student)," searches for

> movement, light, and drawing in the most modern sense. Her half-figure of a woman in a loge lit by gas light and reflections from a mirror is a very beautiful work and puts its author within the range of the strongest artists. Another half-figure who reads while seated in an armchair is quite beautiful, above all in the expression of the pose. A virile portrait of extraordinary resemblance and a group of women in the open air of a garden reveal all the originality and genius of this artist, who has as her specialty *la simpatia*.[7]

Of the works by all artists on view at the exhibition of 1879, the first two paintings mentioned by Martelli—the "woman in a loge," *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* [Fig. 46], and the "half-figure who reads," *Woman Reading* [Fig. 47][8]—were among the pictures most consistently discussed by the critics.

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[5] Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, May 21, 1879, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 144.

[6] This breakdown (as well as those to follow regarding the exhibitions of 1880, 1881, and 1886) is based primarily upon the material reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, considering only those reviews that included significant discussions of the various artists, and excluding those that merely listed the contributors or discussed the exhibition without naming any artists.

[7] Diego Martelli, "I pittori impressionisti francesi (Continuazione: V. num. precedente)," *Roma artistica* (5 July 1879), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 231: "come Degas (forse sua allieva)"; "del movimento, della luce, e del disegno, nel senso il più moderno. La sua mezza figura di donna in un palco, rischiarato dalle luci del gas, e dai riflessi d'uno specchio che gli sta dietro, è cosa bellissima e degna di mettere il suo autore nel rango dei più forti artisti. Altra mezza figura di donna che legge seduta sopra una poltrona, è pure assai bella, sopratutto per il modo con cui si posa. Un ritratto virlile le di straordinaria rassomiglianza, ed un gruppo di signore all'aria aperta in un giardino, rivelano tutta la originalità e l'ingegno di questo artista, che ha per specialità la simpatia."

[8] Though both these works were identified by Breeskin as representing the artist's sister, Lydia, Suzanne Lindsay, in *Mary Cassatt and Philadelphia*, 41, convincingly demonstrates that the figure depicted in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* is a model, and not Lydia. It is likely that *Woman Reading* also

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Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge in particular drew widely varied critical opinions. When a drawing by Gillot after the work was published in *La Vie Moderne*, Robert Cassatt sent a copy of the journal to Alexander, explaining, "You will see that the front of the figure is in shadow the light coming in from rear of box etc— The sketch does not do justice to the picture which was original in conception & very well executed—and was as well, the subject of a good deal of controversy among the artists & undoubtedly made her very generally known to the craft."[9]

In contrast to the figure in Cassatt's earlier loge picture, *A Woman in Black at the Opera* [Fig. 31], the model in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* is far more accessible to the viewer, with her frontal, more open pose and décolleté gown, a smiling expression that reveals a bit of the teeth, and slightly unfurled fan. The tiny figures in the loges reflected in the mirror behind the woman suggest that all eyes are indeed on her. Louis Besson, in *L'Evénement,* found this invitation to the gaze to characterize all of the artist's works on view—to their detriment—claiming, "The studies of Mary Cassatt betray an ardent preoccupation with attracting the glance, rather than the desire to do well. Her *étude de femme avec éventail*, her *femme dans une loge*, and *tutti quanti* provoke laughter."[10]

Some critics spoke of the figure in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* in terms that echo the shocked responses of those encountering Manet's *Olympia* at its first

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depicts a model rather than Lydia. In order to avoid confusion about the identity of the model, I have not used the Breeskin titles here.

Of the two other pictures mentioned by Martelli, the "virile portrait" may be BrCR 49, *Portrait of Miss Cassatt's Father (Robert Stevenson Cassatt)*, while the picture of "women in the open air of a garden" has never been identified.

[9] Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, September 1, 1879, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 147; the drawing after Cassatt's work appeared in *La Vie Moderne* (8 August 1879), 283; it is reproduced in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 254. According to the material collected in Berson, three drawings by Cassatt or after her works in the 1879 exhibition were published in French periodicals, while only two drawings by Degas were reproduced, and no drawings by or after any of the other Impressionists.

[10] Louis Besson, "MM. les impressionnistes," *L'Événement* (11 April 1879), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 213: "Les études de Mme Mary Cassatt trahissent la préoccupation ardente d'attirer le regard, plutôt que le désir de faire bien. Son *'étude de femme avec éventail,'* sa *'femme dans une loge,'* et *tutti quanti* provoquent le rire."

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exhibition in 1863. *Le Soir*, for instance, described Cassatt's picture as "simply, completely horrible. The poor woman has dirty shoulders in the manner of [Zola's] *Assommoir*, and behind her one can see the loges where the gilding is replaced by egg-yolk yellow that gives the impression of being about to fall on her shoulders."[11] It is interesting to note that this critic gave the artist's name as "M. Mary Cassatt" and employed the masculine pronoun "il" for her, as if unable to admit that a female painter was capable of portraying a woman who is not immediately and unmistakably identifiable as a *femme honnête*, or of painting in this bold manner, which "cheapens" both the figure and her surroundings.

Henry Havard admitted that Cassatt possessed "great qualities" but nonetheless associated her paint handling with diseased female flesh: "if there is anything in the world that is especially sweet, fresh, smooth, rosy, and transparent, it is the skin of a woman; why then crackle it like a wall and take away its velvety quality, its delicacy, and its freshness with unseasonable and eczemic impastos?"[12] The *New York Times* critic, too, used terms similar to those of *Le Soir*'s reviewer to describe *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*:

> I am sorry for Mary Cassatt; she is a Philadelphian and has had her place in the Salon – a great triumph for a woman and a foreigner; but why has she gone astray? Her "Lady in an Opera Box" is a nasty representation of a dirty-faced female, in variegated raiment, who in real-life would never have been admitted in any decent

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[11] "Exposition des impressionnistes," *Le Soir* (12 April 1879), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 241: "tout simplement horrible. La pauvre femme a les épaules d'une saleté d'Assommoir, derrière elle on aperçoit des loges où la dorure est remplacée par du jaune d'oeuf qui a l'air de vouloir tomber sur ses épaules." Zola's *L'Assommoir* was first published in 1877.

[12] Henry Havard, "L'Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Le Siècle* (27 April 1879), 3, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 223: "grandes qualités"; "s'il y a une chose au monde qui soit particulièrement douce, fraîche, unie, rosée et transparente, c'est la peau de la femme; pourquoi donc la crépir comme un mur, et, par des empâtements intempestifs et eczémateux, lui enlever son velouté, sa délicatesse et sa fraîcheur?"

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> society until she had washed her face and shoulders, while the background looks as though painted with the yolk of an egg.[13]

In general, the language of these critics, with its allusions to dirt, disrepute, and disease, implies that the figure is not in fact a member of "decent society" but rather of the courtesan class. (Lafenestre's description of Cassatt's images, regarding her "luminous decompositions" of "female flesh exhausted from evenings out and the light shudder of the daily toilette,"[14] while reflecting current scientific ideas about the "decomposition" of tones in different light, likewise carries this connotation.) While this vocabulary of grime and decay was not uncommon in the general response to Impressionist painting, it takes on a different inflection when applied to the works of women artists. The *Times* reviewer's question regarding Cassatt the "Philadelphian" (i.e. patrician from the Main Line)—"why has she gone astray?"—conflates the artist and her figure, insinuating that Cassatt has compromised her own reputation to some degree by abandoning the proper venue of the Salon for the improper Independents and this improper picture.

Other critics, in contrast, found this figure of *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* to be the very essence of bourgeois refinement. Arsène Houssaye (writing under the name F.-C. de Syène), after declaring *Woman Reading* to be "a miracle of simplicity and elegance," also asserted, "Nothing could be more graciously true and aristocratic than [Cassatt's] portraits of young women, unless it is *la Femme dans une loge*, reflected in a mirror placed behind her shoulders and fiery blond hair."[15] Alfred de Lostalot took this idea a step further, equating the artist's gender, her "breeding," and her handling:

> We are first of all struck by the natural grandeur of the series of portraits, bust or half-length, that forms this exhibition. It is at first the absolute sincerity of this young

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[13] "Art in Paris," *New York Times* (27 April 1879), 2.

[14] Lafenestre, "Les Expositions d'art: Les Indépendans," 227.

[15] F.-C. de Syène [Arsène Houssaye], "Salon de 1879," *L'Artiste* (1 May 1879), 292, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 243: "miracle de simplicité et d'élégance"; "Rien de plus gracieusement vrai et aristocratique que ses portraits de jeunes filles, si ce n'est *la Femme dans un loge*, reflétant dans une glace placée derrière elle ses épaules et sa chevelure d'un blond ardent."

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> artist, then a feeling of elegance, a distinction that reveals the hand of a woman, and a woman who is well-born. The very curious execution of her studies, very searching in the modeling of flesh, never ceases to be something delicate, naive, and absolutely subordinated to the will of just expression. One particularly remarks upon the portrait of a young English woman, in décolletage, facing the spectator from the loge of a theater; in the background, a mirror reflects the room which is resplendent with light. What accumulated difficulties in such a subject! Miss Cassatt has surmounted almost all of them; her work is certainly incomplete, and the singularity of aspect can astonish at first approach, but one is soon captivated by all the seductions that the talent and the nature of the artist have put there.[16]

For de Lostalot Cassatt's subject matter and technique were seductive yet refined rather than horrifying or déclassé, and provided evidence of her artistic ambition. On the whole, whether critics praised or derided her works, they felt compelled to speak to her reputation, as a woman "well-born" or "gone astray."

How is it that critics could produce these highly varied opinions regarding Cassatt's work in 1879? Aside from personal preferences that might cause them to lean one way or another, such as attitudes toward modernism and female artists, they were likely responding to a number of complex and even contradictory features in Cassatt's pictures, and in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* more than the others. As Robert Cassatt explained, the light in the painting comes from the back of the theater box—from

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[16] Alfred de Lostalot, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Les Beaux-Arts illustrés* 10 (1879), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 229: "Ce qui frappe tout d'abord dans la série de portraits, en buste ou à mi-corps, grandeur nature, qui forment son exposition, c'est d'abord la sincérité absolue de cette jeune artiste, puis un sentiment d'élégance, une distinction qui révèlent la main d'une femme, et d'une femme bien née. L'exécution très curieuse de recherches, très fouillée dans le modelé des chairs, ne cesse pas pour cela d'être délicate, naïve et absolument subordonnée à la volonté d'exprimer juste. On remarque particulièrement le portrait d'une jeune femme anglaise, décollétée, faisant face au spectateur dans une loge de théâtre: au fond, une glace où se reflète la salle resplendissante de lumière. Que de difficultés accumulées dans un pareil sujet! Miss Cassatt les a surmontées presque toutes; l'oeuvre est certainement incomplète, et la singularité de l'aspect peut étonner au premier abord, mais on ne tarde pas à être captivé par toutes les séductions que le talent et la nature de l'artiste y ont mises."

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the mirror; one result is that the figure's face is depicted in shadow, which helps to explain in part some critics' perception of "dirty" skin, but it also has the effect of de-emphasizing her face, the conventional focal point of figural painting. Cassatt's treatment of the shadowed facial skin is not smooth but rather striated and hatched, in contrast with her handling of the exposed areas of the torso, which are more conventionally painted, though also dappled unevenly with shadow. The figure's coiffure is brushed in with soft, flowing strokes, though the reflected hair shares none of this burnished, sweeping quality; instead, it is patchy and dry. An unequal relation between figure and reflection is also evident in the fact that the pose and its reflection do not precisely match up, and while a dab of white paint on the back of the neck in the reflection suggests the clasp of a piece of jewelry, the woman's pearl necklace does not appear in the mirror.

In effect, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* deflects as much as it invites or reflects, due to Cassatt's manipulation of pose, paint, and mirror. While the figure turns her shoulders toward the viewer, her face is angled away, and she leans back a bit, as if to avoid intimacy. The slightly open fan, while alluding to flirtation, also serves to keep the viewer at some distance. The face, with its slight smile, appeals to, but does not completely welcome the viewer, having been depicted in shadow. The décolletage reveals a broad area of skin, yet there is only the most meager suggestion of breasts beneath the gown. The paint, though describing an attractive woman, is not uniformly applied in an even, disciplined manner generally considered appropriate to the subject; it is sometimes silky, sometimes rough, sometimes liquid, sometimes pasty. And the mirror, rather than accurately doubling the alluring figure and thus offering not one but two sides to the spectator's possessive gaze, denies any such plenitude, providing an illusion of depth yet flatly proclaiming the canvas to be a painted surface, and complicating the spatial reading of the picture.

The reserved self-possession of this figure, which we now see is not simply a matter of her bearing and expression but is also a result of Cassatt's handling of materials

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and mirror reflection in a way that denies the viewer full possession of the image, was also understood by a number of critics in relation to both English national characteristics and a contemporary English manner of painting. De Lostalot described *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* as a "portrait of a young English woman," while Lafenestre, who praised Cassatt and Degas as the most talented of the independents, detected in their work "the honest and delicate charm of English art."[17] Edmond Duranty, who also agreed that these two artists presented the best work in the exhibition, followed his appreciation of Degas's work with the comment, "It is equally impossible to visit the exhibition without being interested to the highest degree by the portraits of Mlle Cassatt. A quite remarkable and very English sense of elegance and distinction (she is American) mark these portraits. Mlle Cassatt *merits our most particular attention.*"[18]

Critics were likely responding in part to Cassatt's subject matter when commenting upon her "Englishness," for her scenes paralleled those favored at the 1878 Royal Academy exhibition—one critic explained that the "prevailing note" of that show was "[d]omesticity, as shown in the almost exclusive devotion of our painting to *genre subjects*, in the prosaic tone of our drama, and in the narrow range of our fiction."[19] English painting was much on the minds of French critics in 1879, having made a strong impression at the Exposition Universelle of 1878. Duranty reviewed the English painting section for the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, and, in keeping with his 1877 writings on gestures in paintings in the Louvre, attended to similar issues of national characteristics and phsyiognomical appearance in the pictures on view. He opened his review by linking

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[17] De Lostalot, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," 229: "portrait d'une jeune femme anglaise"; Lafenestre, "Les Expositions d'art: Les Indépendans [*sic*] et les aquarellistes," 226: "le charme honnête et délicat de l'art anglais."

[18] [Edmond] Duranty, "La Quatrième Exposition faite par un groupe d'artistes indépendants," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (19 April 1879), 127, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 219: "Il est également impossible de visiter l'exposition sans être intéressé au plus haut point par les portraits de Mlle Cassatt. Un sens d'élégance et de distinction des plus remarquables, et très-anglais (elle est Américaine), marque ces portraits. Mlle Cassatt *mérite une attention toute particulière.*"

[19] "The Reflection of English Character in English Art," *Quarterly Review* 3 (January 1879), 91, 103.

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English painting to the Dutch and Flemish art he had favored in his gesture essays.[20] Moving on to the contemporary works, he observed, "Young women, and women with children, fill the canvases of England, above all young girls, in their freshness and pure magic."[21] These women, however, were often marked by buck teeth or hare-lips, he continued, though these features were offset by "the beauty and elevation of the forehead, the nobility of the nose, and the penetrating firmness of the gaze."[22] Duranty also expressed an appreciation for the work of Millais, and especially his *Three Sisters* [Fig. 48], "so naive, so freely painted in their variegated range, so girlish, [that] they dazzle me with their rare splendor of clear tonalities and richly illuminated life."[23]

Tullo Massarani, another critic reviewing the 1878 Exposition Universelle, also discussed the factural dimension of Millais's painting, in terms suggesting that this type of comparison may have been made implicitly by those viewing Cassatt's work in 1879. "In his early works, already quite strong," wrote Massarani,

> one saw M. Millais inscribing them with a rare firmness of brush, a mysterious and patient handling that confused and charmed us at the same time, an honest sincerity of domestic feeling, and the very soft tendernesses of the feminine heart. He has returned to us today with an even greater liberty of facture and a bit of the bizarre, if one likes, but with an intuition no less profound, and with an observation of the truth no less conscientious.[24]

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[20] Edmond Duranty, "Exposition Universelle: Les écoles étrangères de peinture," *Gazette des beaux arts* (1 September 1878), 299.

[21] Ibid., 305: "Les jeunes filles, les femmes et les enfants remplissent les toiles de l'Angleterre, surtourt les jeunes filles, dans leur fraîche et pure magie."

[22] Ibid., 307: "la beauté et l'élévation du front, la noblesse du nez et la fermeté pénétrante du regard."

[23] Ibid., 308: "si naïves, si librement peintes dans leur gamme diaprée, si enfantines, m'éblouiront par une rare splendeur de tonalités claires et de vie richement illuminée."

[24] Tullo Massarani, *L'Art à Paris*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1880), 67: "Dans ses premières oeuvres, fort remarquables déjà, on avait vu M. Millais prêter une rare finesse de pinceau, un faire mystérieux et patient, qui vous confondait et vous charmait du même coup, à l'honnête sincérité des sentiments domestiques, aux plus suaves tendresses d'un coeur de femme. Il nous est revenu, aujourd'hui, avec une plus grande liberté de facture et avec un brin de bizarrerie, si l'on veut, mais avec une intuition non moins profonde, avec une observation du vrai non moins consciencieuse."

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This language is similar to that used by critics in 1879 to describe Cassatt's work, which also stressed her "domestic feeling," femininity, and a freedom of handling that bordered on the "bizarrre" at times. It may be that an appeal to English art and character and their intersections allowed critics to grasp these images by Cassatt that sometimes flirted with impropriety (as in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*) but also denied viewers the same type of access to the female body on display most often provided by male painters, whether academic or avant-garde.

Alfred de Lostalot's *Beaux-Arts illustrés* article (in which he discussed Cassatt's facture in terms quite close to those used by Massarani and described *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* as a "portrait of a young English woman") was illustrated with *Jeune femme lisant*[25] [Fig. 49], a drawing by the artist after her painting *Woman Reading*. The critic announced that the painting had been sold to Antonin Proust, a childhood friend of Manet's and an early champion of Impressionism whose values managed to combine republican political ideals and cultural elitism; in 1880 he would be named as the French government's first minister of the arts.[26] As part of his mission to support the conservation of French arts and crafts, Proust promoted the *amateur* as a leader in shaping national taste. Like the Goncourts, he gave particular emphasis to works of the Rococo period and appreciated a quality of "*séduction*" above all. It seems likely, then, that Cassatt's critics and patrons found the "English" character of her painting to be complemented by certain elements of rococo style, an aspect of her work which is quite evident in the brightly colored and loosely brushed *Woman Reading*.[27]

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[25] De Lostalot's article, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," appeared on pp. 82-3 of *Les Beaux-Arts illustrés* (1879), while the illustration after Cassatt's work appeared on p. 84. This work does not appear in Breeskin and its present location is unknown; it is reproduced in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 254.

[26] Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 119. My account of Proust in this paragraph is indebted to Silverman.

[27] The drawing after this work (present collection unknown), published in *Les Beaux-Arts illustrés*, and an unidentified pastel, *Tête d'enfant*, were offered in the Duranty sale, held after his death in 1880. It is not known whether they were in his collection during his lifetime or were donated by the artist to the sale,

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To some degree, *Woman Reading* shares features with works by another artist associated with the rococo revival, Raimondo de Madrazo y Garreta, such as his *Hot Chocolate* [Fig. 50], c. 1884–85, not only in its domestic subject but also in terms of handling. The critic L. Lejeune, in an 1879 *Lippincott's* article, identified the manner of modern Spanish painters such as Madrazo and Mariano Fortuny with that of Impressionism, describing Fortuny in particular as a painter of *le charme de l'inachevé*, in whose works "breadth and detail are placed side by side in the most paradoxical manner."[28] Cassatt is known to have been an occasional visitor to the Parisian home of the Philadelphia collector William Hood Stewart, an important patron of Messonier as well as these Spanish artists, and her penchant for combining carefully finished areas of a picture (usually the faces) with broader swaths of paint parallels their method.[29] The comparison of *Woman Reading* with *Hot Chocolate*, however, makes evident Cassatt's modernist innovations: the close-cropped viewpoint; the division of the composition into three bands (pink, white, and green), punctuated by the dark stripe of hair; the taking of the *inachevé* to another level. As in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, Cassatt plays down the reader's facial features; there is none of the preciousness of Madrazo's analogy between the porcelain cup with decorations painted on it in red and the porcelain-like skin and painted-red lips of the woman who holds it.

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which was held to benefit Duranty's companion. See Jean Sutherland Boggs, et al., *Degas* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1988), 219, for more information on this sale, the "Vente Par Suite de Émile Duranty, Homme de lettres," Hôtel Drouot, Paris, January 28-29, 1881. (Duranty's full name was Louis Émile Edmond Duranty.)

[28] L. Lejeune, "The Impressionist School of Painting," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 24 (December 1879), 726. Of Cassatt and her French colleagues, Lejeune wrote, "Let the reader apply the same test whenever he may come across a picture with the signature of Pisaro [*sic*], of Claude Monet, Renoir, Caillebotte, Mrs. Mary Cassett [*sic*] of Philadelphia, Degas, Sisley or Madame Berthe Morisot. If the impression he receives is agreeable, he may give in his adherence to the new school. Five minutes of eye-delight are worth more than all arguments or theories of art" (727).

[29] Anticipating her first visit to Stewart's gallery, Cassatt wrote in a letter of January 1, 1873, from Seville, "There is I believe a fine collection of modern paintings owned by an amateur here. Fortuny's Madrazos &c, the gentleman called on me, but his gallery is undergoing repairs and I am not to see it yet. . . . [Madrazo's] modelling and his manner as far as I have seen is fine"; in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 114.

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In general, Cassatt's contributions to her 1879 debut exhibition with the Impressionists, *Woman Reading* and *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* in particular, were favorably received. The next year, however, her works drew more tepid responses, split in four nearly equal parts between positive, negative, and middling mentions, and those who declined to mention her work altogether. Critics connected her pastel, *At the Theater*[30] [Fig. 51], to images by Degas; some also listed her as "M.[onsieur]" Cassatt; and others continued to relate her pictures to English art and character.

Charles Ephrussi, another critic associated with the revival of rococo decorative arts, touched upon a number of these themes in his *Gazette des beaux-arts* review of the 1880 exhibition. After discussing the "strange" yellow and violet hues in one of Degas's theater pictures, Ephrussi turned to Cassatt:

> These relations of tones appear more marked in the attempts of Miss Cassatt, the precious student of M. Degas. Here, figures of greater dimensions are seen more plainly in the reflections of light. A woman with red hair dressed in a gown of yellow tulle (and what yellow!) [Fig. 51], is seated in the shadow of a loge, on a red chair, before a mirror; her nude shoulders and arms are lit by a violet light with recollections of yellow, blended in a very bold harmony by a hand if not firm and skillful [*savante*], at least light and delicate.[31]

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[30] As explained above, this work is also unlikely to represent Cassatt's sister Lydia; therefore, I have not used the Breeskin title, *Lydia Leaning on Her Arms, Seated in a Loge.*

[31] Charles Ephrussi, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 May 1880), 487, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 278: "Ces relations de tons apparaissent plus marquées dans les essais de miss Cassatt, la précieuse élève de M. Degas. Ici, les personnages de plus grandes dimensions reçoivent plus pleinement les reflets de la lumière. Une femme aux cheveux roux, vêtue d'une robe de tulle jaune (et quel jaune!), est assise, dans la pénombre d'une loge, sur un fauteuil rouge, devant une glace; les épaules et les bras nus sont éclairés d'une lumière violacée avec des rappels de jaune, fondue dans une harmonie très osée, par une main sinon ferme et savante, au moins légère et délicate."

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Like Proust, Ephrussi also became the owner of a work by Cassatt, in this instance, the pastel he discussed in this passage, which was in his collection by the end of 1881.[32]

Ephrussi continued his review by discussing Cassatt's brushwork, noting, "The *Thé* [Fig. 52] and the *Jeune Femme en blanc* have a heavier facture; one feels in them more an English accent than the advice of Degas. We believe we have encountered, in many expositions of painting in London, studies of this genre, bright and broadly brushed."[33] The *Thé*—now known as *Five O'Clock Tea*—seems closer to Millais's *Three Sisters* than anything Cassatt exhibited in 1879; both works depict women engaged in sociable activities, set against a patterned background. At the same time, Cassatt's work differs significantly from both Millais's example and even her own earlier pictures. While the woman at left is posed much as she was in *Woman Reading*, the composition of *Five O'Clock Tea* is far more complex, adding a second figure, an angled couch, striped wallpaper, mantle, vase, and mirror, and of course, the table that cuts across the foreground, topped by a still life of silver tea set and porcelain cup that dominates the lower quarter of the picture.

It is as if in *Five O'Clock Tea* Cassatt set herself the problem of radicalizing a polite and logically structured image such as Madrazo's *Hot Chocolate*: pulling us forward until we are over the tea set, placing pattern against pattern in the flowered upholstery and striped wallpaper, and again, obscuring a figure's face, this time with the audacious device of a teacup that hides the lips, nose, and part of the eyes. Though he liked the *Thé* better than the theater picture, Eugène Véron commented, "As always, the expression on the faces is absolutely negligible, but the young woman in the foreground,

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[32] The poet and critic Jules Laforgue described a work that appears to be this pastel as being in Ephrussi's collection in a letter to Ephrussi, Berlin, [December 5, 1881], in Jules Laforgue, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1986), 718.

[33] Ephrussi, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," 278: "Le *Thé* et la *Jeune Femme en blanc* sont d'une facture déjà alourdie; on y sent plus le terroir anglais que les conseils de M. Degas. Nous croyons avoir rencontré, dans mainte exposition de peinture à Londres, des études de ce genre, claires et largement brossées." The *Jeune femme en blanc* is possibly BrCR 94, *Lydia Reading in a Garden*, c. 1880, oil on canvas (Art Institute of Chicago).

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who we see from the side, is well modeled in the light, without gimmicks nor *repoussoir*."[34] Paul Mantz, finding that "the intention isn't bad" in this picture of "two honorable ladies taking tea," focused on the foreground still life:

> The artist has succeeded, not without difficulty, in representing the metal of the English teapot; but how has she painted the sugar bowl? How to figure the circular forms in perspective, shining with light on its curving surfaces! This was the impossible thing! Mlle Cassatt has made the lines dance, she has crumpled the metal, but she did not know how to express her thought. This unfortunate sugar bowl remains floating like a dream. There are tragic hours in the life of an independent.[35]

While some critics continued to associate Cassatt with Degas, others sought to align her more closely with the women artists of the group, especially Morisot. For example, Arthur Baignères stated, "Madames Morisot, Bracquemond and Cassatt diversely represent the feminine aspect of Impressionism. Mme Morisot assembles gray fogs that are condensed into the appearance of women's portraits. Miss Cassatt, faithful to the theater, shows us a smear of yellow in a red one. It's a woman in a loge. The *Thé* is a rational picture and the figures in it truly seem to be drinking."[36] Nonetheless, though critics like Baignères compartmentalized the women artists of the group within a feminized

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[34] Eugène Véron, "Cinquième Exposition des indépendants," *L'Art* 21 (1880), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 318: "Comme toujours, l'expression des visages est absolument négligée, mais la jeune fille de premier plan, qu'on voit de côté, est bien modelée dans la lumière, sans ficelle ni repoussoir."

[35] Paul Mantz, "Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendants," *Le Temps* (14 April 1880), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 297: "L'intention n'est pas mauvaise"; "deux honnêtes dames prenant du thé"; "L'artiste est parvenue, non sans peine, à représenter la théière de métal anglais; mais comment peindre le sucrier? Quoi! figurer des formes circulaires en perspective, des luisants de lumière sur des surfaces tournantes! C'était la chose impossible! Mlle Cassatt a fait danser les lignes, elle a chiffoné le métal, elle n'a pas su exprimer sa pensée. Ce malheureux sucrier est resté flottant comme un rêve. Il y a des heures tragiques dans la vie des indépendants."

[36] Arthur Baignères, "Exposition des oeuvres de M. J. de Nittis: 5e Exposition de peinture, par MM. Bracquemond, Caillebotte, Degas, etc.," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (10 April 1880), 118, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 266-7: "Mmes Morisot, Bracquemond et Cassatt représentent diversement l'impressionnisme féminin. Mme Morisot assemble des brouillards gris qui se condensent avec des apparences de portraits de femme. Miss Cassatt, fidèle au théâtre, nous montre une tache jaune dans du rouge. C'est une femme dans une loge. Le *Thé* est un tableau raisonnable et les personnages ont vraiment l'air de boire."

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subsection of Impressionism, they also took pains to distinguish between Morisot and Cassatt by identifying them, respectively, with the French and English traditions.

Morisot's work could be quite easily recuperated under the rubric of a feminized, seductive—and French—rococo manner, as it was by Ephrussi, who followed his observation of Cassatt's "English accent" with a declaration that Morisot "is French in her distinction, elegance, gaiety, and insouciance; she loves joyous and restless painting; she grinds flower petals onto her palette in order to then spread them on the canvas with airy and spirited touches, thrown out a bit haphazardly. . . ."[37] A number of other critics cited one specific rococo painter as Morisot's touchstone: "Her sketches recall without the least servility but with some sort of spiritual affiliation the most charming sketches of Fragonard," wrote Henry Trianon; "Since the eighteenth century, since Fragonard, spirited and bright tones of such daring have rarely been displayed," stated Burty; and so forth.[38] Her paintings for the 1880 exhibition, such as *Woman at Her Toilette* [Fig. 29], were characterized by an extremely loose handling of pigment, a palette dominated by light pinks, blues, and greens in addition to white, and backgrounds resplendent with flowers and foliage, lending credence to the rococo comparison.

Cassatt's works, on the other hand, varied more in technique, theme, and mood, from the solid and sober *Five O'Clock Tea* to the high-key, scratchily drawn pastel, *At the Theater*. Critics seem not to have acknowledged the radicality of this last picture, perhaps finding it too close to her *succès de scandale* of the previous year, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, to merit extended consideration. Yet the pastel evinces notable

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[37] Ephrussi, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," 278: "est Française par la distinction, l'élégance, la gaieté, l'insouciance; elle aime la peinture réjouissante et remuante; elle broie sur sa palette des pétales de fleurs, pour les étaler ensuite sur la toile en touches spirituelles, soufflées, jetées un peu au hasard. . . ."

[38] Henry Trianon, "Cinquième Exposition par un groupe d'artistes indépendants (10, rue des Pyramides.)," *Le Constitutionnel* (8 April 1880), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 314: "Ses ébauches rappellent sans la moindre servilité mais par une sorte de filiation spirituelle les plus charmantes ébauches de Fragonard"; Ph.[illipe] Burty, "Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendant *[sic]*," *La République française* (10 April 1880), 2, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 269: "Depuis le dix-huitième siècle, depuis Fragonard, on n'a point étalé avec une hardiesse plus spirituelle des tons plus clairs."

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differences from the painting. The colors are more strident, the flesh tones more darkly shadowed, and the mirror reflects in the most cursory manner and without showing any of the theater interior, an aspect that was acknowledged by Trianon: "This young woman dressed in yellow, with her figure reflected in half-tones, is done as well as possible, but is rather more bad than good in the lateral mirror where not a touch nor a trace indicates presence."[39] In a sense, in *At the Theater* Cassatt simultaneously reworked her painting from the previous year and the stereotypes of pastel as a rococo medium suited to soft, blended textures and the rendering of rosy and invitingly tactile female flesh. Not surprisingly, *The Artist's* critic condemned the picture in terms even harsher than those used to describe the "dirty" and "eczemic" skin of the woman in the 1879 painting, claiming that the "combinations of reds, greens, and yellows" in this "study of a very ugly and very *decolletée* young woman . . . remind one strongly of the scales of a mackerel, after a week's exposure at a fishmonger's."[40]

On the whole, critics found it difficult to categorize the images by Cassatt, a woman and a foreigner from a country with a limited artistic tradition, of which they knew little in any case. Trianon, in fact, misidentified the artist, whom he considered to represent the very definition of *impressionniste*, as both English *and* male: "We note especially the *Tea*, by an English artist, M. Henry Cassatt, who, after having surrendered himself, in this agreeable picture, to all the resources of execution, in two other compositions should have believed in making a gesture of politeness toward impressionism."[41] For those critics who were aware that Cassatt was a woman, evoking

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[39] Trianon, "Cinquième Exposition par un groupe d'artistes indépendants," 313: "Cette jeune fille vêtue de jaune, et la figure dans la demi-teinte se reflète, tant bien que mal, plutôt mal que bien, dans une glace latérale dont pas une touche ni un trait n'indiquent la présence."

[40] "Our Correspondent," "Art Abroad. France," *Artist and Journal of Home Culture* 1 (15 April 1880), 117.

[41] Trianon, "Cinquième Exposition par un groupe d'artistes indépendants," 313: "Nous citerons spécialement 'le Thé', par un artiste anglais, M. Henry Cassatt, qui, après s'être livré, dans cet agréable tableau, à toutes les ressources de l'exécution, a cru devoir, dans deux autres compositions, faire acte de politesse envers l'impressionnisme."

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English character and style enabled them to associate her imagery with the art of a national school that was often affiliated with the realms of the domestic and the feminine, as Morisot's was linked to the most effete aspects of the Rococo. In this way, the fact that both artists were women working in what were deemed to be appropriately feminine modes came to seem more significant than the more unsettling notion that they were also modernists at the forefront of Impressionist innovation, creating pictures that flirted with traditional scenarios of masculine possession while often working to deny them.[42]

As I suggested in the Introduction, it was Huysmans in 1881 who would lean most heavily upon the comparison between Cassatt and certain aspects of English culture, particularly by likening her female figures to characters from the novels of Dickens. In his review of the 1880 exhibition, he began moving toward this viewpoint:

> The only thing that remains for me to do now, before arriving at the work of M. Degas, which I have saved for last, is to speak some words about the two *peintresses* of the group, Mlle Cassatt and Mme Berthe Morizot.
>
> Student of Degas,—I see it in the charming painting where a red-headed woman, dressed in yellow, her back reflected in a mirror in the purple background of a loge,—Mlle Cassatt is evidently also a student of the English painters, because her excellent canvas, two women who take tea, in an interior, reminds me of certain works shown in 1878 in the English section [of the Exposition Universelle].
>
> Here, it is the bourgeoisie again, but it is no longer that of M. Caillebotte; it is also world of ease, but more refined, more elegant. In spite of a personality that has not yet completely extricated itself, Mlle Cassatt nevertheless has a curiosity, a special attraction, because a flutter of feminine nerves passes through paintings that

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[42] Tamar Garb, in "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism," 57-66, demonstrates that by the 1890s Impressionism itself became defined as a "feminine art" by many critics, with some, like Camille Mauclair, citing Morisot as its foremost practitioner.

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> are more balanced, more peaceful, more knowing [*savante*] than those of Mme Morizot, a student of Manet.[43]

Huysmans opened his review by segregating Cassatt and Morisot from the other *indepéndants* under the term *peintresses* (Marie Bracquemond, who exhibited only three pictures, is dismissed in half a sentence shared with her husband). He then praised Cassatt's work while simultaneously calling into question her originality by positing that she is a "student" of English painting and of Degas. Ultimately, however, what he found most compelling about her work had less to do with originality than with the approximation of female physiology—the "flutter of feminine nerves"—in her pictures. (Meanwhile, Morisot's feminine nerves fluttered too much for Huysmans: "An intoxicating, worldly elegance is emitted by these morbid sketches, these surprising improvisations which might justly be described using the epithet hysterical, perhaps.")[44]

Huysmans's 1880 review anticipated ideas he articulated in his 1881 commentary about the presumed consonance between the woman's artist's subject matter and her manner. He was not able to fully make this connection, however, until she began exhibiting scenes of child care. It is to the beginnings of her treatment of this subject that I will now turn.

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[43] J.-K. Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1880," *L'Art moderne* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1883), 110, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 290:

Il ne me reste plus maintenant, avant d'arriver à l'oeuvre de M. Degas que j'ai gardée pour la fin, qu'à dire quelques mots des deux peintresses du groupe, Mlle Cassatt et Mme Berthe Morizot.

Élève de Degas, —je le vois dans ce charmant tableau où une femme rousse, vêtue de jaune, reflète son dos dans une glace sur le fond pourpre d'une loge,—Mlle Cassatt est élève évidement aussi des peintres anglais, car son excellente toile, deux dames qui prennent le thé, dans un intérieur, me fait songer à certains des oeuvres exposées, en 1878, dans la section anglaise.

Ici, c'est la bourgeoisie encore, mais ce n'est déjà plus celle de M. Caillebotte, c'est un monde à l'aise aussi, mais plus affiné, plus élégant. En dépit de sa personnalité qui ne s'est pas complètement dégagée encore, Mlle Cassatt a cependant une curiosité, un attrait spécial, car un fouetté des nerfs féminins passe dans sa peinture plus équilibrée, plus paisible, plus savante, que celle de Mme Morizot, une élève de M. Manet.

[44] Ibid.: "Une élégance mondaine s'échappe, capiteuse, de ces ébauches morbides, de ces surprenantes improvisations que l'épithète d'hystérisées qualifierait justement, peut-être."

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II.

It does not appear that Cassatt included any images of mothers or children in her first two Impressionist exhibitions except for an unidentified painting shown in 1879 titled *Portrait de petite fille*.[45] She did, however, begin experimenting with these subjects in this period, most likely during the spring of 1878. Her earliest known work depicting child care is *The Nurse* [Fig. 53], probably completed in mid-1878, but not shown until the Impressionist exhibition of 1886. A picture of a governess and her two young charges within a garden, *The Nurse* is very much in keeping with similar small-scale images of women with children in landscape settings that were created or exhibited by other Impressionists in the 1870s. Degas's *At the Races in the Countryside* [Fig. 54], for example, portrays a wet nurse feeding an infant while attending an outdoor event, and Morisot's *Hide-and-Seek* [Fig. 28] depicts the artist's sister Edma playing with her daughter while strolling in the country; both of these works were shown at the first Impressionist exhibition, held in 1874. Cassatt's painting also has features in common with Monet's *Camille Monet and a Child in a Garden* [Fig. 55], from 1875, which represents the artist's wife attending to her needlework while their son plays at her feet. Like Monet, Cassatt filled her image to the corners with greenery; yet, she angled the composition with an upward tilt of the path, similar to the way she had conceived the space in *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6].

These pictures must be understood in relation to the idea of women's work more than the theme of leisure so often associated with Impressionism, for the types of work performed by women while caring for children began to come under new scrutiny in the

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[45] Some have suggested that this work, #47 in the catalogue, was *The Blue Room (Little Girl in a Blue Armchair)* [Fig. 6]. See, for example, Moffett, et al., *The New Painting*, 1986, 267, and Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 2, 1996, 108. Given that no concrete evidence exists to support this point, and the fact that no known review from 1879 describes anything that resembles this distinctive picture (which would have seemed even more distinctive in 1879), it seems unlikely to me that *The Blue Room* was the work shown as *Portrait de petite fille*.

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years around the Impressionist exhibitions.[46] Women were increasingly encouraged to nurse their own babies rather than employing wet nurses, for instance, and in 1874 the Roussel Law regulating the supervision of nurslings was adopted, to protect "the children of the bourgeois of Paris against the abuses of the wet-nursing business," wrote its author.[47]

In 1868, an English journalist employed the idea of the close-knit French family, consisting of mother, children, and nurse, to express anxiety about the decline of maternal sentiment in the British Isles, observing,

> In France, where it is the fashion for mother and *bonne* to be together both out of doors and at home, at least the children are not neglected nor ill-treated, as is too often the case with us; and if they are improperly managed, according to our ideas, the fault is in the system, not in the want of maternal supervision. Here it is a very rare case indeed when the mother accompanies the nurse and children; and those days when she does are nursery gala days, to be talked of and remembered for weeks after.[48]

Whether Cassatt's image, which lacks the maternal presence desired by this writer, represents a change in French custom or whether the writer has idealized the French family for rhetorical effect is difficult to know (though the latter is most likely); it is even possible that the figure of the mother was eliminated here simply to suit Cassatt's pictorial needs. What is more certain is that the figure of the nurse had come to be a source of great concern throughout the Western world by the mid-1870s. As the private home began to be defined as a space within which the mother was to provide hands-on care and a moral education for her children, the nurse came to be viewed as a figure symbolizing

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[46] On this issue, see Linda Nochlin's important essay, "Morisot's *Wet Nurse*: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting," in *Perspectives on Morisot*, 91-102.

[47] Jean-Baptiste-Victor-Théophile Roussel, quoted in George D. Sussman, *Selling Mother's Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1715–1914* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 128.

[48] "Modern Mothers," reprinted from *Saturday Review* in *Ladies' Repository*, 128.

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maternal indifference, and further, to be seen as a potential danger, a source of physical and mental contamination.

In her 1878 *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Children*, the first woman medical doctor, English-born and American-educated Elizabeth Blackwell, admonished, "The earliest duty of the parent is to watch over the infant child. Few parents are aware how very early evil habits may be formed, nor how injurious the influence of the nurse often is to the child. The mother's eye, full of tenderness and respect, must always watch over her children."[49] In France, Albert Blanquet provided a cautionary tale about a young mother who failed in her surveillance duty because she trusted a nurse to perform what should have been her own duties. In his book *Les Femmes*, Blanquet recounted how a woman, feeling indisposed, decided not to accompany her daughter's *bonne* on their daily trip through the Bois de Bolougne. When the nurse returned, the one-year-old girl was sick, but the nurse offered no explanation, and the child soon died. One day a woman says to the mother, "Ah, Madame! . . . you are the mother of the poor little girl, the one who, last year, took that terrible fall!" The truth emerges—the nurse stumbled while pushing the carriage at a run and the child was thrown, injuring her kidneys. Blanquet concluded with a moral lesson: "Never leave your children."[50]

The nurse was also feared for the improprieties she might teach children. The writer of the 1868 *Saturday Review* article on "modern mothers" fretted, "the first lesson taught the youthful Christian in short frocks or knickerbockers is not to carry tales down stairs, and by no means to let mamma know what nurse desires should be kept secret . . . A great deal of other evil, besides these sly beginnings of deceit, is taught in the nursery; a great deal of vulgar thought, of superstitious fear, of class coarseness."[51] In addition,

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[49] Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Children* (1878) (New York: Brentano's Literary Emporium, 1879), 110.

[50] Chrysale [Albert Blanquet], *Les Femmes* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1875), 69-70: "Ah! madame . . . vous êtes la mère de cette pauvre petite fille, qui, l'année dernière, a fait cette chute si horrible!"; "Ne quittez jamais vos enfants."

[51] "Modern Mothers," reprinted from *Saturday Review* in *The Ladies' Repository*, 129.

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much of this "evil" involved the transmission of sexual knowledge, whether through language or by means of physical contact with the child. Blackwell, to support her point about the possibly "injurious influence" of the nurse in relation to the "sexual instinct," referred the reader to studies by French doctors, such as Ulysee Trélat's 1861 *Folie lucide étudiée et considérée au point de vue de la famille et de la société*. She continued, "I have myself traced the ill-health of children in wealthy families to the habits practiced by confidential nurses, apparently quiet, respectable women! Abundant medical testimony confirms these observations."[52]

Blackwell's recommendations for parents also drew upon an association increasingly being made during this period between morality and physical cleanliness, with sexuality often serving as a middle term. The 1860s, for example, saw the passage of a number of Contagious Disease Acts in England, which allowed police to arrest women and jail them in lock-hospitals if they were found to suffer from venereal disease, while in the late 1870s and early 1880s French feminists fought similar regulations. During the same period, Louis Pasteur began to publish his ground-breaking work on the role of microbes and bacteria in the spread of disease, while Proctor & Gamble introduced its Ivory Soap with an advertising slogan proclaiming it to be "99 and 44/100 percent pure." Recommendations on personal hygiene and bathing grew in scope and were frequently linked to the idea of moral education and *hygiene morale*, particularly in relation to the teaching of children. Dr. William Strange, who proclaimed in 1868, "it may be laid down as an axiom that there is no man, woman, or child, except the very invalid, who ought not to perform at least [a] modified kind of bathing every morning of the year," further asserted that without "personal cleanliness," "the intercourse of refined society would be

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[52] Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents*, 158.

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impossible; for its neglect not only indicates a want of proper self-respect, but a disregard of the feelings of others, which argues in the offender a low tone of the moral sense."[53]

Blackwell suggested that the earliest efforts of the mother to care for the child's hygiene would have a beneficial effect on the child's sexual development. She did not provide specific instructions regarding these matters, since "such details are more suited to the private and familiar conferences of those who are resolved to ennoble the life of sex."[54] Part of this "ennobling" entailed child hygiene:

> It will then be seen that no details are insignificant to the watchful mother; that the shape of the child's night-dress, made in the form of loose drawers, manner of washing, manner of attending to its natural wants, the nightly prayer, and quiet falling asleep in a natural attitude, the simple and respectful answers to the questions of awakening curiosity—all endless applications will flow from the principle once clearly embraced of the lofty character of sex, and the necessity of securing its slow and healthful development.[55]

Bernard Perez echoed Blackwell in his influential book, *The First Three Years of Childhood*, published in France in 1878. "I shall content myself with pointing out to parents and educators who are ignorant of them, the possible dangers resulting from the deviation and corruption of the sexual instinct, even as regards quite young children," he stated, while also quoting Blackwell's remarks about the injurious activities of some nurses.[56]

In 1886, Pauline Kergomard, a Republican and one of the first women to serve as an inspector of schools in France, advocated regular bathing for children as a foundation

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[53] William Strange, M.D., "How, When, and Where to Bathe," *Gentleman's Magazine* 1 (August 1868), 297-8. Dr. Strange also noted, "The fact is, the Frenchman washes, the Englishman bathes" (296).
[54] Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents*, 158.
[55] Ibid., 158-9.
[56] Bernard Perez, *The First Three Years of Childhood* (1878, 1st ed.), ed. and trans. Alice M. Christie, 2nd ed. (London: W. Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1885), 58.

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for self-respect.[57] Blackwell's commentary hints at an unspoken meaning of this term, for, as she wrote, "Self-respect can not be too early inculcated. Unnecessary handling should be prevented. The child must be taught that the human body is a wonderful and sacred thing, intended for important and noble ends; that it must not be played or trifled with, or in any way injured. Every thoughtless breach of delicacy should be checked with a gentle gravity, which will not repel or abash, but impress the child."[58] Self-respect likely serves here as a euphemism for the avoidance of masturbation, an activity which must be curbed not solely as a matter of "hygiene" but also in order to set into motion the reduplication of the Oedipal family by encouraging the child to repudiate pleasurable self-sensation in exchange for parental love.[59] That the ritual of mother bathing child was considered important is further suggested in an article on the "Duties of a Nurse" published in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1879. After recommending that the nurse should wash and dry her charges well, then wrap them in a white cotton sheet or blanket to "safeguard against exposure," the writer added, "Most mothers would reserve this pleasure and duty of washing the baby for themselves."[60]

It is against this background that Cassatt painted the first picture on the theme that has come to be viewed as her "signature" subject, mother and child. Though there is no sure way of ascertaining whether *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* [Fig. 56] was intended to depict a mother and child, as opposed to nurse and child, or whether the models depicted were actually mother and child, images of this type have generally been construed as portraying family scenes. (In the case of this picture, the woman's clothing offers a clue: because she wears a morning dress, it seems more likely that she is the

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[57] Pauline Kergomard, in *L'Instruction maternelle dans l'école* (Paris, 1886), quoted and discussed in Nord, "Republican Politics and the Bourgeois Interior," 202.
[58] Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents*, 110-1.
[59] On this subject, see Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family*, 170-4.
[60] Mrs. S. W. Oakey, "Hints to Young Housekeepers.—VI. Duties of a Nurse.," *Scribner's Monthly* 17 (April 1879), 908.

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child's mother rather than nurse.)[61] That Cassatt must have found this painting to represent a considerable step in her development is signaled, as with many of her earlier pictures, by a variant on her standard signature. In contrast to most of her works done after 1870, which are signed simply "Mary Cassatt," this picture is also inscribed with a date: 1880.

Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child has a number of notable features in common with the first work that the artist inscribed "Mary Cassatt": *Reading "Le Figaro"* [Fig. 27]. Like that painting, *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* devotes a large area of the canvas to an exploration of white, though in the case of the later picture, the dominant color is shaded with tones of blue rather than gray, and set off with considerable areas of pink flesh and wallpaper background. More interesting is the fact that the woman appears to be dressed in a gown that is the same as or nearly identical to that which the artist's mother wears in *Reading "Le Figaro."* The gown creates a visual link between the maternal bodies in Cassatt's first fully realized example of her signature style and her most important early foray into her signature subject matter, mother and child.

Yet, while *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, like *Reading "Le Figaro,"* demonstrates that Cassatt had arrived at her mature, Impressionist style, it also looks back to the paintings of Cassatt's favorite historical artist, Correggio. Cassatt's work resembles his c. 1523–25 *Madonna of the Basket* [Fig. 57] (which she probably saw during an 1871 visit to London)[62] in significant ways. Most obvious is the composition: a triangular mother/child group filling most of the canvas, the similarly posed figures, and the inclusion

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[61] The work's early history also fails to clarify this issue: the painting was apparently sold to a private collector, perhaps Charles Ephrussi, soon after completion, and was not exhibited until 1895, when it received its first known title, *La Toilette de l'enfant.* For information on Ephrussi's possible ownership of the picture, see Philippe Kolb and Jean Adhémar, in "Charles Ephrussi (1849–1905), Ses Secrétaires: Laforgue. A. Renan, Proust, 'Sa' Gazette des beaux-arts," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (January 1984), 39 n. 9.

[62] Emily Sartain reported in a letter to her father, written from London on December 15, 1871, "I then went back to the Hotel for Miss Cassatt . . . and afterwards went to the National Gallery— We went to the rooms of the Institute and found there a good collection of Water Colors. . . ." In *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 79.

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of a round vessel—for Correggio, a basket, for Cassatt, a wash bowl—in the lower left portion of the canvas. The mother's absorption with her child is also seen in both pictures, and the domestic subject matter is similar, for the Correggio is unusual in its treatment of the Virgin and Child theme: she is shown dressing him in a jacket that she appears to have made herself, from the evidence of a ball of matching yarn seen in the basket at her side.

That Cassatt might turn to Correggio when first painting scenes that can be identified as maternal in subject is not surprising, given her previous study of his work as well as his reputation as the painter of what the English art historian Anna Jameson called "that soft, yet joyful, maternal feeling for which [he] was remarkable."[63] Citing Raphael and Correggio as originators of a "strictly domestic conception" of the Holy Family type of picture, Jameson explained, "they afford the most perfect examples of the tender and the graceful in sentiment and action, the softest parental feeling, the loveliest forms of childhood."[64] As an example of this sort of image, she referred the reader to *The Madonna of the Basket*.[65] In the *Gazette des beaux-arts* in 1877, Frédéric Reiset also praised the work's depicted and factural gestures, noting that it was done in the manner of a sketch and represented wonderfully varied movements.[66] In 1893, the English critic Emily Constance Cook went so far as to link the picture to Correggio's personal history, stating:

> For an example of domestic detail, we have a pretty record of Correggio's early married life in the little panel picture, "La Vierge au Panier," painted just after the birth of his first child. There is much humanity about it; and it is all the sweeter for

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[63] Mrs. [Anna] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts* (1852), 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857), 264.

[64] Ibid., 263.

[65] Ibid., 264; Jameson used the French title for this work, *La Vierge au Panier*.

[66] [Frédéric] Reiset, "Une Visite aux musées de Londres en 1876," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 March 1877), 254. Reiset also described the work as one of the most celebrated pictures of Correggio and as one of the most often copied works from the sixteenth century (253). Though Reiset discussed this picture in the third installment of his series on London's museums, an engraving after the painting was illustrated in the fifth article in the series, published three months later. See "Une Visite aux musées de Londres en 1876 (Cinquième article)," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 June 1877), ill. between pp. 594-5.

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its lack of reverence. The young mother is dressing her baby, and is trying to get his arm into a little jacket, while he playfully resists her attempts. What a change from Cimabue! No longer Madonnas and children of unearthly sorrow; but "Papa, Mamma, and the Baby!"[67]

The Italian anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza also invoked the Madonnas of Correggio and Raphael in order to provide a model for feminine behavior in his widely-read *Physiology of Love* (1872), interpreting the images in a manner that reflects the wedge being driven between female sexuality and maternity at this time. "And you, mothers who were virgins, when you teach your daughters how great a treasure is their virgin purity, give them with the anatomy and physiology which they may not need, a lesson in high morality," Mantegazza advised, suggesting that recent developments in the biological sciences were to be shared with women only with reluctance.[68] "Tell them that one can be physically a virgin, morally a prostitute," he wrote,

> Tell them that on the first kiss, all the treasures must be intact and not one gem alone, that the future of love lies in preserving the hundred virginities not included in the single vulgar conception. . . . The religion of Christ, in offering a virgin mother for the worship of mankind, may have intended to consecrate the purity of woman along with the characteristics of the bride, to create an ideal of perfection embracing woman's two greatest virtues, indicating that one can be a virgin and a mother as one can be a virgin and a prostitute. That this idealized creature has been a marvellous creation of the human mind and not a riddle or a myth, its influence on Christian art

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[67] Emily Constance Cook, "Romance of the National Gallery," reprinted from *National Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 198 (29 July 1893), 235.

[68] Paolo Mantegazza, *Physiology of Love* (1872), trans. Herbert Alexander (New York: Eugenics Publishing Company, 1936), 73. In this book, described by translator Alexander as a "lyric popularization" of Darwin's 1871 *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Mantegazza offered a moralizing version of his colleague's ideas.

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is ample proof. One has only to look at the Madonnas of Raphael, Murillo, and Correggio.[69]

Cassatt, though depicting a mortal rather than divine mother and child, by no means created a completely mundane image. Rather, her vision of maternity is elevated through the use of various elements that emphasize the importance of her figures. Reiset described the figure of Correggio's Madonna as having a "great effect," even at some distance, despite the tiny size of the picture[70] (it measures 13 1/4 x 10 inches), and Cassatt's figure has a similarly surprising amplitude. Even broader than the canvas upon which she is painted, her right elbow is cropped, as is the knee of her impossibly long left leg. Like Correggio's Madonna, or the chair that holds the young girl in *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6], the mother's body serves as almost as a throne for her child. But unlike Correggio, who opened his background to include an image of Joseph at work on his carpentry, Cassatt focuses the viewer's attention on the mother/child dyad, not only by closing her backdrop with a patterned wallpaper, but also through an extreme compression of space even greater than that seen in *The Blue Room*, or in Degas's dance scenes and brothel monotypes. Even if the virginal Madonnas of these Old Masters, in addition to a painting of her own mother (*Reading "Le Figaro"*), can be seen underlying the maternal figure in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, something of Degas's images of prostitutes creeps into Cassatt's painting.

Indeed, *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* includes an echo of one of the brothel monotypes, *La Sortie du Bain* [Fig. 58], in the wash bowl at lower left, tipped at an angle toward the spectator. While wash bowls appear from time to time in Old Master depictions of Christ washing the feet of his disciples,[71] they had also begun to surface in

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Reiset, "Une Visite aux musées de Londres en 1876," 254: "grand effet."

[71] The secularization of another religious theme in relation to washing can be found in Degas's 1873 *Pedicure* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which echoes the Lamentation of Christ; see Boggs, et al., *Degas*, cat. no. 120.

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Degas's monotypes and pastels of the late 1870s and early 1880s, in the images of prostitutes he created simultaneously with Edmond de Goncourt, Huysmans, and others, all of which brought private issues of bathing and sexuality to public light. The frequency with which Degas depicted prostitutes washing or bathing, and the critical reaction to these images, speak to the simultaneous fascination and revulsion felt toward prostitutes in this period.[72]

The sexualized association of woman and water has a long history, as in "Birth of Venus" imagery ranging from Botticelli's 1485 Uffizi painting to Alexandre Cabanel's 1863 rendering of the subject [Fig. 34] and William Bouguereau's 1879 Salon painting (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which feature highly idealized goddesses. Degas's bathers, and the images from his notorious 1886 *Suite de nuds* [*sic*] *de femmes se baignant, se lavant, se séchant, s'essuyant, se peignant ou se faisant peigner* in particular, were seen by some as satirizing this classicizing mode. For instance, J. M. Michel invoked certain mythological figures and Zola's *Nana* in his review of the eighth Impressionist exhibition:

> The school aims for Realism, having noisily chased away the gods, and one really must not demand that it bring Amphitrite out of the ocean or dry the hair of Venus Astarte, daughter of the bitter wave.
>
> No! Nana who bathes herself, sponges herself, cares for herself, arms herself for battle—*voilà*, the Impressionist ideal. Don't forget that the exhibition is only two steps from the street corner.[73]

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[72] Anthea Callen treats questions of bathing and hygiene in "Degas' *Bathers*: Hygiene and Dirt—Gaze and Touch," in *Dealing with Degas*, 159-85, and in *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). For a different approach to the relation of gaze and touch in Degas's work, see Carol Armstrong, "Edgar Degas and the Representation of the Female Body," *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Sulieman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 223-42, and also her *Odd Man Out.*

[73] J. M. Michel, "Exposition des impressionistes," *La Petite Gazette* (18 May 1886), 2, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 465:

L'école visant au réalisme, ayant bruyamment chassé les dieux, il ne faut point lui demander de nous faire sortir de l'océan Amphitrite ou de sécher les cheveux de Vénus Astarté, fille de l'onde amère.

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Other critics saw no such reference to classical tradition. For Henry Fèvre it was a clear matter of sexual contamination and animalistic filth in these "suspect bedrooms of registered *maisons*, where some ladies fill the social and utilitarian role of great collectors of love" and "wash themselves, brush themselves, soak themselves, and wipe themselves off in basins as vast as troughs."[74]

Cassatt's painting, which shares with these images by Degas an interest in the theme of bathing and the accessory of the wash bowl in particular, might also be seen as looking forward to the appearance of a similar accouterment in another significant bathing scene. This wash bowl appears in memories associated with Sigmund Freud's 1897 discussion of a dream that was essential to his theorization of the Oedipus complex, and indicative of the degree to which that complex is rooted in his inability to integrate the sexual and the maternal within the figure of the mother.[75]

In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud reported a dream about the nurse who cared for him in his first years. He recalled three things about her: she was his "teacher in sexual matters" (and complained that he was "clumsy and unable to do anything"), she had bathed him "in reddish water in which she had previously washed herself," and she had made him steal money to give to her.[76] Freud's 1897 memories and subsequent theories show how the nurse came to be conflated with certain aspects of the prostitute in order to create a figure to be spurned because she was associated with an improper form of

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Non! Nana qui se lave qui s'éponge, qui se soigne, qui s'arme pour le combat, voilà l'idéal impressioniste. N'oubliez pas que l'Exposition est à deux pas du coin du boulevard.

[74] Henry Fèvre, "L'Exposition des impressionnistes," *La Revue de demain* (May-June 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 446: "boudoirs louches de maisons matriculées, où des dames remplissent le rôle social et utilitaire de grands collecteurs de l'amour"; "se lavent, se brossent, se détrempent, se torchent dans des cuvettes aussi vastes que des auges."

[75] On the general subject of the role of this dream in relation to the Oedipus complex, see Jim Swan, "*Mater* and Nannie: Freud's Two Mothers and the Discovery of the Oedipus Complex," *American Imago* 31 (Spring 1974), 1-64. For the implications of the dream with regard to Freud's ideas about maternity, see Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 190-4.

[76] Letter from Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, October 4, 1897, in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 269.

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maternity, one that was unclean, suspected of sexual deviance, and sold for money. Female servants, too, were often seduced by fathers and brothers in nineteenth-century bourgeois households, reinforcing the correlation between female sexuality and servitude or financial exchange.[77]

Freud's memories in relation to this 1897 dream allowed him to effect a split between a dirty, sexual nurse and the pure, non-sexual, and Madonna-like mother who is installed in the Oedipus complex as the attractive object of sexual desire for father and son but lacks any sexuality of her own. This situation may have grown out of Freud's own experiences having had "two mothers" (as well as having deeper cultural roots in the emergence of European free-market democracy with its emphasis on the importance of masculine individuality).[78] Yet some of these memories were actually mis-memories, for Freud later discovered that his nurse had stolen money directly from him rather than forcing him to commit the act on her behalf, and it seems far more likely that his young mother rather than his elderly nurse washed him in water mixed with menstrual blood.[79] These mistakes suggest that Freud chose to identify with the dirty, bad nurse rather than the pure, good mother, ensuring his sexual difference from his mother. Ultimately, the absence of a sexual mother allowed Freud to imagine both himself and his science as "self-conceived."[80]

If Freud misremembered the circumstances regarding his nurse, the "reddish water," and stolen money, what of the third part of the memories rekindled by the 1897 dream, that the nurse was his "*Urheberin*," who introduced him to sexual activity? Of course, questions of children's knowledge about and experience of sexuality not only haunted Freud throughout his career, but have also been raised in relation to Cassatt's

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[77] Charles Bernheimer, "Introduction: Part One," *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*, eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 13. Jane Gallop's "Keys to Dora," in this same volume, 200-20, has also been useful to me in understanding this issue.
[78] Swan, "*Mater* and Nannie," 50.
[79] Jacobus, "Reading Woman," 190-1.
[80] Ibid., 193.

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works, especially *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6]. While Freud originally proposed that "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (or rather, from repressed traumas), by 1896 he had begun to believe that hysteria resulted from their having been sexually molested while children, most frequently by "nursemaids, governesses and domestic servants, to whose care children are only too thoughtlessly entrusted"[81] (thus reversing the equally probable scenario of the master seducing the servant). In early 1897, he changed his mind, deciding that abusers were more likely to be close relatives such as a father or brother, but later in that year, he rejected this "Seduction Theory," too, writing to Fliess that the seduction was instead a matter of perverse, self-exonerating fantasy on the part of the child, arising out of autoerotic activity. Freud's unearthing of what he considered to be a universal fantasy of the daughter's seduction by the father provided him with the foundation upon which he built the Oedipus complex, which then is reversed in the classic Oedipal situation, the son who desires his mother. This moment—Freud's abandonment of the Seduction Theory—represents a key episode in the history of psychoanalysis, heralding "a monumental break with theories of traumatic etiology and the discovery of infantile sexuality."[82]

Nonetheless, in his 1905 "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" Freud continued to wrestle with mysteries he was unable to solve involving the governess, seduction, and the source(s) of Dora's sexual knowledge, and in the early 1930s, he shifted again. In 1931, he moved from the idea of seduction as fantasy to claim, "Actual seduction, too, is common enough; it is initiated either by other children or by someone in charge of the child who wants to soothe it, or send it to sleep, or make it dependent on them," and in 1932 he wrote, "And now we find the phantasy of seduction once more in the pre-Oedipus prehistory of girls; but the seducer is regularly the mother. Here,

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[81] Sigmund Freud, "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (1896), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 3 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1962), 164.
[82] Gallop, "Keys to Dora," *In Dora's Case*, 213-4.

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however, the phantasy touches the ground of reality, for it was really the mother who by her activities over the child's bodily hygiene inevitably stimulated, and perhaps even roused for the first time, pleasurable sensations in her genitals."[83]

Freud's admission that the act of washing the child can be understood at times as a form of sexual stimulation or initiation brings to light a point that is relevant to the consideration of Cassatt's *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*—that is, the regular bathing of children, advocated by various "experts" of the period as essential to the maintenance of moral as well as physical "purity," could have the paradoxical effect of introducing the child to the pleasures of its own body, pleasures that it would soon be called upon to renounce in order to assume its proper place within the Oedipal family. One late nineteenth-century writer remarked of the physical experience of washing (or being washed), "it is not in vain that combing, washing, bathing, and rubbing gives [*sic*] a feeling of comfort—this feeling is a hint of nature that the human system needs it."[84] But Freud's difficulties in distinguishing between the mother's inadvertent but "inevitably" arousing touch and the nurse's deliberate efforts to "soothe" suggest that the difference between comfort and excitation is not so easily decided, and that the acts of washing and bathing can in fact stimulate sensations that will later be recognized as sexual.

Cassatt, then, through *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* participated in the debates regarding infantile sexuality that appeared during this period in the popular as well as scientific press, acknowledging in her work that there is an aspect of physical gratification experienced by both mother and child inherent in many of the activities of child care some years before Freud would publish his widely influential ideas on the subject. The child's pleasure is underscored in Cassatt's painting in a number of ways: by

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[83] Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality" (1931), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 21 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1961), 232; "Femininity" (1932), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 22 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1964), 120.

[84] "Poisons in the Air," *Manufacturer and Builder* 8 (May 1876), 103.

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an almost "dirty" facture, by the child's sprawling pose (legs spread wide, toes curled), and by the use of one of the artist's typical gestures, the child's pointed elbow, held behind the head.

As I discussed in Chapters One and Two, the pointed elbow often appears in Cassatt's early paintings in relation to subjects associated with sensuality or flirtation, and can be understood in *The Blue Room* as suggestive of the girl's awakening to an independence that is nevertheless structured by conformity to restrictive norms of feminine bodily decorum. In *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* the effect of the pointed elbow is less acute because the child is younger and its sex difficult to determine. Nonetheless, there is still an element of individuation linked to early moments in the formation of sexual identity at work here, in this case taking place in the physical presence of—and in part due to the physical actions of—the mother. Because the mother wears a morning dress, we can assume that child is in fact awakening (and not being readied for bed), while the discourses of the "sexual instinct" in children that were developing in the 1870s and that led to Freud's essay on "Infantile Sexuality" of 1905 (and eventually to his writings of the 1930s) lend credence to the idea that the mother may also be awakening the child to bodily pleasures initially stimulated by the act of washing.

Harriet Scott Chessman, discussing *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, cogently summarizes the scene:

> In holding afloat the possibility both for a sexual identification and for a difference between these two figures, Cassatt creates a situation theorized by recent feminists, especially Irigaray, who imagines a field of play between two figures at once the same and different, in contrast to what she identifies as the more conventional field, in which the masculine position is always one and the same, the feminine always other. In Cassatt's painting the adult masculine is absent, leaving the space open for a

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> largely female world, in which sexual difference can be conceived as unhierarchical and unthreatening.[85]

Chessman relates the child's pose to that of the traditional odalisque, but finds that the vulnerability of that position is moderated in Cassatt's painting because the child is held close to the mother's body and "absorbed in the mutual gaze," a gaze which "exists within the context of a safe, caressive touch."[86]

Although Chessman gives importance to the mother's touch, she also understands her body to be largely absent to the viewer because it is mostly covered by clothing and the face turned away; it is thus both lost and asexual. The sexuality she does possess, argues Chessman, is expressed indirectly by the child's body. Through a visual metonymy, this body "can become the site of maternal sexuality" in the representation, offering a "safe figure for the mother's more hidden erotic life."[87] I agree that the stretching child, its legs exposed and dangling, its genitals barely covered, manifests a sexuality (in the sense of an awakening to physical pleasure that has not yet come under the control of parental/societal repression) that is not immediately evident in the mother. I would argue, however, that this maternal figure is simultaneously present and lost to the viewer. Griselda Pollock has demonstrated how Katherine Cassatt in *Reading "Le Figaro"* [Fig. 27] is intimately close to the viewer because she is not contained within the boundaries of the canvas while at the same time she is "over there," unreachable because involved in her own intellectual activity.[88] In a like manner, the maternal body in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* is absent because the woman is turned away from the viewer and is absorbed in the child, whose body covers hers. But she is also profoundly present in her amplitude, filling the

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[85] Chessman, "Mary Cassatt and the Maternal Body," 247.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 247-8.
[88] Griselda Pollock, "The Case of the Missing Women," in *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, eds. Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer (New York: Continuum, 1994), 98.

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frame with her knees parted, body thrust toward the spectator, and presented through a highly tactile facture.

Furthermore, the mother's body might have been understood at the time of the painting's creation as participating in a highly charged sensual (though not necessarily sexual) relation with the child. Mantegazza, for instance, who emphasized the necessity of a woman being both a virgin and a mother in *The Physiology of Love*, in a later book defined the "Expression of Maternal Love":

> In this we find every warm tint of the erotic world save voluptuousness. As it is one of the most animal and the most automatic affections, it is always characterised by impetuosity, an extreme energy almost convulsive and volcanic. Many great artists have known how to make themselves immortal by rendering the expression of maternal love, which is at once so sensual and so elevated, so impetuous and so constant.[89]

Mantegazza's point of view, however misogynistic in its conjoining of the female and the animal and its need to counteract maternal sexuality by invoking the ideal, at least allows for the existence of a female eroticism, and for its coexistence with maternity (which our culture has since then found so difficult to imagine).

It is not surprising then that the Madonnas painted by Correggio were also recognized as exhibiting a sensuality that was not incompatible with holiness. In 1881 Mariana van Rensselaer explained that Correggio's Madonnas could be understood to show that "the sensuousness of the Renaissance, wide and deep though it was, irresponsible and unmoral as it frankly professed itself to be, was yet a very different thing from the sensual depravity of an Asian court, or of Rome in her decadent days."[90] In these Marian images, she went on,

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[89] Paolo Mantegazza, *Physiognomy and Expression* (1881) (London: Walter Scott, n.d.), 144.
[90] Van Rensselaer, "Correggio," 237-8.

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> is struck the lowest note in that long scale where the highest is sounded by the holy presence of the Dresden *Sistina*. Not, I mean, the lowest possible, or the lowest that has actually been struck, but the lowest compatible with *artistic* harmony between idea and execution. Correggio's Madonnas are not, as some have seen, Bacchantes, or Phrynes, or rude Italian peasant-girls; but they are the most simply and sensuously and radiantly earthly of all Madonnas,—the most mundane, not after the manner of our tired, self-conscious modern world to-day, but after the childlike manner of the modern world triumphing in its new birth and its just-learned powers. Correggio's mothers are as far below the divinity of Raphael's conceptions, as his heathen heroines are far above the conscious sensuality we find in those of Giulio Romano and of more modern artists whom we do not need to name.[91]

In *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* Cassatt repeats many of the aspects of Correggio's *Madonna of the Basket* that emphasize the mother's sensual presence: the large-scale body filling the canvas, the elongated left leg, the enlarged lap which serves to support the child while also reminding us of the womb from which the child emerged, the hands that touch, and the gaze directed at the child rather than the spectator. In comparison, Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* [Fig. 59] appears far more idealized and iconic, framed by curtains and attendant figures, standing upright, and holding the child for the spectator's contemplation as she too looks out of the canvas.[92]

What van Rensselaer did not mention about the sensuality of Correggio's Madonna and Child pictures—but cannot so easily be ignored in the wake of Leo Steinberg's *The*

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[91] Ibid., 238. This idea that Correggio's Madonnas had been seen by some as resembling bacchantes is interesting in relation to my discussion of Cassatt's *Bacchante* [Fig. 11] in Chapter One.

[92] This figure's continuing relevance as a symbol of the highest representative of virginal maternity is evident in Freud's "Dora" case (begun in 1901), in which he reported that Dora "remained *two hours* in front of the Sistine Madonna, rapt in silent admiration"; the Madonna's appeal, he posited, was as "a favourite counter-idea in the mind of girls who feel themselves oppressed by imputation of sexual guilt." See Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," (1905), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 7 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953), 96, 104, and also in *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 116, 125 n. 20.

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Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion—is the centrality of the Child's genitals in a number of these images, including *The Madonna of the Basket*. As Steinberg points out, the "rendering of the infant erection" is rare in this type of painting, yet he illustrates two prominent examples from Correggio's oeuvre.[93] (One wonders whether Cook's 1893 description of the picture as evincing a "lack of reverence" might refer to this display of genitality, linked to the idea of Correggio's "early married life," as much as to the "humanity" of the Madonna's efforts to dress the Child.) Steinberg interprets this "true to life" phenomenon of infant erection as demonstrating the Child's "physiological potency without which the chastity of the man would count for nought."[94] Cassatt's image carries no such religious symbolism, and the child's sex is not indicated, the genital area being carefully (but just barely) concealed. Nonetheless, her work, with its theme of the rituals of bathing which seek to insure moral as well as physical purity while at the same time stimulating arousal, similarly holds in suspension these putatively incompatible states.

That Correggio's execution also lent to his Madonnas an air of sensuality is suggested in the writings of Charles Blanc, who noted, "As for Correggio, it is true that he handled the brush with indulgence. His execution has as much charm for him as for us, and he savored the pleasure of losing and finding himself in color; but his brush is always the same, always caressing, always sweet and tender."[95] Blanc's words imply that Correggio carried his strokes a bit too far, that his facture is as masturbatory as seductive, and color, too, for Blanc was associated with femininity and animality. Cassatt's brushwork in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, on the other hand, is neither

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[93] Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 76, 78. The other Corregio on this theme cited by Steinberg (81, Fig. 89) is the *Madonna di S. Giorgio*, 1530-32 (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden).

[94] Ibid., 78.

[95] Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (Paris: V^e^ Jules Renouard, 1867), 612: "Quant au Corrége, il est vrai qu'il a manié la brosse avec complaisance. Son exécution a eu pour lui autant de charme qu'elle en a pour nous, et il a savouré le plaisir de se perdre et de se retrouver dans la couleur; mais son pinceau a toujours été le même, toujours caressant, toujours suave et tendre."

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masturbatory nor seductive; this, her first major mother and child picture, is one of the most insistently worked canvases of her career. Though the mother's gaze may be, as Chessman describes it, "caressive," as are the washing and holding gestures she performs, Cassatt's application of paint is anything but tender or gentle.

Rather, the figures take shape out of a dense network of strokes, with choppy and ragged areas of dry pigment pulled over longer, more liquid lines. Little effort is made to blend the edges between colors; tones are modulated more by overlap than commingling. The mother's face lacks the smooth modeling generally favored in depicting the human visage; the use of cross-hatching gives to her skin a striated and patchy quality also seen, but to a lesser degree, in the flesh of the child; moreover, the mother's hands are large and crudely drawn. The surface of *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* is characterized by an extreme tactility, but Cassatt's handling cannot be equated with an erotic caress in the same manner as in Correggio's work, for instance, or in Boucher's; it cannot be likened to a delicate, feminized touch—nor was it. In the same way that *The Blue Room* can be understood as questioning the traditionally assumed consonance between the representation of the female body and the brushstroke as an invitation to/substitute for the artist's/spectator's sexualized touch, the facture in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* may be seen to draw a parallel between the artist's gesture and the mother's (or nurse's) work, problematizing the struggle to shape raw, even resistant materials into a self-sufficient image/subject.[96]

In *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* Cassatt also gives us a mother and child image which draws upon the triangular disposition of figures first employed by Old Master painters to impart monumentality to their depictions of Madonna and Child, while

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[96] Chessman notes that the wash bowl evokes a palette, from which the artist draws paint to "touch up" her subject, while at the same time, the act of washing is one of taking something away; see "Mary Cassatt and the Maternal Body," 248. I am also reminded here of Armstrong's characterization of Degas's facture in the brothel monotypes as "both constitutive and obliterative," and how his work, especially in the monotypes, is best understood "not so much as a project of liberation from representation as a struggle within and against it, at once reconstituting it and negating it." See *Odd Man Out*, 155.

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at the same time she puts this compositional type under pressure. The compression of space has a somewhat vertiginous effect—the washbowl and child appear as if they might slide off their respective perches at any moment, a situation that is emphasized by the large size of the child's legs, which dominate the foreground, and the blue outline incompletely defining those limbs, lending them an almost cartoon-like sense of motion. The wallpaper, too, with its calligraphic squiggles (so much like those seen in the background of Degas's *La Sortie du Bain*), works against the stability of the mother's giant lap and the broad chair upon which she sits.

Cassatt in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* therefore employs a number of formal and symbolical strategies to represent the seemingly simple act of bathing an infant in a nuanced light, in keeping with the complexities of contemporary ideas regarding hygiene, infantile sexuality, and the female artist's touch. Unlike Degas, who generally created bathing scenes that were associated with a strictly non-maternal form of sexuality, or Freud, who would conflate the nurse and the prostitute in a figure of improperly sexualized maternity, in this painting Cassatt depicted a mother and child who mutually enjoy the "pleasure and duty of washing the baby." Her work derives from Correggio more than a compositional template: it shares with his images a sense that the relation of mother to child can be "at once so sensual and so elevated, so impetuous and so constant," as Mantegazza proclaimed.

That this balance risks being upset at any moment is also implied by Cassatt, not only in the agitated wallpaper pattern, the forward tilt of the composition, and the precarious position of the wash bowl, but also in the child's pose, with its pointed elbows and the suggestion of squirming. When the work was shown for the first time, at Durand-Ruel's New York gallery in 1895, the *New York Sun*'s critic described it as "very beautiful in tone, but very ungraceful in the drawing of the sprawling child that is resisting its

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mother's attention in the interest of cleanliness."[97] (These words echo Cook's 1893 characterization of Correggio's *Madonna of the Basket* as representing a Child who "playfully resists" his mother's attempts to dress him in a jacket.) The baby's bath is "pleasure and duty" and more: an effort to ensure physical health through cleanliness, an in-the-moment experience of physical gratification or comfort that may arouse feelings that will later be recognized as sexual, and a ritual that instructs children about cultural expectations regarding hygiene, class, and morality, without which "the intercourse of refined society would be impossible," as Dr. William Strange explained in 1868.

Cassatt's painting represents the interplay between two figures "at once the same and different"[98] in a manner that resists the traditional masculine/feminine hierarchy of sexual difference. It speaks to our common experience of individuation and the ambivalence felt before the uncanny maternal body, which is at once the home from which we were once unable to distinguish ourselves and the place from which we have been forever exiled, regardless of gender. If Huysmans described Cassatt's contributions to the 1880 Impressionist exhibitions as the product of an artist in possession of "a personality that has not yet completely extricated itself,"[99] by the time she completed *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* her style and subject matter had become fully "signature," an acheievement that will be acknowledged in his discussion of the 1881 Impressionist exhibition.

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[97] "Miss Cassatt's Paintings," *New York Sun* (19 April 1895), 7.
[98] Chessman, "Mary Cassatt and the Maternal Body," 247.
[99] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1880," 290.

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CHAPTER FOUR — *"ONLY A WOMAN CAN PAINT CHILDHOOD": CASSATT AT THE IMPRESSIONIST EXHIBITIONS OF 1881 AND 1886*

In the preceding chapters I have addressed the notion of Cassatt's achievement of her signature style in light of discourses on individuality, gesture and touch, the physiognomical and evidentiary analysis of handwriting, feminine propriety, and the legal rights of women. In Chapter Four I will continue exploring these ideas, now with regard to Cassatt's efforts from 1881 through 1886 to depict the mother and child theme. As I have already noted, it was in response to her contributions to the 1881 Impressionist exhibition that Joris-Karl Huysmans declared, "only a woman can paint childhood. There is in it a particular feeling that a man cannot render; his fingers, unless they are especially sensitive and delicate, are too thick to avoid leaving behind clumsy and brutal fingerprints; only a woman can pose a child, dress it, place pins without pricking. . . ."[1] This chapter will challenge Huysmans's presumption of consonance between the female artist's subject matter and style. By carefully examining Cassatt's pictures and the contemporary criticism treating them alongside the extremely contentious debates centering around the family, maternity, and the artist's mark that took place in the 1870s and 1880s, I seek to uncover the uncanniness in these images of mother and child by a female artist who was not herself a mother.

Chapter Four is divided into three sections. The first treats Cassatt's contributions to the 1881 Impressionist exhibition, particularly *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3], focusing on Huysmans's commentary along with writings about the home and attempts to define women's place as solely within the domestic interior. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story, "The Yellow Wall-paper," will figure prominently in this section. The second part of the chapter, centering around another work likely to have been shown in 1881,

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[1] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350.

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Mathilde Holding a Baby Who Reaches Out to Right [Fig. 68], brings in questions of the father and paternity as well as ownership and legitimacy as they intersect and diverge in relation to issues of feminine creativity versus procreativity. The third section considers Cassatt's works from 1883 to 1886 and her participation in the final Impressionist exhibition in the context of Degas's assertion that women know nothing of "style."

I.

As far as it has been determined, Cassatt's first exploration of the mother and child theme, *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* [Fig. 56], was not exhibited until 1895. The painting was likely sold to a private collector within a year or two of its completion, which would help to explain its absence from a number of significant exhibitions in the intervening years, including the Impressionist shows and Cassatt's first retrospective, held at Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, in 1893. But if this work, which seems from the evidence of the date inscribed on the canvas to have been recognized by the artist as a significant achievement, does not appear to have been shown publicly around the time of its completion in 1880, by the Impressionist exhibition of 1881 Cassatt had created for display a number of new works on the subject that would soon be identified as her "signature" theme.

After the mixed reviews Cassatt received for her contributions to the 1880 Impressionist exhibition, her participation in the 1881 show was highly commended, with 26 critics mentioning her work in mainly favorable terms and no reviewer condemning it outright.[2] The ten critics who did not wholeheartedly endorse her work nevertheless had

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[2] Charles-Albert d'Arnoux, writing under the pseudonym "Bertall," may have been conflating Cassatt's work with Morisot's when he stated disdainfully, "We could not even attempt to describe the jumble of women and young ladies in pink, fanning themselves in their chairs, seated on unrealistic sofas, badly drawn, badly painted, lacking color and without modeling, inconsistent in tone and form." However, he did not use any of the names of the artists nor the titles of their works in his review, "Exposition: Des peintres intransigeants et nihilistes: 36, boulevard des Capucines," *Paris-Journal* (21 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 330: "Nous renonçons à décrire le fatras de dames et demoiselles en rose, s'éventant dans leur fauteuil, assises sur des canapés invraisemblables, mal dessinés, mal peintes, sans couleur et sans modelé, inconsistantes de ton et de forme." Of all the critics

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some praise. The reviewer for the Belgian periodical *L'Art Moderne*, for example, wrote, "Alongside Guillaumin and Rafaëlli are grouped some sincere talents, whom one regrets to see taking this same path, which they themselves will recognize, sooner or later, as an error: Mlles. Cassatt and Morisot, whose facture is good, full of quality, but who too easily content themselves by being a little too close to their figures and show us the faces of children smeared with blue or green."[3] Of the critical reaction in general, Robert Cassatt observed, "Mame's success is certainly more marked this year than at any time previous";[4] it was not only extensive and generally positive in 1881, but also richer in its rhetoric and allusions, as if critics were inspired in their prose to match the more consistently accomplished pictures on view.

Gustave Geffroy reviewed Cassatt's work for the first time in 1881, encountering much to like across her range of subject matter:

> One remains a long time in the small room where the ten paintings by Mlle Mary Cassatt are on view. The indication is at times quite summary, and the white dominates in a fashion perhaps too absolute; but it is impossible not to succumb to the charm of these bright pictures. *La lecture*, a mother who reads amidst her children [Fig. 60]; another mother who embraces her baby [Fig. 3], the *Jardin* [Fig. 61]: all have an assured facture and just coloration; also well-done are the flesh tones that appear to us as if in a light filtered through foliage or the cloth of a window shade. The *Automne* [Fig. 62], a woman wrapped in a shawl and seated in a park, pleases us a great deal through the languishing of the visage, the darkening richness of the clothing;

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who substantially discussed the works of specific artists, only two chose not to mention Cassatt in their 1881 reviews.

[3] "Nouvelles artistiques Parisiens: Le Salon des Indépendants," *L'Art Moderne* 1 (24 April 1881), 63 [not in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996]: "A côté de Guillaumin et de Rafaëlli se groupent quelques talents sincères, que l'on regrette de voir s'engager dans cette voie dont ils reconnaîtront eux-mêmes, tôt ou tard, l'erreur: Mlles Cassatt et Morisot, dont la facture est bonne, pleine de qualités, mais qui se contentent trop facilement d'à peu près dans leur figures et nous montrent des visages d'enfants barbouillés de bleu ou de vert. . . ."

[4] Robert Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, April 18, 1881, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 160.

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like the leaves of the trees, illusions fly away: it is the autumn of life; it is gentle and melancholy. The artist has also fixed on her canvas, with great joy, the rosy mouth and nostrils, the delicate and shining skin, the pure eyes, full of clarity, of a child's face [possibly Fig. 63]. But all our preferences go to the woman in a pink gown and bonnet, who takes a cup of tea in her gloved fingers [Fig. 64]. She is exquisitely Parisian. The nuances of pink, the lightness of the lace, all the lights and reflections that play over her clothing, hair, and softly pale skin, make this *Thé* a delicious work.[5]

The pictures mentioned by Geffroy, all works probably completed in the short period between the painting of *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* and the opening of the exhibition in April, confirm that Cassatt had reached a new level of accomplishment in her pursuit of Impressionism.

The critic Antony Valabrègue, too, extolled Cassatt's 1881 pictures, opening his review with the declaration, "The success of this exhibition appears to me to be Mlle Mary Cassatt."[6] Even more than Geffroy, Valabrègue appreciated her high-key palette, handling, and "freshness of tones," and he linked her style with an English aesthetic of domestic life, as had a number of critics in 1880, including Huysmans:

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[5] Gustave Geffroy, "L'Exposition des artistes indépendants," *La Justice* (19 April 1881), 3, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 343: "On reste longtemps dans la petite salle où sont exposées les dix toiles de Mlle Mary Cassatt. L'indication est parfois bien sommaire, le blanc domine peut-être d'une façon trop absolue; mais il est imposible de ne pas céder au charme de ces claires peintures. *La Lecture*, une mère qui lit au milieu de ses enfants, une autre mère qui embrasse son baby, le *Jardin*, sont d'une facture assurée et d'une juste coloration; c'est bein ainsi que les chairs nous apparaissent dans la lumière tamisée par le feuillage ou la toile d'une store. *L'Automne*, une femme enveloppée d'un châle et assise dans un parc, nous plaît beaucoup par l'alanguissement du visage, la richesse assombrie du vêtement; comme les feuilles des arbres, les illusions se sont envolées: c'est l'automne de la vie; cela est doux et mélancolique. L'artiste a aussi fixé sur la toile, avec un grand bonheur, la bouche et les narines rosées, la peau délicate et luisante, les yeux purs, emplis de clarté, d'un visage d'enfant. Mais toutes nos préférences vont à la femme en robe et en capote roses, qui tient une tasse de thé de ses doigts gantés. Elle est exquisement parisienne. Les nuances du rose, la légèreté de la dentelle, toutes les lumières et tous les reflets qui se jouent sur la toilette, sur les cheveux, sur les chairs doucement pâlies, font de ce *Thé* une oeuvre délicieuse."

[6] Antony Valabrègue, "Beaux-Arts: L'Exposition des impressionnistes," *La Revue littéraire et artistique* (15 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 369: "Le succès de cette exposition me paraît être pour Mlle Mary Cassatt."

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> I recommend that visitors study the execution of this skillful artist up close. I do not find an excess of virtuosity here, I have the pleasure of stating. Everything appears to me to be sincere, and I recognize here and there much feeling and observation. Mlle Mary Cassatt is American; she possesses the charm, the intimacy of certain English artists; she knows how to compose excellent family pictures. Look at her studies of children: the *Jeune Violiniste* has perfect grace; the *Lecture*; the *Jardin* are scenes of great truth.[7]

Valabrègue, like many of his colleagues, stressed that Cassatt's facture, while charming and skillful, avoids an overt seductiveness that would be inimical to her subject matter.

Charles Diguef, in a review for the feminist periodical *Le Papillon*, found the artist to be the only participant worth praising in his review. After mocking "Degos" and "Pissard," he stated,

> I have saved Miss Cassatt for last. This artist is truly out of place in this milieu of eccentrics. Her painting of "a woman in an armchair, who reads" contains very rare qualities. She possesses a very great feeling for nature: she observes well and executes with a real feeling for truth. How little you would need to do, mademoiselle, in order to arrive at an excellent result!
>
> You have talent and intelligence: quickly leave this milieu that will spoil you and absorb the best in you, and we will salute in you a true artist. Flee from this little scene, flee from the monstrous! Your day will come.[8]

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[7] Ibid.: "fraîcheur de tons"; "Je recommande aux visiteurs d'étudier de près l'exécution de cette habile artiste. Pas trop de virtuosité chez elle, j'ai plaisir à le constater. Tout me paraît sincère, et je reconnais ça et là beaucoup de sentiment et d'observation. Mlle Mary Cassatt est Américaine; elle possède le charme, l'intimité de certains artistes anglais; elle sait composer d'excellents tableaux de famille. Regardez ces études d'enfants: la *Jeune violoniste* est d'une grâce parfaite; la *Lecture*; le *Jardin* sont des scènes d'une grande vérité." The pastel of the *Jeune violoniste* has never been located.

[8] Charles Diguef, "Exposition des indépendants," *Le Papillon* (1 May 1881), 12 [not in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996]:

J'ai gardé pour la fin Mlle Cassatt. Cette artiste est un vérité dépaysée dans ce milieu d'excentriques. Son tableau de "la femme dans un fauteuil, qui lit," renferme de très rares qualités. Elle posséde un très grand sentiment de la nature: elle observe bien et execute avec un réel sentiment du vérité. Combien il vous faudrait peu, mademoiselle, pour arriver à un excellent resultat!

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Many other critics, in contrast, did not see Cassatt as being "out of place" among the Impressionists but rather continued to couple her work with Morisot's, finding their pictures to represent the very essence of Impressionism. Armand Silvestre, for instance, declared, "It's true: two women—Mlles Mary Cassatt and Morisot—have taken the impressionist flag in their hands with an incomparable valor served by a real talent."[9] Some critics reached a similar conclusion while insinuating that Impressionism had already begun to be degraded—no longer quite so original a movement, and further, associated with the feminine. Paul Mantz stated, "The women remain the most faithful to the doctrines of orthodox impressionism,"[10] and Jules Claretie made no other comment than to note that their works were painted in "pink pastel tones and bright whites that caress the sight."[11]

For some critics, questions of gender overrode those of Impressionism altogether. Gustave Goetschy expressed one such view, asking, "How could one not be interested . . . in the studies and works of Miss Cassatt, whose pictures have a delicacy, an intuition, a grace, and, if I dare to use the word, a particular *femininity*?"[12] To Nina de Villars, the contributions by the two women served to prove the abilities of their sex—as long as they

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Vous avez le don et l'intelligence: sortez au plus vite de ce milieu qui vous gâtera et absorbera ce que vous avez de meilleur en vous, et on saluera en vous une artiste veritable. Fuyez ce petit milieu, fuyez le monstrueux! votre heure viendra.

I have been unable to identify the "*femme dans un fauteuil, qui lit*" described by Diguef; perhaps it is one of the pastels exhibited under the title *Tête de jeune fille*, or possibly he has misrepresented one of the pictures known to have been on view, such as the *Lecture* [Fig. 60] or the *Jardin* [Fig. 61].

[9] Armand Silvestre, "Le Monde des arts: Sixième Exposition des artistes indépendants," *La Vie moderne* (16 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 365: "Deux femmes, Mlles Mary Cassatt et Morisot, ont pris, il est vrai, en mains le drapeau avec une vaillance incomparable servie par un réel talent." Cassatt and Morisot were the only women to exhibit in 1881.

[10] Paul Mantz, "Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendants," *Le Temps* (23 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 357: "Les femmes sont restées plus fidèles aux doctrines de l'impressionnisme orthodoxe."

[11] Jules Claretie, "La Vie à Paris: Les Artistes indépendants," *Le Temps* (5 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 334: "tons roses de pastel et des blancs légers qui caressent la vue. . . ."

[12] Gustave Goetschy, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Le Voltaire* (5 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 344: "Comment ne pas s'intéresser . . . aux recherches et aux travaux de miss Cassatt, dont les oeuvres ont une délicatesse, une finesse, une grâce et, si j'ose employer ce mot, une feminité si particulières."

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remained in their "proper" domain—more effectively than the challenges to the status quo made by a contemporary feminist: "The *eternal feminine* is brilliantly represented by a French woman and an American. . . . If only all the women who declare themselves the equals 'of men' could paint like Mesdames Morisot and Cassat [*sic*]. They would do more for their cause than all the discourses of Mlle Hubertine Auclerc [*sic*]."[13]

In 1881, as in the previous year, a number of critics who took pains to affiliate Cassatt and Morisot as women artists also sought to make distinctions between them. Charles Ephrussi claimed, "Mme Morisot has great facility, Mlle Cassatt a great will; the one paints like a warbling lark, the other works with the conscience of an artist; the one allows herself to go toward the abandon of her French nature, the other expands upon the tenacity of the American race."[14] Again, Morisot is recuperated for her native tradition, she "abandons" herself to it. But while Cassatt was also seen as a product of her American roots and linked to English art and domestic culture, she would increasingly be understood as seeking her effects in the past, a past redolent with a purity and propriety viewed as suitable for her subject matter. Henry Havard, who opposed Morisot and Cassatt to Gauguin as "[m]ore chaste, as suits the rest of their sex," wrote of Cassatt's pictures, "these delicate sketches, lightly faded, recall for us in their effaced tones, sweet and harmonious, the mural paintings in fresco or tempera from the end of the fourteenth century and in the following century."[15] Havard concluded, "Perhaps, after all, this is the

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[13] Nina de Villars [Villard], "Variétés: Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Le Courrier du soir* (23 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 371: "L'ETERNEL FÉMININ est brillamment représenté par une française et une américaine. . . . Que les femmes qui se déclarent égales 'de l'homme' peignent comme Mesdames Morisot et Cassat [*sic*]. Elles feront beaucoup plus pour leur cause que tous les discours de Mlle Hubertine Auclerc [*sic*]."

[14] C. E. [Charles Ephrussi], "Exposition des peintres indépendants," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (23 April 1881), 134, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 337: "Mme Morisot a une grande facilité, Mlle Cassatt une grande volonté; l'une peint comme l'alouette gazouille, l'autre travaille avec la conscience de l'artiste; l'une se laisse aller à l'abandon de sa nature française, l'autre développe la ténacité de la race américaine."

[15] Henry Havard, "L'Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Le Siècle* (3 April 1881), 2, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 347: "Plus pudiques, comme il convient du reste à leur sexe"; "ces esquisses délicates, légèrement affadies, nous rappellent par leurs tonalités effacées, douces et

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goal; and this grand effort forward so noisily commented upon would actually only be a return to an ancient aesthetic."[16]

A number of visual qualities favored by the Impressionists and drawn in part from the "primitives" of Western art—brilliant, opaque colors; flat or matte surfaces; the absence of chiaroscuro—were privileged because they were seen as sincere, honest, and truthful. By incorporating these aspects into their own work, the modernist painters strove to subvert academic techniques and the inauthenticity and artifice they had come to signal.[17] When discussing Cassatt's works, Ephrussi made this point obvious, stating,

> The painting of Mlle Cassatt is full of sincere honesty, of meditation; of gravity, and above all of grace. Thus the mother reading, on a garden terrace, to her three children, breathes with a soulful serenity, a moral beauty that acknowledges a true style; though painted in oil, the picture has the clear and matte qualities of fresco; if only one could see such serious talent of this type exercised in the decoration of some school room or town hall.[18]

That Cassatt intentionally emulated wall paintings of the early Renaissance is well-known; she wrote to her brother of the work discussed in this passage, *Mrs. Cassatt Reading to Her Grandchildren* (*La Lecture*) [Fig. 60]: "it is painted to look as much like frescoe [*sic*] as possible so that it would be appropriate over a door as the Italian painters used to do, they are called 'dessus de porte' here."[19] Ephrussi's commentary implies that Cassatt, in

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harmonieuses, les peintures murales à fresque ou en détrempe de la fin du XIV^{e} siècle et du siècle suivant."

[16] Ibid.: "Peut-être bien, après tout, est-ce là qu'est le but; et ce grand effort en avant si bruyamment commenté pourrait bien n'être au fond qu'un retour à une esthétique ancienne."

[17] Anthea Callen, "The Unvarnished Truth: Mattness [*sic*], 'Primitivism,' and Modernity in French Paintings, c. 1870–1907," *Burlington Magazine* 136 (November 1994), 746.

[18] C. E. [Charles Ephrussi], "Exposition des peintres indépendants," 337-8: "La peintre de Mlle Cassatt est pleine d'honnêteté de sincerité, de recueillement; la gravité n'y exclut point la grâce. Ainsi la mère faisant, sur une terrasse de jardin, la lecture à ces trois enfants, respire une sérénité d'âme, une beauté morale qui accuse un vrai style; quoique peinte à l'huile, la toile a l'aspect clair et mat de la fresque; on voudrait voir un talent si sérieux s'exercer, dans cette manière, à la décoration de quelque salle d'école ou de quelque mairie."

[19] Mary Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, June 22 [1883], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 170.

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borrowing certain formal effects from what were likely religious images by *primitifs* such as Ghirlandaio or Botticelli, also reproduced some of their moral and ideological values. These values were not only in keeping with ideas about women's roles current in 1881, including the mother's chastity and her importance as the first teacher of children, but also paralleled Republican ideas about the educational importance of mural projects for public buildings.[20] It seems, then, that Cassatt's great success at the 1881 Impressionist exhibition owes in large part to her images of child care, which appealed to critics such as Havard and Ephrussi for the manner in which their theme and aesthetic strategies dovetailed in support of Republican ideas regarding women's roles and education.

* * *

Whereas Ephrussi made a link between Cassatt's works and the values promoted by her aesthetic sources, a link that asserts a certain view of female behavior but does not depend upon the gender of the artist being female, Huysmans was more concerned to analogize Cassatt's "hand" with the hand of the mother, and therefore to emphasize her suitability to her subject matter. However, as I have suggested, while his text appears on the surface to support this point of view, his language, references, and his own body of work undermine the simple congruence he posits between mother and female painter of motherhood. His 1881 discussion of Cassatt is worth examining at length because it represents one of the most complimentary discussions of her Impressionist work, but it is riven with paradoxical arguments that reflect his conflicted attitude toward the female artist and the subject of maternity in addition to larger cultural concerns with these issues.

Though well-known for his disparagement of most things feminine, Huysmans was in fact one of the first critics to appreciate Cassatt's depictions of the domestic realm. While in 1880 he characterized her work as the product of "a personality that has not yet

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[20] On Republican efforts to encourage mural schemes throughout France, see the exhibition catalogues *Le Triomphe des mairies: Grand décors républicains à Paris, 1870–1914* (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1986), and *Quand Paris dansait avec Marianne, 1879–1889* (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1989).

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completely extricated itself," he opened his 1881 discussion by announcing her new-found originality:

> I wrote last year that most of the paintings of Mlle Cassatt recalled the pastels of Degas, and that one of them derived from the modern English masters.
>
> From these two sources has emerged an artist who now does not owe anything to anyone; a totally dashing and personal artist.[21]

He then pointed out that her works were successful because they rejected the overly emotional or anecdotal character common in works by other painters of domestic scenes, such as English genre artists or the *juste milieu* painters in France.

Huysmans ended his review with a statement regarding Cassatt's fluent movement between cultures with regard to the home:

> And there is the inherently special mark of her talent: Mlle Cassatt, who is American, I believe, paints our French women; but introduces into her very Parisian interiors the kindly smile of the *at home* [in English in original]; she brings out, in Paris, that which none of our own painters have known how to express, the joyous quietude, the tranquil bonhomie of an interior.[22]

Digeuf had seen Cassatt as "out of place" [*dépaysée*] among the Impressionists; Huysmans, in contrast, found the artist to be uncannily "at home" within a number of foreign territories: as an American artist who painted in France but whose style and subject reminded critics of English art, as a woman in a male-dominated profession, and as a non-mother who painted maternity. Questions regarding where and how a woman was

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[21] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350:
J'écrivais, l'an dernier, que la plupart des toiles de Mlle Cassatt rappellaient les pastels de M. Degas, et que l'une d'elles découlait des maîtres anglais modernes.
De ces deux influences est sortie une artiste qui ne doit plus rien à personne maintenant, une artiste toute prime-sautière, toute personelle.

[22] Ibid., 233: "Et c'est là une marque inhérente spéciale de son talent, Mlle Cassatt qui est Américaine, je crois, nous peint des Françaises; mais, dans ses habitations si parisiennes, elle met le bienveillant sourire du at home; elle dégage, à Paris, ce qu'aucun de nos peintres ne saurait exprimer, la joyeuse quiétude, la bonhomie tranquille d'un intérieur."

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most properly "at home" did not concern Huysmans alone but rather had become a matter of great cross-cultural debate in this era, especially between the three countries he mentioned—France, England, and the United States. These debates provide a context within which to better understand both Huysmans's remarks and the manner in which Cassatt's works conform to or resist his characterizations.

In the 1870s a number of writers outside of France attempted to prove that Gallic culture did indeed possess a "home life" equivalent to that of their own countries. A writer for *Appleton's Journal*, for example, observed, "It is still, we believe, a rooted idea in England that home-life does not exist in France; that fathers are always abroad, and mothers always seeking amusement, usually in the society of lovers; that French children are brought up by *bonnes*, and that domestic affection is treated with ridicule in society as well as in Parisian literature."[23] In truth, the writer argued, "the French of this generation have sacrificed too much to the home, have suppressed many of the rougher and more useful virtues in the effort to cultivate the domestic affections, an effort which has been singularly successful."[24] A writer for the American *Atlantic Monthly*, reviewing the publication of Englishman Frederick F. Marshall's 1874 *French Home Life*, in which his widely reprinted articles on the subject were collected, similarly stated:

> It is the fashion in this country to bewail the utter lack of home life among the French. The men we imagine to be faithless, and the women too; the corruption of French society is an old story. . . . That we do not see all sides of the question becomes plain enough in the light of so excellent a book as French Home Life, which is evidently written by one who knows well what he writes about.[25]

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[23] "Miscellany: French Children," *Appleton's Journal* 7 (27 January 1872), 108.
[24] Ibid.
[25] "Recent Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 303 (June 1874), 748. The German essayist Karl Hillebrand also published articles on the same subject, such as "French Family Life and Lessons," which were reprinted in a number of volumes in various languages during the period 1872–81.

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Another reviewer of Marshall's book looked to the linguistic roots of this bias against the idea of French home life, noting that the volume "shows English natures that French natures possess and prize *home*, whatever they call it—'foyer,' or 'ménage,' or 'chez' associated with its varied complement of personal pronouns. It shows all who read English that the French love and live pretty much as other people do, and that if they have any advantage in some directions, there is a good and suggestive reason for it."[26] The same notion was taken up in a *Blackwood's Magazine* article of 1878, "French Home Life: The Idea of Home." The writer chided those who believe that "'home' is an essentially English idea, because we fancy . . . that 'home' is an essentially English word," for whether the word is "*heim*, *hiem*, *hem*, or *heimr*," the "idea of 'home' is felt and realized, in varying degrees and forms, throughout a large part of the earth."[27] Furthermore, according to *Blackwood's*, "If French homes are not perfect, they approach, at all events, much nearer to perfection than any other homes do, precisely for the reason that they contain the largest proportion of the components that produce happiness in its active living forms."[28]

Huysmans, in his discussion of Cassatt, associated her works with both French and English domestic interiors. In her images of child care, he wrote, she portrayed "an affectionate understanding of the quiet life, a penetrating sense of intimacy, such that one must go back to [John] Everett Millais's painting, *The Three Sisters* [Fig. 48], to find their equivalent."[29] When describing her Parisian scenes as being imbued with "the kindly smile of the *at home*" he was also making reference to the English tradition of women remaining "at home" to receive visitors (a practice which became popular in France and the U.S. at this time). She was simultaneously attuned to the specific nuances of French culture in his

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[26] "Current Literature," *Galaxy* 17 (June 1874), 854.

[27] "French Home Life: The Idea of Home," reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 24 (19 October 1878), 153.

[28] Ibid., 159.

[29] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350: "une affective compréhension de la vie placide, une pénétrante sensation d'intimité, telles qu'il faut remonter, pour en trouver d'égales, au tableau d'Everett Millais, *les Trois Soeurs*. . . ."

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view, and he found *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61] and *The Cup of Tea* [Fig. 64] to exude "a delicate fragrance of Parisian elegance."[30] At a moment of some anxiety about the differences between national cultures, Huysmans saw Cassatt as moving effortlessly between the domestic interiors of different countries.

The freedom of women to socialize in the manner depicted in many of Cassatt's works was not a given in this period, however, becoming an issue of some controversy in the second half of the nineteenth century. The French priest Father Hyacinthe, in a lecture on "Home," reported that the jury assigned to institute prizes for social virtue at the 1867 Exposition Universelle had spoken with "but one voice, one unanimous voice, to proclaim that the keeping of the mother of the family at home is the remedy for our evils, and the stimulus to our progress."[31] Father Hyacinthe expressed his concern at the growing social activities of women, maintaining,

> I make no attack, then, on the reign of woman in the drawing-room. But what I do attack is the sacrifice of the home to the drawing-room, and above all, to that life of excitement and dissipation which is called, now-a-days, "being in society." Begin by living at home, and be—I am not afraid of the word, even for women of the loftiest position—be *housewives*; a common-sounding word, but in reality sublime! That is your empire, the empire of the earnest woman; be housewives, watch over the realm of home. . . .[32]

That women spent too much time "being in society," as Father Hyacinthe described it, concerned a number of writers at this time. In the United States, a reviewer for *The Critic* described the thesis of a new book by Dr. Edward Ellis, titled *What Every Mother Should Know*:

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[30] Ibid.: "une fine odeur d'élégances parisiennes."
[31] Father Hyacinthe, *The Family and The Church, Advent Conferences of Notre-Dame, Paris, 1866–67, 1868–9*, ed. and trans. Leonard Woolsey Bacon (New York: G. P. Putnam & Son, London: S. Low, Son & Marston, 1870), 161-2.
[32] Ibid., 162.

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> The so-called "woman of fashion" has many sins to answer for if all that is laid at her door be true. In the introductory chapter of Dr. Ellis's book we are regaled with a violent philippic against her for the inhuman manner in which she neglects her offspring. In his indignation, the author exclaims that it is better, far, "to have done with the over-refinement of an unnatural society—the pampered ease of wealth and fashion—and to go back to the active housewife of our forefathers' days, to the woman who could and did both toil and spin."[33]

In England, a *Saturday Review* writer expressed a related fear regarding women's social activities: "It is not quite clear whether women expect, when they have got their rights, to keep their privileges also. . . . And, above all, will they then still retain their most cherished privilege of tea and talk at five o'clock in the afternoon?"[34]

Writings such as these suggest that, far from representing a thoroughly uncontroversial and transparent social ritual, images like Cassatt's *Five O'Clock Tea* [Fig. 52] and *The Cup of Tea* [Fig. 64] might in fact have embodied different things to different viewers, ranging from a celebration of women's increasing liberty to socialize outside their own homes to a threat represented by the mother who is not completely devoted to domestic duties. Indeed, the *Saturday Review* writer worried that women might go so far as to replace themselves with some kind of uncanny mechanical double in order to devote themselves more completely to the social, fashionable life:

> We can even imagine that, by the application of some kind of power to a contrivance combining the bottle and the baby-jumper, she may be able to hand over one of her most natural, but most unmanly, duties to a nursing-machine. And when machines have been invented for all the different household duties of women, it is of course perfectly conceivable that they may all be combined in one great domestic engine,

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[33] "'What Every Mother Should Know,'" *Critic* 1 (3 December 1881), 336. It should be noted that the author of this review took issue with Ellis's charge, arguing that that the children of New York at least were much better off when raised by mothers of "pampered ease" than by those who "toil and spin."
[34] "Five O'Clock Tea," *Saturday Review* 36 (12 July 1873), 45.

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> warranted to do the work of an automaton housewife, or complete mechanical mistress and mother.[35]

At first glance, this scenario presents a far different picture of mothers from what Huysmans saw in Cassatt's work. "It is family life," he wrote,

> painted with distinction, with love; one involuntarily imagines those discreet interiors of Dickens, of his Esther Summerson, Florence Dombey, Agnes Copperfield, Little Dorrit, and Ruth Pinch, who so gladly rock children on their knees, while in the quiet room a copper kettle simmers, and the light falling upon the table illuminates the teapot, and the cups and saucers in pairs, and the more distant plate upon which slices of bread and butter are stacked.[36]

However, as suggested earlier, the Dickens characters mentioned here by Huysmans were not actually biological mothers. Rather, they are the "true mother" type, that is, the figure who acts as a maternal surrogate, renouncing her procreative role and remaining virginal in mind and body, suppressing her needs in order to provide physical and psychological comfort to the man of the house and his children.[37]

These "true mother" characters appear in novels by Dickens that were recognized by an *Atlantic Monthly* writer in 1881 as among those stories in which biological mothers "are specially conspicuous by their absence."[38] "The father, the uncle, even the mother-in-law or the step-mother, play an important part in fiction," this writer observed, "but the mother, if she is introduced at all, is always an uncomfortable figure, is always in the way.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350: ". . . c'est la vie de famille peinte avec distinction, avec amour; l'on songe involontairement à ces discrets intérieurs de Dickens, à ces Esther Summerson, à ces Florence Dombey, à ces Agnès Copperfield, à ces petites Dorrit, à ces Ruth Pinch, qui bercent si volontiers des enfants sur leurs genoux, pendant que, dans la chambre apaisée, la bouilloire de cuivre bourdonne, et que la lumière rabattue sur la table anime la théière et les tasses et coupe, en deux, l'assiette plus éloignée où des tartines beurrées s'étagent."

[37] Patricia Ingham, *Dickens, Women and Language* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992), chapter six, "True Mothers."

[38] "The Contributors' Club," *Atlantic Monthly* 45 (February 1880), 287.

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Can any student of human nature explain this?"[39] Recently it has been proposed that the theme of maternal loss was a prerequisite for many Victorian representations of domestic life, as a motor to drive narratives that allow characters to define themselves in the course of a search for an origin, and as a means of idealizing mothers to an extent that could not be achieved if living women were portrayed.[40] Moreover, Freud's psychoanalytic theory proceeds from this metaphor of maternal loss, upon which his constructions of adult subjectivity and "normative" sexuality were established.[41] By citing figures from Dickens novels originally published from 1843 to 1857 in relation to Cassatt's pictures of 1881, Huysmans intensified the nostalgia for a "lost" mother in his remarks. It is even possible that he preferred the idea of an uncanny mechanical mother, a figure who performs the duties of mistress and mother while denying her own human needs. (This theme would be taken up by the symbolist writer Villiers de l'Isle-Adam in his 1886 novel, *L'Eve future*.) In fact, the "true mother" type appears in Huysmans's 1881 novel, *En ménage*, in a number of characters who "renounce the primary biological function of copulation and reproduction in favour of the role of sexless comforter and supplier of victuals."[42] By extension, then, he has associated Cassatt's figures—these mothering figures who need not be biological mothers—not only with those of Dickens, but with certain characters in his own writing of the period. And the longing for this asexual mother type was not unique to Huysmans, but was shared by many who feared that increased women's rights and social freedom would lead to diminished maternal and domestic care.

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[39] Ibid. In the U.S., L. M. Bedinger, in "Mothers in American Novels," *Century Magazine* 25 (December 1882), 312, remarked upon "the colorless characters and subordinate positions assigned to the mothers" in stories recently published in *The Century*, finding this to have become "a marked characteristic of American fiction," concluding, "Though the position of the mother must be an inconspicuous one, her influence is the strongest in the world. American novelists should depict American mothers as most of them are: intelligent, devoted, self-sacrificing."

[40] Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud*, xi.

[41] Ibid., xii.

[42] Christopher Lloyd, *J.-K. Huysmans and the* Fin-de-Siècle *Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the University of Durham, 1990), 81.

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If Huysmans unsettled expectations about mothers in his discussion of Cassatt's works, what of his claim that women alone possess "a particular feeling that a man cannot render" by means of his body because "his fingers . . . are too thick to avoid leaving behind clumsy and brutal fingerprints"? "[O]nly a woman," Huysmans continued, "can pose a child, dress it, place pins without pricking." Near the end of the review, however, he discovered the sharp, piercing character of Cassatt's brush, describing how she has "pricked out" red "stars" formed from geraniums and spiky Chinese nettles amidst the greenery surrounding the figure in *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61].[43] Her pastel handling, too, frequently contradicts stereotypes of a woman's soft and smooth touch.

The issue of a rough or sharp masculine touch versus a soft and smooth feminine tactility also emerged at this time with regard to the struggle for control of knowledge about child care. As implied by the title of the book cited above, Dr. Ellis's *What Every Mother Should Know*, by 1881 "instinctual" approaches to motherhood were being called into question within the increasingly medicalized discourse of maternity, in conjunction with pediatrics, which had recently been founded as a discrete field. While these discourses were frequently controlled by male "experts," it must be acknowledged that women actively challenged their advice, through study groups and mother's clubs, for instance.[44] In addition, women's instinct, common sense, and experience continued to be brought to bear against those who sought to establish sciences of child-rearing.

For example, in April of 1881 the *New York Times* ridiculed a research project of the American Social Science Association involving a questionnaire for mothers. The *Times* derided the questions as poorly conceived, like Huysmans citing a Dickensian

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[43] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350: "verts massifs piqués d'étoiles rouges par des géraniums et bordés de pourpre sombre par des orties de Chine. . . ."

[44] Julia Grant discusses this process as it developed in the U.S. in her very interesting *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), in chapter one, "Fitting Their Nurture to Their Nature: The Emergence of Education for Motherhood."

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precedent in claiming that the association would eventually "frame a Theory of Infants which in originality and importance will at least equal Mr. Pickwick's celebrated Theory of Tittlebats."[45] Objecting to the social scientists' question, "At what age does an infant notice pain, as the prick of a pin?," the *Times* writer commented,

> The Secretary has obviously heard of pins, and perhaps uses them to fasten his collar, and he rashly jumps to the conclusion that pin-pricks are the earlier source of infantile woe. Did the miserable man never hear of colic? If not, let him be told that the first pain of which an infant complains is colic. A state of colic is the normal condition of infantile life. At times the pervasive pin undoubtedly does abrade the infant's tender surface, but to speak of pin-pricks and ignore colic as the prominent cause of infant dissatisfaction is to show an utter incapacity to estimate the comparative importance of facts.[46]

To the *Times* writer, the male secretary obviously lacks experience in caring for children, and thus is incapable of forming the proper questions necessary for his science.

While this writer clearly believed that questions about infant behavior could not be resolved without an appeal to mothers, the field of "child study" more frequently minimized the role of the mother in its attempts to understand its subject. This is the case in one of the founding texts of this genre, written by a figure better known for his theories of aesthetics—Hippolyte Taine—whose "Note sur l'acquisition du langage chez les enfants et dans l'espèce humaine," based upon observations of his own daughter, was first published in France in 1876. When translated into English in *Mind* in 1877, Taine's article inspired Darwin to print a similar study of his own child in the same journal later that

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[45] "Manners and Customs of Infants," *New York Times* (14 April 1881), 4. *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens's first novel (serialized 1836–37), traces the comic adventures and pseudo-scientific theorizing of the Pickwick Club.

[46] Ibid.

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year.[47] But despite their careful attention to every nuance of infant behavior, neither author paid much attention to the figure of the mother.

James Sully, who would come to be recognized as one of the first practitioners of developmental psychology, even went so far as to characterize women as impediments to child study. Like Taine, Sully had also published widely on aesthetics,[48] and his formulation of child study as a field appropriate for men relies upon its assignment to an intersection of aesthetics and science. In the article "Babies and Science," published in England and the U.S. in 1881, Sully declared that, "To the feminine mind, when not too confined by selfish vanities or embittered by prolonged disappointment, the baby is apt to appear one of the most considerable interests of life."[49] Men, on the other hand,

> are too obtuse, too coarse-fibred, to feel the subtle fascination of babyhood all at once. They must be bribed by an admixture of scientific interest before they will come to see all the lovely aspects of the object. Just as the naturalist gets to feel a kindly interest in the animals that yield him so much intellectual gratification, so the male sex may be unconsciously led on to admire and delight in the aesthetic side of babyhood by first becoming impressed with its scientific value.[50]

Sully's description of men as "too coarse-fibred" to appreciate what might be described as the "finer points" of infancy parallels Huysmans's characterization of the male artist as

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[47] Hippolyte Taine, "Note sur l'acquisition du langage chez les enfants et dans l'espèce humaine," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 1 (January 1876), 5-23; translated and reprinted as "M. Taine on the Acquisition of Language by Children," in *Mind* 2 (April 1877), 252-9; Charles Darwin, "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant," *Mind* 2 (July 1877), 285-94. Darwin's record had been made prior to, and proved important to the writing of, his *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal* (1872).

[48] See, for example, James Sully, *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King, 1874).

[49] The article was originally published as J. S. [James Sully], "Babies and Science," *The Cornhill Magazine* 43 (May 1881), 539-54, and reprinted in the U.S. in *Appleton's Journal* 11 (July 1881), 27-36. Page numbers in this and following notes refer to the *Cornhill* version. This quotation, p. 539. Sully also published an expanded version in his "baby diary" in *Studies of Childhood* (1895), ed. Daniel N. Robinson (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1977).

[50] Sully, "Babies and Science," 543.

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having fingers too ungainly for the delicate tasks of child care, or as lacking the ability use pins adroitly and without causing pain.

Nonetheless, men can compensate for the lack of a sensitive tactility by appropriating the penetrating and disembodied gaze of objective science. After positing that an understanding of the infant mind can lead psychologists to solve many questions regarding the developed will, Sully turned to the father as a source of information, and announced,

> Men who previously never thought of meddling with the affairs of the nursery have been impelled to make periodic visits thither in the hope of eliciting important psychological facts. The tiny occupant of the cradle has had to bear the piercing glance of the scientific eye. The psychological papa has acquired a new proprietary right in his offspring; he has appropriated it as a biological specimen.[51]

The "piercing gaze of the scientific eye" thus cuts through the mother's sentimentality and establishes an intellectual bond with the child that is superior to the mother's natural, material tie and the superficial comprehension she achieves by means of her hands. This scientific relationship between father and child also serves to reinforce the father's sense of ownership of his offspring.

Furthermore, the mother's or nurse's experience and intuition are not merely devalued resources but can even stand in the way of the scientific gaze. The mother, wrote Sully, is incapable of objectivity; her "maternal instincts impel her to regard her particular infant as phenomenal in an extra-scientific sense. She is accordingly on the look-out for remarkable infantile feats, and is disposed to ascribe to her baby a preternatural degree of intelligence."[52] As for the nurse, she "may prove even a more invincible obstacle to these researches than the mother. Her dominion in the matter of babies is necessarily large, and, if she takes exception to the father's line of research, she

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[51] Ibid., 545.
[52] Ibid., 546.

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may succeed in effectually barricading the cradle against his scientific approaches."[53] The nurse, even more than the mother, represented to Sully the unscientific forms of knowledge associated with the embodied, instinctual *kennen/connoître*, because to her, "There is something uncanny, in all this trying to get at the mysteries of the infant mind; it looks like an unhallowed prying into things which are above human comprehension, and ought to be accepted as matters of faith. Woe to the scientific father if he perseveres in his inquiries in the face of such opposition as this.[54] To the nurse, the scientific desire to penetrate life's mysteries is itself unnatural and thereby uncanny.

In 1881, then, the mother's perceptual abilities were valued and devalued in various ways with regard to knowledge about child care. For the editorial writer for the *New York Times*, hands-on experience endows the mother with a source of information not sufficiently appreciated by the male scientist, who has no such direct, daily contact with his subject of study. For Sully, in contrast, the mother's or nurse's knowledge is associated with her more delicate sense of touch, but because it is inflected by her emotional relationship with the child it is too subjective for scientific purposes, and inferior to the penetrating male gaze. Indeed, in Sully's view, despite their more sensitive tactual abilities women are "blind" to the objective knowledge of children, and may even attempt to screen out the piercing vision of the male scientist.

Despite his claim that "only a woman can paint childhood" due to her inherent physical and mental suitability for maternity, Huysmans actually aligned Cassatt more closely with Sully's male scientist than with the *New York Times*' mother. Cassatt is able to create maternal images that men might find appealing, he suggested, not because she has the same hands-on knowledge of children as a biological mother, not because she is literally able to "place pins without pricking" when dressing a child, but because she is able to utilize the "penetrating," objective gaze more commonly ascribed to men, rather than

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 546-7.

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resorting to the "affectations or tears"[55] employed by most women artists. This objectivity is also figured in her facture, with which she "pricks out" her subject matter, using a rough and more stereotypically masculine rather than feminine, delicate touch.

Cassatt, in Huysmans's view, arose from "two sources" (English painting and Degas) but is at the same time "original." She is American, but her "inherently spcial mark" is her ability to capture the essence of feminine interiors that are simultaneously French and English. She excels at painting mothers and children, but the mothers remind him of figures who are not biological mothers, and who have no mothers of their own. And though Cassatt is a woman who should be suited by virtue of feminine physiology, instinct, and a familiarity with the tasks of child care to the painting of mother and child, she succeeds not because she paints like a woman (and despite not being a mother), but because she paints like certain male novelists write (Dickens and himself), because she manages to resist the sentimentality expected of women artists, and because she sometimes employs a more masculine and prickly touch. To Huysmans, Cassatt succeeds not because she, as a female artist painting maternity, can be simply conflated with the mother, but because of her uncanny ability to hesitate in her maternal images between the familiar and the unexpected, the homelike and the *unheimlich.*

* * *

On the whole, mother and nurse are depicted interchangeably in late nineteenth-century "baby diaries" as little more than providers of nourishment and physical comfort. The father, on the other hand, is recorded as playing an active role in individuation and specifically in encouraging verbal skills, in keeping with the common alignment of mothers with pre-verbal and emotional gesture and fathers with abstract, spoken language. This gendered conception of the acquisition of language remains current in some psychoanalytical theories indebted to Freud and Lacan: the mother and child

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[55] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350: "l'afféterie ou à la larme."

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communicate in an asocial, embodied, pre-verbal language of gesture as if they are still one being, whereas the father's presence is necessary to introduce symbolic language, and thus to sever the original mother/child dyad so the child may enter into society.[56]

These ideas about the origins of language and pre-verbal communication between mother and child are not only germane to a consideration of Cassatt's subject matter, but also to her factural strategies. Griselda Pollock, in an important critique of the rhetoric of abstraction, claims that non-figurative gestural painting owes its appeal to the belief that one encounters in such works a self that is "capable of total self-expression, free from division and articulation, producing meaning directly without the mediation of symbol or sign."[57] Yet this is a regressive fantasy of return to the imaginary phase, when the subject first imagines itself to be unified and "able to communicate spontaneously and fully by means of the infant's primitive but psychically freighted tools, the look and the gesture."[58] As Pollock makes clear, although this fantasy is attractive to artists (and spectators) of both sexes, it has generally served to uphold patriarchal principles. Throughout most of the history of modernism, only men have been granted the right to participate in this fantasy without being seen as too closely identified with the infantile or maternal positions at its origins.

Few works of art embody the power of the fantasized unity of mother and child more than Cassatt's *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3], a pastel praised by a number of critics in 1881. Armand Silvestre, in *La Vie moderne*, proclaimed, "it is quite simply, from the point of view of drawing, such as M. Degas understands it—that is to say, synthesized in the accuracy of movement rather than the search for contour—a true marvel. How these

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[56] Some feminist revisions of Freud and Lacan, which inform my own thinking, understand the child's acquisition of language as preceding the introduction of the third term of the father, being more closely related to the child's individuation from the maternal body. See, for example, the discussion of this issue in Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 33.

[57] Griselda Pollock, "Painting, Feminism, History," in *Destabilizing Theory, Contemporary Feminist Debates*, eds. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 143.

[58] Ibid.

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two beings embrace each other with a real tenderness! I admit that this pastel leaves me singularly moved."[59] Huysmans cited this image of a "mother kissing her baby on the cheeks, which are impeccable pearls of the sweet Orient" as among those pictures characterized by "an affectionate understanding of the quiet life, a penetrating sense of intimacy" in which the artist has succeeded in capturing the "joyous quietude, the tranquil bonhomie of an interior."[60]

But as Huysmans was able in his review to recognize Cassatt's more "prickly" and "penetrating" qualities, a number of other critics found *A Goodnight Hug* to be "truthful" and "accurate" while at the same time "violent" and "audacious," suggesting that the fantasy of unity between mother and child has its disquieting elements. Silvestre, in a review for *L'Estafette*, stated, "Mlle Cassatt has given her drawing a feeling at the same time violent and accurate. I have seen no better proof than the *Mère et enfant*: in this summary composition, the woman and her little one embrace with a freedom from imitation and a tender truth that are truly marvelous."[61] Henry Trianon described the pastel as a depiction of mother and child that "confounds, so to speak, their faces in an embrace. It is there that the conjuring might slip up, but such is not the case. The two figures, turned toward the background, are presented only in a three-quarter view, composed of cheek, hair, and nape. The ensemble is accurate and audacious."[62]

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[59] Armand Silvestre, "Le Monde des arts: Sixième Exposition des artistes indépendants," *La Vie moderne* (16 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 366: "c'est tout simplement, au point de vue du dessin, tel que M. Degas le comprend, c'est-à-dire synthétisé dans la justesse du mouvement et non dans la recherche du contour, une vraie merveille. Comme ces deux êtres-là s'embrassent avec une réele tendresse! J'avoue que ce pastel m'a singulièrement ému."

[60] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350: "mère embrassant sur les joues son bébé, qui sont d'irréprochables perles au doux orient. . . ."; "une affective compréhension de la vie placide, une pénétrante sensation d'intimité. . . ."; "la joyeuse quiétude, la bonhomie tranquille d'un intérieur."

[61] Armand Silvestre, "Sixième Exposition des artistes indépendants," *L'Estafette* (11 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 365: "Mlle Cassatt a du dessin . . . un sentiment à la fois violent et juste. Je n'en veux pour preuve que *Mère et enfant*: dans cette composition sommaire, la femme et le petit s'embrassent avec une franchise de mimique et une vérité de tendresse vraiment merveilleuses."

[62] Henry Trianon, "Sixième Exposition de peinture par un groupe d'artistes: 35, boulevard des Capucines," *Le Consitutionnel* (24 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 367: "confondant pour ainsi dire leurs visages dans un embrassement. C'est là que l'escamotage pouvait

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Trianon's choice of verb—*confondre*—denotes not only "to mingle" or "to blend," but also "to take in" or "to overwhelm," and thus is brilliantly employed to describe this image in which the figures appear almost to be swallowing or absorbing one another, returning to a past state of prenatal unity rather than moving toward separation and maturation. The work thus invokes the uncanniness of the mother-child relationship in those moments when the difference between self and other is blurred or elided. The merging of the two bodies invokes the blissful unity with the maternal corpus, but the fragmentation of the bodies and the invisibility of their faces serve as a reminder that no one is able to understand him- or herself as completely whole, despite the seductive appeal of such fantasies, and that we all once experienced the maternal body as both protective and threatening.[63]

As we have seen, theorists such as Darwin, Taine, Sully, and even Freud frequently failed to address the mother and child relationship. Darwin even went so far as to proclaim that some important facets of maternity were nearly invisible, writing, "No emotion is stronger than maternal love; but a mother may feel the deepest love for her helpless infant, and yet not show it by any outward sign; or only by slight caressing movements, with a gentle smile and tender eyes."[64] Huysmans, too, had a troubled relationship with the figure of the mother, promoting the "true mother" type rather than the biological mother in Cassatt's imagery as well as in his own work. In contrast, Cassatt, though not herself a mother, created pictures that speak to aspects of the mother-child relationship that were not often acknowledged in her time, especially by male child-study "experts." She evoked the sensual and sensuous dimensions of the child's bath, for instance, at a moment when this aspect of hygiene could only be discussed in terms of

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se glisser; et il n'en a rien été. Les deux figures, tournées vers le fond, ne se présentent que par un trois-quarts, composé de la joue, de la chevelure et de la nuque. L'ensemble est juste et hardi."

[63] My understanding of sight in relation to the uncanny maternal body here relies upon the work of Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 113.

[64] Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal* (1872) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 78.

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deviance and the debased figure of the nurse, rather than as a normal part of the child's relationship to the maternal body, to individuation, and eventually, to adult sexuality.

Here I would like to turn to another of these aspects of the maternal relationship to which Cassatt seems attuned in *A Goodnight Hug*: the mother's struggle to retain an identity as separate from the child during an era when her right to do so was under attack. The picture's mother/child dyad, which is at once one and two, and the agitated wallpaper background behind it can be understood as having prefigured Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story, "The Yellow Wall-paper," in which issues of feminine creativity and procreativity are addressed. Working from a number of recent interpretations of this text as well as late nineteenth-century ideas about wallpaper and decoration, it is possible to bring together Cassatt, Gilman, the representation of the maternal body, and the female artist in enlightening ways.[65]

"The Yellow Wall-paper" has long been read as the story of a failed "rest cure," and as Gilman's attempt to force the rest cure's originator, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, to consider its limitations.[66] The unnamed narrator of the story, a young mother, has begun to experience "hysterical" symptoms. The doctor prescribes a treatment requiring her to regress to an infantile state during which she is not allowed to do any type of work, whether child care, reading, or writing. Instead, she must re-train herself in the most basic

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[65] Most important to my discussion of this story are the interpretations of Walter Benn Michaels, "Introduction: The Writer's Mark," in *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3-28; Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 229-48; Richard Feldstein, in "Reader, Text, and Ambiguous Referentiality in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper,'" *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 269-79; and Barbara Johnson, "Is Female to Male as Ground is to Figure?," also in *Feminism and Pscyhoanalysis*, 255-68.

[66] Michaels, by contrast, in "Introduction: The Writer's Mark," 5, argues that "The Yellow Wall-paper" is best interpreted as "the work of something like self-generation and that, far from being a story about a woman driven crazy by Weir Mitchell's refusal to allow her to produce, it is about a woman driven crazy (if she is crazy) by a commitment to production so complete that it requires her to begin by producing herself."

It is not known at what date Cassatt first came to know of Dr. Mitchell, who was a prominent Philadelphian, but in a letter to her friend Theodate Pope, dated December 23, [1910], she wrote that "Mary Mitchell . . . a grand daughter of Dr Weir Mitchells of Philadelphia" was the daughter of a friend of her sister-in-law; in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 303.

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activities, including walking. In order to facilitate her treatment, the narrator and her husband move into a rented house, one whose title is under dispute by a number of heirs. The narrator is installed apart from her child in a former nursery which has windows "barred for little children" and wallpaper in "[o]ne of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin."[67] Soon she detects the presence of creeping female figures in the wallpaper, becomes obsessed with them, and begins to creep with them. She also defies the order to avoid work by writing the narrative which is the story.

In her 1898 book, *Women and Economics*, Gilman described economic production and the impulse to work (which proves irresistible to the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-paper") as "the natural expression of human energy," for "human beings tend to produce, as a gland to secrete."[68] If this urge to produce is automatic and to some degree unconscious, it is also pursued consciously: "'I want to mark!' cries the child, demanding the pencil. He does not want to eat. He wants to mark. He is not seeking to get something into himself, but to put something out of himself."[69] The act of marking represents an effort to guarantee identity, whether for the child who is in the process of individuation, or the (female) hysteric in danger of losing self-control. The mark thus operates as a signature, or as a form of "inherited title" which is passed from one's past selves to one's present self.[70] Yet, as I discussed in Chapter One, particularly in relation to Cassatt's changing pseudonyms and signatures, women's access to culturally validated and legally permissible experiences of individual identity, embodiedness, and property

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[67] Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper," 30-1.

[68] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Women and Economics," in *Women and Economics, A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898), ed. Carl Degler (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 116.

[69] Ibid., 116-7.

[70] Michaels, "Introduction: The Writer's Mark," 7. This idea about the self being organized under the passage of an "inherited title" is drawn by Michaels from William James and his answer to the question, "How do I know today that I am the same self that I was yesterday?," addresssed in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890).

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ownership were much more limited than men's in the late nineteenth century, rendering this "title" to the female self (and to the female artist's property) much more problematic.[71]

Furthermore, while Gilman's choice to frame the need for personal expression in terms of the universal male subject—the boy who wishes to mark—reflects the conventions for writing in her period, at the same time it emphasizes that it was usually the male child alone who was encouraged to pursue self-expression into the realm of what Gilman termed "true art," as opposed to the "sensuous decoration and personal ornament" toward which creative girls were steered.[72] In fact, Gilman had originally studied for a commercial art career, attending the newly opened Rhode Island School of Design in 1878–79 before marrying an artist and suffering depression after the birth of her daughter in 1885.[73] By examining Cassatt's visual strategies in *A Goodnight Hug* in conjunction with similar elements in Gilman's story we can better understand how these two female artists struggled to assert a woman's right to establish an identity through her mark-making at a time when women were increasingly pressured to aspire to no other career than housewife.

Mary Jacobus, writing on "The Yellow Wall-paper," makes the important point that most readings of the story fail to address two significant aesthetic elements employed by Gilman—the color yellow and the uncanny—elements which are linked by the manner in which they exceed meaning in relation to the female body.[74] The color yellow in Cassatt's theater pictures of the 1879 and 1880 Impressionist exhibitions was understood by some critics in similar ways. For some, it was associated with the abject female body,

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[71] Gilman, too, utilized different names over the course of her career, publishing her writings under a number of variants upon her maiden name and her husbands' names. Feldstein, in "Reader, Text, and Ambiguous Referentiality in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper,'" 269, posits that Gilman "possibly foresaw the manipulation of the names of the fathers—Perkins, Stetson, Gilman—as a means of destabilizing the process of signification by presenting a proliferation of signifiers that ironically generate a paucity of signifieds."

[72] Gilman, "Women and Economics," 120.

[73] Carl Degler, "Introduction to the Torchbook Edition," in *Women and Economics*, ix.

[74] Jacobus, *Reading Woman*, 234-5.

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as with the critic who wrote that figure in *At the Theater* [Fig. 51] looked like a rotting mackerel, or those who described the theater interior in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* [Fig. 46] as having been painted with the yolk of an egg. For others, the bright hue was also evidence of the artist's attempt to go beyond the limitations of conventional painting, defined here in terms of the legible representation of the female body: Auguste Dalligny commented, "Mlle Marie [*sic*] Cassatt abuses yellow in certain cases,"[75] while Arthur Baignères stated, "Miss Cassatt, faithful to the theater, shows us a smear of yellow in a red one. It's a woman in a loge."[76]

As for the uncanny, Jacobus locates it in Gilman's story mainly in the repetition of the word "creepy" in the text and in the word's oscillation between figural and literal uses, as the narrator experiences the wallpaper as eerie and makes a physical connection with it, rubbing her shoulder against the paper while she crawls on hands and knees, ostensibly relearning how to walk.[77] To read the story as "merely creepy" rather than to explore its uncanny aspects, including the house which is "haunted" by disputes over inheritance, is to reduce female subjectivity to sentimentality and to reinforce the constitution of female subjects "within an economy which defines knowledge as power and gives to women the disenfranchizing privilege of personal feeling uninformed by knowledge ('I am a doctor, dear, and I know')."[78]

To push Jacobus's reading further, we can understand the pattern of Gilman's wallpaper as uncanny, as is the relationship between the paper and female figures in both the story and Cassatt's *A Goodnight Hug*. As Gilman's narrator describes the pattern:

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[75] Aug[uste] Dalligny, "L'Exposition de la rue des Pyramides," *Le Journal des arts* (16 April 1880), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 274: "Mlle Marie [sic] Cassatt abuse du jaune en certains cas."

[76] Baignères, "Exposition des oeuvres de M. J. de Nittis: 5e Exposition de peinture, par MM. Bracquemond, Caillebotte, Degas, etc.," 267.

[77] Jacobus, *Reading Woman*, 234-5.

[78] Ibid., 237.

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> I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.
>
> It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.
>
> Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of "debased Romanesque" with *delirium tremens*—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.
>
> But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing sea-weeds in full chase.
>
> The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.
>
> They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.[79]

The wallpaper embodies a number of things here, such as the hysterical woman (suffering "*delirium tremens*") and the oppressiveness of the domestic interior ("like a lot of wallowing sea-weeds in full chase"). Moreover, the wallpaper represents the devaluation of art or design forms when they are associated with the feminine and mass culture ("a kind of 'debased Romanesque'").

Though such wallcoverings had once been hand-woven, hand-printed, or hand-painted (hence the French term for wallpaper: *papier peint*), their machine manufacture increased throughout the nineteenth century, with British and French producers striving to outdo each other. After 1874, when a 20-color printing machine was developed (adding greatly to the eight colors previously possible), complexly patterned yet affordable

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[79] Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper," 34.

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wallpapers became widely available.[80] William Morris had also been responsible for a surge of interest in wallcoverings through his promotion of the Arts and Crafts movement, which sought to preserve something of the original values of "handicraft" in an increasingly mechanized and commercialized market for decorative goods. But while this movement had utopian aspirations with regard to gender roles, its methods and materials remained associated with "women's work" and often promoted hierarchies of gender. Morris's design firm, for example, employed women mainly to create needlework, a traditionally "feminine" field.[81] In the U.S., the designing of wallpaper was considered to be a suitable occupation for women, as reported in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1880.[82] Not surprisingly, women whose creative activities were limited to interior decoration were seen as capable of choosing between "designs intended to catch the eye" and those that "appeal to our sense of propriety and the fitness of things," a skill that was aligned with their intuitive abilities to critique the details of other women's dress and make-up.[83] That wallpaper was associated with a debased femininity by 1881 is further evident from the fate of the artist Cyprien in Huysmans's novel *En ménage*. By the end of the story, he comes to blame relationships with women for suffocating male creative talent, and has himself been "reduced to designing wallpapers."[84]

In addition, wallpaper at this time had not only come to be associated with a devalued femininity but was also frequently figured as a surface receptive of abject fluids

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[80] Joanne Kosuda-Warner, "Outside In: Landscape in 19th-Century Wallpaper," *Art on Paper* (September/October 2001), 60.

[81] Anthea Callen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870–1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 15-6.

[82] William H. Rideing, "Working-Women in New York," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 61 (June 1880), 33.

[83] "On the Selection of Wall Papers," *Manufacturer and Builder* 9 (July 1877), 162.

[84] Lloyd, *J.-K. Huysmans and the Fin-de-Siècle Novel*, 76. It is interesting to note, in light of *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6] and a number of works featuring plaid patterns exhibited by Cassatt in 1881, that at the end of *En ménage*, when Cyprien describes his work as a wallpaper designer, he says he makes Scottish patterns, "papers with alternating and crossing lines, in red and green, like the trousers of Highlanders or certain shawls." J.-K. Huysmans, *En Ménage* (1881), in *En Ménage/À Vau-L'Eau (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions*, 1975), 376: "papiers qui ont des raies alternées et croisées, rouges et vertes, comme des culottes d'Highlanders ou certains châles."

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and substances. In Guy de Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1885), for instance, the protagonist rents a room covered in a gray paper with blue flowers that showed "as many stains as flowers, old suspicious-looking stains, the nature of which could not be defined, crushed insects or drops of oil, fingertips smeared with hair pomade or soapy water splattered from the basin while washing."[85] Zola, in *Nana* (1880), described the dressing room of two actresses, adorned with a "paper of seven sous a roll, with pink flowers roaming over green trelliswork."[86] This paper serves as the backdrop to a scene of squalor: dressing tables "black with spilled water," and a display of articles "battered" and "dirtied with use," and belonging to these women who "undress themselves and wash together" without regard for the filth around them.[87] Wallpaper, then, forms a literal and figural background to many scenes at the intersection of female sexuality and "moral hygiene."

No artist would exploit the association of the feminine and decorative patterns such as those found on wallpaper or textiles more than Edouard Vuillard. In a picture contemporaneous with "The Yellow Wall-paper," *Dressmaking Studio I* [Fig. 65], the Nabi painter depicted seamstresses at work within a profusion of patterns, the women barely distinguishable from the dress fabrics they manipulate and from the wallpaper behind them. Susan Sidlauskas has convincingly argued that Vuillard, far from creating scenes of domestic ease that emerged naturally from his experiences being raised as the son and brother of dressmakers, actually subverted the conventional signs of femininity, absorbing figure into background to the point that many of his works offer "a nightmarish realization of the cherished dictum that a woman's place is in the home."[88] Sidlauskas

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[85] Guy de Maupassant, *Bel-Ami* (1885) (Paris: Louis Conard, 1928), 5: "autant de taches que de fleurs, des taches anciennes, suspectes, dont on n'aurait pu dire la nature, bêtes écrasées ou gouttes d'huile, bouts de doigts graissés de pommade ou écume de la cuvette projetée pendant des lavages."

[86] Emile Zola, *Nana* (1880), ed. Colette Becker (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1994), 130: "papier à sept sous le rouleau, des fleurs roses courant sur un treillage vert."

[87] Ibid.: "noire d'eau répandue"; "tordus"; "salis par l'usage"; "se déshabillant, se débarbouillant en commun."

[88] Susan Sidlauskas, "Contesting Femininity: Vuillard's Family Pictures," *Art Bulletin* 78 (March 1997), 98.

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emphasizes that while one narrative on Vuillard has characterized him as being excessively feminine due to the congruence of his upbringing and his subject matter, a counter-narrative has emerged that places Vuillard firmly within the trajectory toward the masculine invention of abstraction and its suppression of space and of the distinctions between (female) figure and ground.[89]

Cassatt, too, experimented with patterns throughout her career, even before Vuillard and the other Nabi painters. Yet in images like *The Bath* [Fig. 66], of 1893, she never dissolved the figures to the same degree as her male counterparts. But to say that she did not achieve an equivalent abstraction is not to say that her work is uninteresting or unoriginal; rather, it is to recognize that she had a different type of investment in the representation of women in domestic settings. And it should also be stressed that Cassatt's pictures of the late 1870s and early 1880s, such as *The Blue Room* and *A Goodnight Hug*, demonstrate not only that she had begun to work with pattern in new ways a decade before the Nabis, but also that the relation of ground and figure could be questioned in a productive manner without resorting to the two most common masculinist representational strategies, described by Barbara Johnson in her discussion of "The Yellow Wall-paper": woman "as ground—the place upon or within which what is interesting stands out," and woman "as figure—a detachable object of degradation or desire."[90]

In Cassatt's first maternal image, for example, *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* [Fig. 56], the wallpaper closes the background, pressing the figures into the spectator's space in a way that increases their intimacy with each other (and our intimacy with them) while also suggesting that this closeness can be too much, as when the child begins to feel the need to individuate. The angular squiggles of the wallpaper echo the child's pointed elbows, spread legs, and flexed toes—the signs of its metaphorical as well as literal "awakening." The mother, who both supports the child with her enormous lap

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[89] Ibid., 88.

[90] Johnson, "Is Female to Male as Ground is to Figure?," 256 n. 3.

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but participates in its earliest experiences of individuation through her caretaking, reminds us that the trope of woman as an object of degradation or desire has its roots in the child's earliest relationship with the mother, but need not be the artist's only representational strategy outside of woman "as ground."

In *A Goodnight Hug*, which appears to portray the same two figures seen in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, the scene is both simpler and more complicated. The compression of space is even greater and the wallpaper more agitated. The vertically-striped pattern invokes, if not a cage or a jail, at least some type of construction intended to protect or restrain the inhabitants of an interior, like the barred windows of the nursery in "The Yellow Wall-paper." This mother, swallowing or being swallowed by the child—or to use Gilman's terms, consuming or being consumed by the child—would appear to have no identity outside that child.

The issue of maternal identity, and whether this identity should preclude female sexuality and creativity, concerned Gilman's physician, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, in his writings on hysteria. According to Mitchell, the symptoms of hysteria could include the "split personality," as was the case with a young woman whose "alternate consciousness" brought dishonor to her by writing love letters to a man for whom her "real" self felt only friendship.[91] To prevent this type of overtly sexualized behavior, Mitchell recommended that girls be raised more like boys: "The boy is taught self-control, repression of emotion, not to cry when hurt. Teach your girls these things and you will in the end assure to them . . . interior control."[92]

Whereas emotion in Western culture often seemed to be becoming "more private and invisible" due to the social requirements of class-based decorum and to a revival of the idea that the expression of sentiment reveals moral weakness, as a *Saturday Review* writer

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[91] Michaels, "Introduction: The Writer's Mark," 6.

[92] Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1887), 146; quoted in Michaels, "Introduction: The Writer's Mark," 6-7. The idea of what is now called "multiple personality disorder" had begun to be studied in the 1870s; this issue will be treated at greater length in Chapter Five.

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claimed in 1873,[93] the expression of love between mother and child not only remained proper for women, but was promoted as the most suitable outlet for a woman's emotions, and the only outlet which could be allowed to be publicly visible. Paolo Mantegazza, for instance, who encouraged women to remain "virginal" even as they became mothers, tacitly approved of maternal love as a substitute for adult female sexuality when he found the relation between mother and child to be characterized by "an extreme energy almost convulsive and volcanic."[94]

One could even say that women were encouraged by writers such as Mantegazza and Mitchell to adopt a certain flattening of affect outside of expressing loving emotions toward children. But Mitchell found that some women could also be too flat, and these patients, "whose minds are like the back of a piece of needlework with a baffling absence of pattern—women with a low, whining, bleating voice that is by itself a tell-tale of the kind of will-less ataxia which seems to cripple the mind no less than the body," were even harder to cure.[95] Both types of women, suffering from too much or too little emotion, were considered by Mitchell to have been sickened by weak blood and a lack of body fat. His treatment involved the consumption of a high-calorie diet and an increase in exercise.[96] Soon, as he described one case, the patient's "limbs began to round, and color come back to her pallid cheek," and he was able to "set her to thinking how far the early troubles might have been within her control. I assured her that, although she could not now overcome at once the results due to habitual failure of self-control, repeated efforts would surely end in success."[97] Dr. Mitchell's idea of a healthy woman, then, involved achieving a habitually repetitive pattern of behavior with a balance between flatness and

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[93] "The Emotional Language of the Future," reprinted from *Saturday Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 119 (6 December 1873), 632.

[94] Mantegazza, *Physiognomy and Expression*, 144.

[95] Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea's Son & Co., 1881), 31.

[96] See, for example, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1877).

[97] Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, 32.

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roundness: repressed and flat in her non-maternal sexuality, but full in her maternal body and emotions, having a rotundity redolent of pregnancy that Gilman's narrator found repulsive in the wallpaper pattern, with its "bloated curves and flourishes" that "go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity."[98]

This language of roundness and flatness in relation to pattern also brings to mind William Morris's theories of design, which anticipated to some extent Clement Greenberg's modernism and its valuation of the coincidence of flattened color and the two-dimensional canvas support as the irreducible essence of modernist painting. Morris believed that wallpaper ornament should be "honest" to its function and its materiality, having a flattened appearance and avoiding the approximation of round forms or the simulation of non-paper substances such as stone or wood.[99] "I think the real way to deal successfully with designing for paperhangings is to accept their mechanical nature frankly, to avoid falling into the trap of trying to make your paper look as if it were painted by hand," Morris stated in 1882.[100]

Patterns for what Morris termed "secondary" art forms, including wallpaper, should be derived from natural shapes like leaves and flowers, he recommended in an 1881 lecture, but must be stylized or abstracted in order to prevent them from appearing too realistic and deeply stirring the sentiments.[101] The appeal to emotion should only be attempted through the higher, more "intellectual" art forms. At the same time, patterns intended for these "lesser arts" could represent a satisfying challenge to the (usually male)

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[98] Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper," 34.

[99] That these ideas had made their way into American popular literature is evident in the 1877 article, "On the Selection of Wall Papers," in *Manufacturer and Builder*, which admonished, "Figures in the round are not to be tolerated; but some of the flat designs are good, though not all" (162). In France, Charles Blanc, in *Grammaire des arts décoratifs, décoration intérieure de la maison* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1882), attributed this idea about "flatness" (he used the English term) to the English architect and design theorist Owen Jones (76); Blanc, however, was not as doctrinaire, finding some perspective and imitation admissible in wallpaper.

[100] William Morris, "The Lesser Arts of Life" (1882), quoted in E. A. Entwisle, *A Literary History of Wallpaper* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1960), 124.

[101] William Morris, *Some Hints on Pattern-Designing* (1881) (London: Longmans, 1899), 3-4.

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designer, who would seek to compensate in some way for "these wares which are stretched out flat on the wall, and have no special beauty of execution about them."[102] In this case, the designer should attend to certain rules that prefigure aspects of Roger Fry's formalism:

> The absolute necessities of the art are beauty of colour and restfulness of form. More definite qualities than these it need not have. Its colour may be brought about by the simplest combinations; its form may be merely that of abstract lines or spaces, and need not of necessity have any distinct meaning, or tell any story expressible in words. On the other hand, it is necessary to the purity of the art that its form and colour, when these bear any relation to the facts of nature (as for the most part they do), should be suggestive of such facts, and not descriptive of them.[103]

Morris's emphasis on flatness, abstraction from nature, and purity shares with the ideas of Fry and Greenberg a desire to repress the procreative rotundity and sentimental emotions that have been most often equated with women and their bodies.

If the wallpaper in Gilman's short story refuses its prescribed role as a "secondary" source of "pure" and "restful" beauty and form, functioning rather as a screen onto which are projected both the narrator's fears (of being caged in "fatuous" maternity and domesticity) and desires (to "produce" and to "mark"), so too does the wallpaper in *A Goodnight Hug* complicate not only the expected relation between foreground and background in works of visual art but also expectations about the female artist. Cassatt's hand and the hand of the mother in this pastel might indeed be analogized, as suggested by Huysmans, but in a way that works against the natural congruence that he posited. In the passage in which he proposed this analogy and praised *A Goodnight Hug*, he attributed

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[102] Morris, *Some Hints on Pattern-Designing*, 23.

[103] William Morris, "The History of Pattern-Designing," originally published in *Lectures on Art Delivered in Support of the Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings, by Reginald Stuart Poole, Prof., W. B. Richmond, E. J. Poynter, R.A., J. T. Micklethwaite, William Morris* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882); text consulted at http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/tmp/pattern.htm, 11 January 2002. Fry's formalism will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

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Cassatt's success to her ability to achieve a balance between the expression of a properly feminine and maternal sentiment and a repression of this same feeling.[104] Yet, as *The Artist*'s "Lady Correspondent" observed of the pastel, neither Cassatt's handling nor the hand of the mother in this image correspond to stereotypes about feminine delicacy and restraint: "'Mère et Enfant' deserves praise from [*sic*] its intense feeling; both faces are almost invisible, but one feels the love and intensity of embrace; it is a pity more care was not put into the drawing of the hand, which is large, coarse, and ill shapen."[105] This critic's language, too, parallels the vocabulary used by James Sully to describe the father/naturalist who is too "coarse-fibred" to "feel the subtle fascination of babyhood all at once" and can only come to appreciate the "aesthetic side of babyhood by first becoming impressed with its scientific value."[106] Cassatt's handling of the hand thereby reads as more masculine than feminine in the eyes of *The Artist's* critic.[107]

The critic Albert Wolff, when discussing Cassatt's 1881 pictures, also found it difficult to decide Cassatt's relation to gendered stereotypes about artists. He opened his review by aligning the artist with a masculine positivism, stating, "From a scientific point of view, Mlle Casatt [*sic*] is a veritable phenomenon; in more than one of her paintings, she is on the point of becoming a considerable artist, with an unheard of feeling for nature, very penetrating powers of observation, and an ability to subordinate herself before the model that is a fact of the unrivaled artist. . . ."[108] But she also appeared to him to have a second self or an "alternate consciousness" (much in the manner of Dr. Mitchell's

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[104] Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," 350.

[105] "Our Lady Correspondent," "Art Abroad. Art in Paris," 153.

[106] J. S. [James Sully], "Babies and Science," 543.

[107] Anne Higonnet discusses the tendency for critics of Impressionism to assign gender identities to artists and their works in "Imaging Gender," in *Art Criticism and Its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (Manchester, England, and New York: Manchester University Press), 146-61, and notes that Cassatt was at times described as more masculine a painter than Renoir (152).

[108] Albert Wolff, "Courrier de Paris," *Le Figaro* (10 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 372: "A ce point de vue scientifique, Mlle Casatt [*sic*] est un véritable phénomène; dans plus d'une de ses toiles, elle est sur le point de devenir une artiste considérable, avec un sentiment inouï de la nature, une observation très pénétrante et une subordination recueillie devant le modèle qui est le fait des artistes hors de pair. . . ."

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hysterics), for, Wolff continued, "then, when this beautiful intelligence has completed its work and, while it rests, a little spider takes the palette and the brushes and imprints its stamp on the work either in unrealistic hands, or in some touches of color which have no reason for being, and always in a corner of the painting which is deformed and monstrous and makes one shudder and say, 'What a shame!'"[109] Given that Cassatt's primary self here is identified with a rational, masculine aesthetic, her secondary self would appear to be of feminine origin, in keeping with the etymological roots of *araignée* and the Greek mythological story of Arachne, the woman weaver who was turned into a spider for daring to challenge the goddess Minerva's dominance in this most traditionally feminine of arts.[110] But rather than imbuing her pictures with the delicate prettiness or transparent sentimentality expected of the female artist, Cassatt's feminine spider-self takes her imagery toward another extreme, one suggested by Sully in his discussion of the mother's tactile relation to the child. This many-armed, Medusa-like self carries touch to its blind limits, refusing to make her subjects completely accessible to the viewer, obscuring them through what Wolff described as poorly drawn hands, non-local color, and "deformed and monstrous" passages of paint.

In this tension between the visible and the invisible, *A Goodnight Hug* reads almost as an illustration of Herbert Spencer's contention that emotions suppressed or blocked from their normal paths will inevitably find an outlet, and anticipates Freud's ideas on the inevitable revelation of repressed emotions, often in displaced form. Cassatt has made "invisible" the customary focus of Western figural painting and one of its main vehicles for expression—the human face—as *Artist*'s "Lady Correspondent" maintained; nevertheless,

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[109] Ibid.: "puis, quand cette belle intelligence a bien travaillé et pendant qu'elle se repose, la petite araignée prend la palette et les pinceaux et imprime sa griffe à l'ouvrage, soit par des mains invraisemblables, soit par quelques taches de couleur qui n'ont aucune raison d'être, toujours par un coin difforme et monstrueux qui donne le frisson et qui fait dire: Quel malheur!"

[110] For a cross-cultural exploration of spider and spinning mythology, see Marta Weigle, *Spiders & Spinsters: Women and Mythology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).

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"one feels the love and intensity of the embrace."[111] But is it only the embrace that is expressive in this work? No, for in the same way that Cassatt subverts expectations by giving us the sides and backs of her figures' heads instead of their faces, she offers a background that plays an emphatic role in the composition: a wallpaper that is anything but bereft of affect[112] and anything but mere background.

The coarse treatment of flesh and the assertive presence of the wallpaper in *A Goodnight Hug* together present a challenge to those who attempted to lock female creativity within the realm of the decorative, the devalued, and the domestic. Cassatt's handling, use of color, and inversion of conventions regarding foreground and background as well as the visible and the invisible, counteract the wholesale consumption of the female figure within the realm of the maternal. The jagged application of strident pastel tints to approximate the wallcovering and the roughly scratched treatment of skin, especially in the large female hand in the foreground, produce an unsettled environment that works against the mother's complete assimilation into the identity of her child. This hand is not the sensitive, feminine hand fantasized by Huysmans that "can place pins without pricking" but rather one that is capable of participating in what is considered to be a more masculine creative act, refusing to follow a predetermined pattern and be limited to the representation of Huysmans's "tranquil bonhomie of an interior."

Though the wallpaper pattern seems to be based on the highly abstracted type recommended by Morris, in Cassatt's hands its lines become restless and irregular, not

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[111] "Our Lady Correspondent," "Art Abroad. Art in Paris," 153.

[112] I have borrowed the phrase "bereft of affect" from David Joselit's recent "genealogy of flatness," in which he examines how the pinnacle of modernism as theorized by Clement Greenberg and practiced by Jackson Pollock is validated by the idea that the "flatness" of Pollock's work in fact represents a density or even impaction of authentic emotion. Greenberg expressed concern that viewers would understand Pollock's paintings as consisting either of "wallpaper patterns"—what Joselit calls "a form of representation absolutely bereft of affect"—or as being no more than the expression of "raw, uncultivated emotion" (22). Pollock's works are able to avoid the meaninglessness of either extreme in Greenberg's view because their material substances, in being distributed on the canvas by means of the artist's deliberately yet unconsciously choreographed physical gestures, are transformed into a repository for Pollock's "soul," which is "not above or beyond the body, but its simple correlative." See David Joselit, "Notes on Surface: Toward a Genealogy of Flatness," *Art History* 23 (March 2000), 19-34.

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perfectly repetitive and emblematic of repose; the paper resembles more closely the back of a piece of needlework, recalling Mitchell's description of some of his hysterical patients. Nor is the wallpaper background adequately finished according to either the norms of needlework or conventional painting of the era, for no attempt was made to completely cover the support with pastel. As a result, the pattern floats on the paper, calls attention to its material status as pigment,[113] and in its empty interstices and blank spaces provides a visual and psychological counterpoint to the nearly complete suturing of the foreground figures into one undivided being.

Moreover, Cassatt has taken a decorative element considered to be a debased and "lesser" art, associated with the commercial and feminine (because machine-manufactured, mass-produced, and destined for use in the domestic interior), and has hand-drawn it, imbuing the pattern with a lively, scribbled, and "high art" presence through its material link to the hand of the artist. Like Gilman's wallpaper, the background takes a foreground role, functioning as a screen for the projection of the female figure's fears and desires. The intense embrace of mother and child is compounded by the churning wallcovering; here, even more than in the Old Master pictures of Madonna and Child cited by Mantegazza, the expression of maternal love is aptly characterized as "an extreme energy almost convulsive and volcanic."[114] But at the same time, this energy is not the gentle rhythm of Dickens's and Huysmans's "true mothers" who "gladly rock children on their knees, while in the quiet room a copper kettle simmers." Rather, the vertical lines, unevenly transversed by horizontal markings, also resemble the bars of a cage being shaken by a powerful force struggling for release.

The notion of the nursery as cage appears not only in Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" but was invoked contemporaneously with *A Goodnight Hug* in an 1881 article on

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[113] This effect may have been exaggerated by the darkening of the paper over the course of time to the current brown tint; nevertheless, the contrast between pastel and support would have been evident from the moment of its creation, especially given contemporary notions of "finish."

[114] Mantegazza, *Physiognomy and Expression*, 144.

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"Nursery Decoration and Hygiene." Constance Cary Harrison reported the comments of a mother who wished for some relief from the need to keep her children under constant surveillance: "'My idea of a model nursery,' said a fine lady, not long ago, 'is a padded room, with barred windows, and everything in it, when not in use, hung out of reach upon the walls. Then, one might sit down-stairs in the drawing-room, and read, or practice, or receive, with a mind at rest.'"[115] The nursery in this case serves as a site for locking the children safely away so that the mother may relax outside in freedom; being a "padded room," it also invokes the room of a psychiatric patient, which this mother fears she may become if she must spend every moment locked within it, performing her maternal duties. However, Harrison displayed little sympathy with this mother, asking, "But what of the melancholy little starlings caged above, piping their woful [*sic*] plaint, 'I can't get out'? And, in many cases, it is no wonder they should want to get out."[116] Harrison characterized the average nursery as "a *Hôtel des Invalides* for retired furniture," having a carpet with "a half-effaced pattern of lilies and roses, long since trodden into a dingy uniformity of tint," and a wallpaper of green and yellow stripes "soiled by finger-marks."[117] Her recommendations for the safest and most hygienic surroundings for "His Serene Highness, Baby Number One" and each "usurper" to the throne included "cheap and charming wall-papers" and "an iron net-work, which may be painted green with gilded top" outside the windows.[118]

At the conclusion of the article, Harrison's "model nursery" is no less a cage for the mother for being gilded. In support of her notion that each child should have a view of a pleasant park-like landscape, Harrison recalled the story of a weary mother who tries to soothe the feverish child in her arms. No one can help until the father enters the room,

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[115] Constance Cary Harrison, "Nursery Decoration and Hygiene," *Scribner's Monthly* 21 (January 1881), 470.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid. I am also reminded here of the furnishings in *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6].
[118] Ibid., 470-1.

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and the child goes to him, asking to be held up to the window. Only when the father provides the view and shares his knowledge of the birds with the boy does the child fall asleep and begin his recovery. The mother's instinct to touch the child, to hold him close to her body within the nursery, is trumped by the father's opticality and role as the third term that breaks up the mother/child dyad, here by means of science and the promise of a world outside the mother's body and the feminine-identified interior (the *Heim*).

This casting of the mother as an inmate or prisoner caged inside the home brings to mind another strange visual resemblance, in this case, between *A Goodnight Hug* and police mug shots of the same era [Fig. 67], which included the hands as well as the face of the offender, and featured mirror reflections in order to simultaneously capture the profile and the shape of the ear. Cassatt's image differs in an important way from these photographs because she obscures the figures' faces. Still, the peculiar prominence of the mother's hand, set in a central position on the page, has no visual equivalent in the realm of high art, outside of Morelli's schedules of old master body parts [Fig. 4]. A visual connection between Morelli's method and the mug shot would be made in 1895 by a reviewer of one of Bernard Berenson's books, who observed, "Morelli's theory, it is now almost superfluous to state, was that, in the identification of the painting, as in that of the criminal, it is the trivial detail that betrays,—'the ears, the hands, the folds, certain idiosyncrasies of pose and certain settings and backgrounds, as pronest to be executed in a stereotyped fashion.'"[119] But even in 1881, housewives were analogized with prison inmates, psychiatric hospital residents, or even chattel in feminist writings. Hubertine Auclert, for example, described how the French legal system, by denying women various rights, especially those regarding property (including children), served to confine them. "It is the law on marriage that makes the married woman and her property the property of her husband," she wrote; "It is the law of guardianship that, in order to exclude women

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[119] "Reconstructive Criticism," *Atlantic Monthly*, 557.

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(with the exception of the mother and her ancestors) from guardianship and family councils, does not hesitate to class them with criminals and the insane."[120]

While Cassatt in *A Goodnight Hug* was not intending to make a statement about the female prisoner or criminal, her pastel unsettles expectations that shackled women regarding their anatomy, physiology, and behavior in the 1880s. Cassatt prevents us from characterizing her figure as "appropriately" feminine, maternal, or delicate by giving her a large, coarse, even masculine hand. Still, the figure expresses a great deal of "proper" maternal emotion, indeed, far more than even a keen observer like Darwin was accustomed to see. But if maternity here is likened here to a prison or cage, the possibility of avoiding complete subsumption of woman into motherhood also exists. Cassatt's pastel handling, her emphatic and individualized presentation of the wallpaper background, the manner in which she obscures her figures' faces (denying us the full possibilities of identification promised by the mug shot), and the depiction of a woman and child simultaneously possessing and consuming each other leave little prospect for the spectator to possess or consume the female figure.

II.

In spite of Cassatt's strategies for disrupting the traditional depiction of the female figure offered up for the spectator's consumption, the fantasy of possession or unity remains strong—and strongly gendered. Adam Gopnik, for instance, described *A Goodnight Hug* in a recent *New Yorker* article: "This little boy doesn't just embrace his mother. He consumes her, with a passionate hug that erases their features and turns them into a single, heart-shaped form."[121] To Gopnik, the child is clearly both a boy and the

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[120] Auclert, [article of unknown title], *La Citoyenne*, quoted and trans. in *Victorian Women*, 445.

[121] Adam Gopnik, "Mary Cassatt's Baby Love," *The New Yorker* (22 March 1999), 115. It is worth noting that Gopnik's essay, though prompted by the Art Institute of Chicago's "Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman" exhibition, which attempted to some degree to redress the limitations of considering Cassatt as primarily the "peintre des enfants et des mères," ignores the show to focus on Cassatt's representations of what he describes as "the nearly adulterous, exhausting love with which middle-class women have come to address their babies" (115). His central illustration, *A Goodnight Hug*, was not included in the exhibition but was reproduced in the catalogue.

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active agent in the picture, even in the absence of any clear signs of gender (hair length not being a reliable indication, particularly in the late nineteenth century), and in spite of that fact that the mother's hand enfolds the child tightly.

This idea can be clarified and expanded with reference to issues of gesture when considered in relation to another Cassatt pastel likely to have been on display at the 1881 Impressionist exhibition: *Mathilde Holding a Baby Who Reaches to Right*[122] [Fig. 68]. The critic Enjoiras, while finding fault with Cassatt's palette (she "abuses . . . green, blue, and violet"),[123] praised her ability to depict poses and gestures. "Mlle Mary Cassatt gives to her figures a feeling of repose, of a quite remarkable, intimate placidity," he stated, adding, "the mother of the family surrounded by children [Fig. 60], the woman who knits [Fig. 61]: these are poses of rare naturalness."[124] Of *Mathilde Holding a Baby* he wrote, "I find exquisite . . . her baby turned backwards, so true in pose and just in movement."[125] Henry Trianon closed his review by declaring in terms reminiscent of Taine's theories of "*la race, le moment, le milieu*": "Truth of gesture and typical individuality: these are Mlle Cassatt's two masterful qualities. They properly belong to the Anglo-American race."[126]

If gesture had been an important topic to critics like Duranty and to scientists like Darwin and Spencer with regard to its expressive potential in the 1870s. it soon became a

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[122] Though this work has traditionally been dated to c. 1890 and has never before been associated with the 1881 Impressionist exhibition, I believe it can be redated to c. 1880–81 for stylistic reasons. It also appears to match descriptions by the critics Trianon and Hoschedé (to be discussed in detail below) of a picture shown in 1881, although it does not match any of the titles of works shown in 1881 precisely.

[123] Enjoiras, "Causerie artistique: Exposition des artistes indépendants," *L'Intransigeant* (12 April 1881), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 341: "elle abuse . . . de vert, du bleu et du violet."

[124] Ibid.: "Mlle Mary Canatt [*sic*] donne à ses figures un sentiment de repos, de placide intimité tout à fait remarquable; la mère de la famille entourée de ses enfants, et la dame qui tricote, ont des poses d'un rare naturel."

[125] Ibid.: "je trouve exquis . . . son bébé renversé, si vrai de pose et si juste de mouvement."

[126] Trianon, "Sixième exposition de peinture par un groupe d'artistes," 367: "La vérité du geste et l'individualité typique, telles sont les deux qualités maîtresses de Mlle Cassatt. Elles appartiennent en propre à la race anglo-américaine."

Hippolyte Taine first expressed his ideas on "race, milieu, moment" in his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863–64), in which he studied English literature in relation to its Anglo-Saxon roots. Taine's ideas eventually played a part in the development of the naturalist school of literature and had an effect on related movements in the visual arts as well.

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significant field of research for those concerned to understand the infant mind and to trace the origins of language, as well as for scientists interested in Ernst Haeckel's recent claim that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny."[127] Garrick Mallery, building upon the ideas expressed by writers such as Darwin and Haeckel, identified the earliest, pre-verbal attempts at language:

> The wishes and emotions of very young children are conveyed in a small number of sounds, but in a great variety of gestures and facial expressions. A child's gestures are intelligent long in advance of speech; although very early and persistent attempts are made to give it instruction in the latter but none in the former, from the time when it begins *risu cognoscere matrem.* It learns words only as they are taught, and learns them through the medium of signs which are not expressly taught. Long after familiarity with speech, it consults the gestures and facial expressions of its parents and nurses as if seeking thus to translate or explain their words[128]

The Latin quoted here is derived from Virgil's *Eclogues*, and a verse that reads, in part: "Begin, baby boy, to recognize your mother with a smile . . . For him who has not smiled upon his mother, god has not deemed worthy of his board, nor goddess of her bed."[129] The smile is thus one of the child's original means of communication, which serves to gratify the mother and assure nourishment and, eventually, to procure sexual fulfillment.

In his 1877 "baby diary," Taine also attended to gesture and its relation to the education of the child's senses, particularly the connections between touch and sight. Sully, too, was interested in motions of reaching and grasping like that made by the child in *Mathilde Holding a Baby.* In keeping with the tone of his article, in which he asserted

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[127] Ernst Haeckel's ideas in this vein were first put forth in his 1866 *General Morphology*, and popularized with English readers in his *The Evolution of Man: A Popular Exposition of the Principal Points of Human Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (1879).

[128] Garrick Mallery, *Sign Language Among North American Indians Compared With That Among Other People and Deaf-Mutes* (1881, first ed.) (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1972), 276.

[129] "Eclogue IV," in P. Vergili Maronis, *Eclogae*, trans. and ed. H. E. Gould (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 12, 52.

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strong gender differences, Sully viewed his son's efforts to reach for and manipulate objects (including the father's beard) in terms of male prerogatives, noting, "The organs of sight and touch worked indeed in the closest connection. Thus our little visitor was no mere passive spectator of his new habitat; he actively took possession of his surroundings: like the Roman general, he at once saw and conquered."[130]

Ernest Hoschedé, in his review of the 1881 Impressionist exhibition, also discussed *Mathilde Holding a Baby Who Reaches Out to Right* in language that evokes conquest and will lead us to another Roman general, Brutus in this case, and to ideas about fathers during the 1880s. Writing in his own publication, *L'Art de la mode*, Hoschedé praised Cassatt's artistic progress and remarked, like Trianon, upon her origins: "Today she has conquered one of the top positions; her diverse and numerous works attest to an artist of a great race."[131] Hoschedé found in Cassatt's oils an innovative blend of "the style of the Primitives" and an "exquisite modernity," and he lauded her pastels as "no less remarkable," continuing, "we must draw your attention to the young mother embracing her *baby* [Fig. 3], and to another *baby* [Fig. 68], astride a wicker chair, in poses promising a Mirabeau or a Berryer. These are the observations of a great mind. . . ."[132] (Hoschedé employed the English "baby" here.) Despite writing of Cassatt in an article on "Les Femmes artistes," publishing in a fashion magazine, and commending her images of maternity, Hoschedé employed terms usually reserved for the male artist, by noting her

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130 J. S. [James Sully], "Babies and Science," 549.

131 Ernest Hoschedé, "Les Femmes artistes," *L'Art de la mode* (April 1881), 57, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 348: "Aujourd'hui elle a conquis une des premières places; ses oeuvres diverses et nombreuses attestent une artiste de grande race."

132 Ibid.: "le style des primitifs"; "modernité exquise"; "ne sont pas moins remarquables"; "nous voulons attirer l'attention sur cette jeune mère embrassant son *baby*, et sur cet autre baby, à califourchon sur une chaise d'osier, dans des attitudes qui promettent un Mirabeau ou un Berryer. Cela est d'une observation de grand esprit. . . ." [pendentives in original].

It is interesting to note that Mariana van Rensselaer published a loose translation of Hoschedé's commentary on Cassatt in the same volume of *The American Art Review* in which her Correggio article (quoted above) appeared, adding: "One is glad to see prominent . . . the name of our compatriot, Miss Cassatt, and to find that no one is accorded higher praise than falls to her share. . . . Miss Cassatt's pastels receive equal commendation with her work in oils, especially when they take the shape of children's portraits." See M[ariana] G. van Rensselaer, "Art and the Fashions," *American Art Review* 2 (1881), 129.

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"conquest" of a top position among her peers and her "great mind," and by linking her expressive abilities indirectly to those of Mirabeau and Berryer.

In describing the pose in *Mathilde Holding a Baby Who Reaches to Right* as "promising a Mirabeau or a Berryer," Hoschedé was characterizing the child's stretching motion as a rhetorical gesture in the tradition of two great French orators, Honoré Gabriel Riqueti (comte de) Mirabeau (1749–91) and Pierre Antoine Berryer (1790–1868). (See, for example, Claude-André Deseine's *Bust of Mirabeau* [Fig. 69], in which the outstretched limb is implied despite the truncated arm.) In 1878 Eugène Véron offered Mirabeau as a model of "lively and sincere emotion" in support of his notion that the visual artist should aim to manifest his or her own personality honestly and spontaneously rather than fall back upon the empty clichés of academic technique. Véron claimed that Mirabeau's rhetoric, like the drama of Shakespeare and Corneille, was "expressive" because "instead of attempting to please the public and gratify their fancy, it set about convincing them by a sincere and vivid statement of the feelings and ideas of the orators. It was, in fact, living and spontaneous eloquence, in the literal sense of the word. . . ."[133] Hoschedé, by comparing the child's gesture to those of Mirabeau and Berryer, implies that Cassatt too has found a naturalistic means of expression appropriate to the painting of modern life.

It may also be that Hoschedé and Havard, by relating Cassatt's works to the *primitifs* and their "ancient aesthetic," were thinking not only of the artists of the early Italian Renaissance, but also of children and their uncorrupted perceptual abilities. While children's drawings in themselves would not be studied by artists in search of formal inspiration for some years, the "innocent eye" as possessed by the child and the processes by which children learn to perceive the world occupied a number of critics associated with the promotion of naturalistic aesthetic strategies that would lead to the Impressionist

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[133] Véron, *Aesthetics*, 116.

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movement, Taine among them. Havard devoted a chapter of his 1882 *L'Art à travers les moeurs* to a study of the child's perceptual training, from the moment of birth, when "this dear little one appears to us to be unconscious of that which surrounds it, stupefied by a mass of new sensations, and knows nothing of the connections that link all these sensations" through its assimilation of information gained in particular through sight and touch and its first efforts to draw. Like Gilman, Havard saw drawing as "a natural need, instinctive, innate, more than a reasoned tendency" to which the child "abandons himself," and a need that generally exists only until intellectual culture comes to dominate, supplanting the imaginative sense.[134]

Sully, too, writing of his son's activities at eight weeks of age, observed how the "growing habit of looking at, reaching, and manually investigating objects, soon leads to the accumulation of a store of materials for the construction of those complex mental actions which we call perceptions," with the "first object that is clearly recognised by a conscious attention" being the face of the mother.[135] By the tenth week, Sully noted,

> There is a yet higher intellectual power displayed about the same time in the germ of distinct anticipation. The moment when the baby mind first passes from the sight of his bottle to the imagination of the blisses of prehension and deglutition . . . marks an epoch in his existence. It is plain that he can now not only perceive what is actually present to his senses, but shape representative images of what is absent. This is the moment at which . . . mind rises above the limitations of the actual, and begins to shape for itself an ideal world of possibilities.[136]

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[134] Henry Havard, *L'Art à travers les moeurs* (Paris: G. Decaux and A. Quantin, 1882), chapter six, "De la première période de l'existence humaine, dite période imaginative," 47-70; these quotes: "ce cher petit être nous apparait inconscient de ce qui l'entoure, stupéfié par une foule de sensations nouvelles, et ne saissant aucun des rapports qui lient entre elles toutes ces sensations" (48); "s'abandonner bien plus à une besoin naturel, instinctif, innée, qu'à une tendance raisonnée" (54). This chapter is illustrated with numerous children's drawings. Viollet-le-Duc, though uninterested in the "innocent eye," was one of the first writers to publish children's drawings as the subjects of serious study in his 1879 *Histoire d'un dessinateur, comment on apprend à dessiner.*

[135] J. S. [James Sully], "Babies and Science," 550.

[136] Ibid., 551.

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Sully thus describes the imagination as having its origins in the visually-experienced anticipation of the pleasures of grasping and sucking (first experienced, of course, in relation to the mother's body). That which is absent is understood only as that which will eventually be present; but of course, absence also brings about the recognition of separation and loss.

Serge Tisseron, in a fascinating recent article that recalls certain ideas proposed by Havard, Sully, and William James, posits that writing is made possible by its basis in drawing; that is, in an activity that originally served the child as a means of coping with maternal absence. "Gesturing, as a motional force distinct from the original stage of impulses," he argues, "is a critical means of breaking away from maternal symbiosis."[137] Drawing, as one of the most important types of motional force, provides the child with an opportunity for the "visual and mental exploration of the space which *simultaneously separates and binds* the mother to the child," the trace acting much like "the leaden line which separates and binds the stained-glass pieces on a latticed window."[138] The child's inscriptions mark out the gap separating it from the maternal body at the same time that they draw a bridge to that body. Through this act of the hand the child comes to symbolize, internalize, and tolerate the necessary division from the mother's or primary caregiver's body that begins to occur around two years of age. The adult writer or artist is likewise enabled to endure the anxiety of following a line of thinking or a visual idea to its limit because his or her ego is securely contained by the maternal form from which the mark or trace originated.

Considered in this light, the infant in *Mathilde Holding a Child* can be seen not only as reaching away from the mother's/nurse's body but also toward expression, if not

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[137] Serge Tisseron, "All Writing Is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript," *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994), 32. Mary Kelly, in her multimedia art work, *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), also studied the child's development of language in relation to drawing and the mother, in a manner that is germane to Tisseron's argument. For more on this project, see Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[138] Tisseron, "All Writing Is Drawing," 34-5.

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the drawing tool, in the manner of Gilman's incipient writer/artist, the child who reaches for the pencil in order to make his mark. In contrast to *A Goodnight Hug*, in which the energies suggested by the agitated strokes of the wallpaper seem to emanate from the mother's psychic state, here the extremely sketchy handling and the many lines that look as if made with a point sharpened like a pencil rather than a soft stick of pastel serve as an analogue to the child's desire to mark, to establish and consolidate an individual identity apart from the mother (or nurse) away from whom he (or she) stretches away, while also remaining indebted to that figure as the foundation of his/her individuality. The use of similar shades of blue in the child's shift and the woman's skirt reinforces the idea that they are still one and not yet two. This dual nature is underscored by Cassatt's treatment of the body of the mother/nurse, which is at the same time solid and ephemeral, the torso fully rendered but the lower body barely delineated with coarse strokes of pastel; yet the child's gesture speaks both to its eventual individuation and to Cassatt's reaching for and possession of a highly gestural handling normally considered to be available for the appropriation of the male artist alone.

We have seen numerous efforts on the part of men at this same time to deny or erase the traces of the maternal body, particularly through the fantasy of creative self-generation. The desire to disassociate the maternal from the notion of talent or genius can also be seen at work even in attempts to define motherhood as a woman's moral duty and exclusive role. Though women were exhorted that their "natural" role as mother was of vital importance on a number of levels, many scientists sought to demonstrate the importance of heredity over environment, minimizing the significance of the mother's role in the achievements of her children. In fact, it was Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, who first popularized the idea of "nature and nurture" in writings on the inheritance of talent and character, including *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences*

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(1869) and *English Men of Science: Their Nature and Nurture* (1874).[139] Galton's work makes it clear that "nature," while most frequently associated with the feminine and thereby denigrated, could be recuperated for masculinity in the guise of "heredity" when it was aligned with talent or genius and the idea that such qualities were transmitted almost solely through the male line of a family. In 1883 Galton coined the term "eugenics" (from the Greek "good in birth") for his proposed program to allow humans to control their own heredity through selective breeding, which most often involved restrictions placed upon women, despite what was believed to be their more limited role in the transmission of inheritable qualities or in fostering learned behaviors.[140]

Galton's ideas on mothers are made clear in *Hereditary Genius*, when he explained that great men, though undoubtedly "largely indebted to maternal influences," also tend to be "affectionate and reverential," making them "naturally disposed to show extreme filial regard, and to publish the good qualities of their mothers, with exaggerated praise."[141] Even when these notions were challenged, as by Mathurin de Lescure in his 1882 book *Les Mères illustres, Études morales et Portraits d'Histoire intime*, women's roles were still relegated to nurturing rather than achieving. One reviewer saw de Lescure's book as proof that women should not aim to be anything but mothers, that "they are running counter to the laws of nature in contending for the equality of the sexes . . . that they do more than risk the happiness of the individual family by departing from it: that national interests are at stake: that the general disregard or light observance of maternal duties in any given community will lead infallibly to the deterioration of the race."[142] Not

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[139] Galton's interest in heredity and his efforts to understand it through statistical methods are discussed in Nicholas Wright Gillham, *A Life of Sir Francis Galton: From African Exploration to the Birth of Eugenics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially part III, "The Triumph of the Pedigree."

[140] For an introduction to the history of eugenics, see Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1995).

[141] Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (1869) (London: Macmillan and Co., 1925), 319.

[142] "Illustrious Mothers," *Quarterly Review* 155 (April 1883), 458.

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surprisingly, one of Galton's strongest rivals in the nature/nurture debate was John Stuart Mill, who argued that nurture predominated over nature, and believed that the "subjection of women" mainly resulted from nurture.[143] But Mill's views remained in the minority.

The figure of Mirabeau, invoked by Hoschedé in relation to Cassatt's *Mathilde Holding a Child Who Reaches Out to Right*, appeared frequently in this debate on nature versus nature. Though his significance shifts according to the writer's point of view, Mirabeau was most often recognized as a great but troubled man who triumphed despite a lack of maternal care. As Paul Janet described the situation in *La Famille: Leçons de Philosophie Morale*: "Mirabeau did not have a mother, or at least his childhood passed as if he did not have one."[144] The drama of Mirabeau's heroic Revolutionary actions and scandalous personal life, and the degree to which both of these aspects of his life could be connected to his relationship with his domineering father (described by Janet as "the tyrant and the executioner of his family"[145]) as opposed to his ineffectual mother, were underwritten by nineteenth-century anxieties about nature and nurture, reason and instinct, emotion and intellect, anxieties that would increasingly surface in the critical response to Cassatt's work.

The story of Mirabeau, in whom "the 'wild blood' of the Riquettis is supposed to have culminated in a final explosion of originality and genius,"[146] demonstrates that as the role of the mother was being problematized, concerns about the father were also emerging in cross-cultural and ethnographic as well as scientific and gendered debates about the family. Central to these debates was the figure of the *patria potestas*—the man who holds

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[143] See, for example, John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869) (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1995).

[144] Paul Janet, *La Famille: Leçons de Philosophie Morale* (1855), 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique de Ladrange, 1856), 105: "Mirabeau n'eut pas de mère, ou de moins son enfance se passa comme s'il n'en avait pas. . . ." The 11th edition of Janet's book was published in 1881.

[145] Ibid.: "le tyran et le borreau de sa famille."

[146] James Cotter Morison, "The Mirabeaus," reprinted from *Macmillan's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 142 (16 August 1879), 411. Morison was arguing that, from the evidence of Louis de Loménie's *Les Mirabeau* (1879), other members of the Mirabeau family would also emerge as fascinating characters.

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complete power over the person and property of his wife and children—embodied in ancient times by Brutus, and, as we will see, evoked in more modern times in the story of Mirabeau. Theories of paternal rights as postulated by ethnologists and historians of ancient law grew in importance in these era because they were useful to those wishing to justify current structures of dominance as regarded property and social relations.[147] In other words, the history of the family, conceived as the ascendance of individual interests over the collective, was employed to deny women (and, to a lesser degree, children) their individual rights.

The figure of the *patria potestas* was also of great interest to a number of writers who wrote about art as well as social issues, attesting to the many points of intersection in this period between those who theorized about aesthetics and about the family. In France, Charles Blanc called forth the image of the *patria potestas* in his 1875 *L'Art dans la parure et dans le vêtement* by illustrating an antique bust of Brutus. He recommended that men wear their hair short in the manner depicted in order to project "an air of austerity, neatness, and adherence to the rules"—rules that assert sexual difference, since this hair style, "being the reverse of what is customary among women . . . has on that account alone a masculine character."[148]

Another writer to discuss the *patria potestas* at length was the critic John Durand, son of the painter Asher B. Durand. Not only the co-founder of America's first art periodical, *The Crayon*, John Durand was also responsible for disseminating Taine's ideas in the United States, translating a number of his works into English shortly after their original publication. Writing on "French Domestic Life and Its Lessons" for *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1881, Durand stated, "We Americans have the word family, but not the thing itself; at all events, the word with us does not convey the same meaning as with the

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147 Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents*, 66, 131.

148 Charles Blanc, *L'Art dans le parure et dans le vêtement* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1875), first published in English as *Art in Ornament and Dress* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1877), 75.

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French."[149] For Durand, as for many writers of the period, the comparison between French and "Anglo-Saxon" (English and American) family formations confirmed the importance of paternal authority as a way to rationalize the exclusion of women from laws and customs expanding individual rights. Durand argued that in the U.S., the individual was "the unit of society" due to the political system: "The family as an institution disappears under the value of a vote."[150] Therefore, the American family was "simply an aggregation of human units, with few principles of cohesion except those of natural instinct."[151] In contrast, in France "the family is not a sentimental group, but a complicated and carefully guarded social compact. It forms the unit of society."[152] Durand, like Blanc, approved of this system because it promoted "order," based upon rules of gendered behavior, which, for example, allowed young men to sow their "wild oats" before settling down with daughters whose "purity" has been fiercely guarded by the mother.[153]

The French system could operate in this manner, according to Durand, because the *patria potestas* was still a functioning legal entity in that country:

> The administration of all family interests in relation to society is vested in the husband; it is he who controls enterprises, investments, the location of the family, and who pronounces on the settlement of children by marriage or otherwise. The great idea is this: he is the natural protector and director of the family unit. This supreme authority, the grandeur as well as the abuse of which is apparent in the Mirabeau

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[149] John Durand, "French Domestic Life and Its Lessons," *Atlantic Monthly* 48 (August 1881), 174. The other co-founder of *The Crayon* was the connoisseur and critic William J. Stillman, whose writings are discussed in Chapters Three, Five, and Six of this dissertation.
[150] Ibid., 175-6.
[151] Ibid., 176.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid., 177.

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> family, is never lost sight of. If latent and imperceptible, it is always active when the occasion calls for it. It never lapses.[154]

This internalized paternal gaze—"latent and imperceptible" yet "never lost sight of"—speaks to the imbrication of property relations and emotional ties that was central to the Oedipal family as it developed in the late nineteenth century and its model of disciplinary power: unseen but all-seeing.[155] As Durand makes evident, the case of Mirabeau provides a spectacular example of what is at stake in such a model of power: a father whose disciplinary might was so strong that he literally imprisoned and exiled his son on a number of occasions, denounced him and denied him use of the family name; and a son who transgressed bourgeois sexual strictures (repeatedly committing adultery) while at the same time demonstrating love of country and democratic values.[156]

In addition, concern for the *patria potestas* also underscores that "imperceptible" paternal authority could function to male advantage in another manner: as a means of avoiding responsibility for illegitimate children. The problem of *enfants naturels* arose on a number of fronts in France during the 1870s, as various feminists, Republicans, and demographers started to demand a reinstatement of a woman's right to *recherche de la paternité*—to legally name a child's father and receive his financial support—which had been stricken (except in cases of abduction) by the writers of article 340 of the Napoleonic Civil Code in 1803.

In 1880 Jacques Bertillon (brother of anthropometry founder Alphonse Bertillon) expressed alarm over European demographics, finding that for every 1000 women aged 15 to 50, women in France gave birth to 102 children, in England, 136, and in Prussia, 150.[157]

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[154] Ibid. In 1886 a writer in *Quarterly Review* argued that the *patria potestas* was in decay in England (presumably due to the actions of feminists); see "The Patriarchal Theory," *Quarterly Review* 162 (April 1886), 181-209.

[155] See Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family*, especially chapter four, "The Language of the Family."

[156] Mirabeau was not a Republican, preferring a Constitutional Monarchy of the English type, but he was revered as one of the most important figures of the National Assembly before his death in 1791.

[157] Jacques Bertillon, *La Statistique Humaine de la France (Naissance, Mariage, Mort)* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière et Cie, 1880), 74.

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Bertillon proposed that the French deal with this threat to the "fatherland" by doing "everything they can to protect those who already have life," meaning *enfants naturels*, who were more likely to die in childhood because their mothers alone were not able to adequately provide for them.[158] Refusing to attribute the illegitimacy problem to "debauch," for "morality is a most complex sentiment,"[159] Bertillon called for paternal support of *enfants naturels* as well as changes in inheritance law, also written by the framers of the Civil Code, which dictated that land must be divided equally between heirs. Anthropologists and demographers argued that this situation was in part to blame for low birth rates in France, for owners of large properties tended to have small families in order to avoid having to split their land into tiny and unproductive plots.

Republicans also took up the cause of *recherche de la paternité* for reasons related to crime and the protection of property, because, as *The New York Times* reported in 1883, "The illegitimate child often becomes a vagabond and a criminal, and out of 538 children prosecuted after the Commune one-quarter were illegitimate."[160] Feminists, too, clamored for the reinstatement of *recherche de la paternité*, but for reasons regarding women's and children's health and happiness as well as their ownership rights. The feminist newspaper *La Citoyenne* ran a column titled "Faits divers, L'article 340," in which the tragic results of the Civil Code were recounted, such as the story of a "young M. le baron X" who sold the child he fathered with a chambermaid to the circus, or that of a pregnant woman who killed herself after being abandoned by the lover she had met "in the shadows of the Isle of the Grande Jatte."[161] In 1882 Ferdinand-Charles-Philippe (comte) d'Esterno called for the *recherche de la paternité* to be "separated from other female

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158 Ibid., 91: "tout faire pour protéger la vie de ceux qu'ils ont."

159 Ibid., 93: "la moralité est un sentiment plus complexe."

160 "French Topics of State: War in the Far East and the Research of Paternity," *New York Times* (26 December 1883), 2.

161 "Faits divers, L'article 340," *La Citoyenne* (10 April 1881), 5; and (8 May 1881), 4: "*sous les ombrages de l'île de la Grande-Jatte.*" The implications of these stories for our viewing of George Seurat's circus and Grand Jatte images are intriguing.

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questions" and pursued first because "it is the most important, the most shattering to humanity, because it entails repairing an injustice that has endured too long; because it is the most paternalistic toward the weak, who are women and children; and most often involves the working class, since seductions and their consequences fall from top to bottom, from the rich to the poor, and seldom *vice versa*."[162]

Léon Giraud and Léon Richer, in their books on the subject of women's rights, called into question the effects upon women of the legal fiction of paternity concurrently being promoted by ethnologists as well as jurists. Giraud asked, "Must we believe that marriage today necessarily involves the subjection of one of the parties as a consequence of fictive givens upon which it rests and that finally . . . the fact of the uncertainty of paternity should involve, for the woman, a state contrary to that of all other citizens: legal insecurity, material dependence, and the status of nonentity with regard to her children?"[163] Giraud agreed with Emile de Girardin's characterization of the "regime of paternity" as that of "the woman possessed without possessing," though he did not go so far as to agree with de Girardin's theory that women could be liberated only through the dissolution of the family.[164] Richer, in his book, brought the debate over paternity "back to the question of knowing [*savoir*] if it is truly impossible,—I mean *absolutely* impossible,—or if it is only difficult to know [*connaître*] the father of an illegitimate

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[162] [Ferdinand-Charles-Philippe, Comte] d'Esterno, *La Femme envisagée au point de vue naturaliste, spiritualiste, philosophique, providentiel* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882), 192: "séparée des autres questions féminines"; "elle est la plus importante, la plus éclatante d'humanité, la plus réparatrice d'une trop longue injustice; la plus paternelle pour les faibles, qui sont les femmes et les enfants; la plus populaire, puisque les séductions et leurs suites tombent de haut en bas, des riches sur les pauvres, et rarement *vice versa*."

[163] Léon Giraud, *Essai sur la condition des femmes en Europe et en Amerique* (Paris: Auguste Ghio, 1882), 273: "Devons-nous croire que le mariage actuel entraîne nécessairement l'assujettissement de l'un des conjoints par suite des données fictives sur lesquelles il repose et qu'enfin . . . le fait de l'incertitude de la paternité doit entraîner, pour la femme, un état contraire à celui de tous les autres citoyens, l'insécurité légale, la dépendance matérielle et jusqu'à la nullité devant l'enfant?" In this book Giraud also examined the story of the Mirabeau family in relation to questions of mothers' rights according to the Civil Code; see pp. 265-6.

[164] De Girardin, quoted in Giraud, *Essai*, 273 n. 1: "Le régime de la paternité . . . c'est la femme possédée et ne se possédant pas."

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child."[165] Richer argued that neither legitimate nor illegitimate paternity could be absolutely certain; therefore, if "presumption"—the husband is presumed to be the father of the wife's child—sufficed as the juridical basis of legitimacy, then the same standard could logically be employed with regard to the paternity of the illegitimate child, at least in cases of concubinage.[166]

Anxieties about legitimacy in this period were not limited to France, nor to questions of immediate family relations. In 1878 *The New York Times* discussed how people were often willing to believe "scoundrels" seeking "to establish their legitimate illegitimacy" after the death of a "bachelor of property," opining, "The sole security to one's reputation after death is in marriage."[167] Edward A. Freeman in 1877 contended that "our English genealogies have become a mass of fables,"[168] and in the U.S. in 1878, Moncure D. Conway observed, "The English complain that the Americans, in their desire to search out their pedigrees and family histories, have in recent years bought up most of the volumes containing county annals, so that now it is impossible to purchase such books except at enormous prices."[169]

It is not surprising that Francis Galton, given his interest in heredity, gave his efforts at composite photography a genealogical turn in an article on "Photographic Chronicles From Childhood to Age." Galton claimed, "The family tie has a real as well as a sentimental significance. The world is beginning to perceive that the life of each individual is in some real sense a prolongation of those of his ancestry. His character, his vigour, and his disease are principally theirs. . . ."[170] Therefore, he suggested, in addition

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[165] Léon Richer, *Le Codes des femmes* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1883), 236: "ramené à la question de savoir s'il est vraiment impossible,—j'entends impossible *absolument*,—ou seulement difficile de connaître le père d'un enfant naturel."
[166] Ibid., 240.
[167] [Untitled editorial], *New York Times* (12 October 1878), 4.
[168] Edward A. Freeman, "Pedigrees and Pedigree-Makers," *Contemporary Review* 30 (June 1877), 41.
[169] Moncure D. Conway, "The Romance of a Family," *Atlantic Monthly* 42 (July 1878), 11.
[170] Francis Galton, "Photographic Chronicles From Childhood to Age," *Fortnightly Review* 181 (1 January 1882), 31.

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to composite photographs, through which he believed the shared characteristics of people of a particular "type" could be distilled, a complete photographic record of each individual person's life, to be passed along to descendants, would serve as a source of information about hereditary matters. Galton's study of heredity and his development of the field of eugenics also played into growing concerns with class and racial "purity," which were seen as being transmitted through the male line. According to John Amphlett, who explained the importance of paternal lineage in 1878,

> this is the great difference between good families and families of all other kinds: the members of a good family can tell who their forefathers were, where they lived, and whom they married; while those who belong to no families in particular are classed in a body as those who don't know their own grandfathers, or who perhaps never had any to know. . . . the higher the state of culture of society becomes, the more care will be demanded in matters which so closely concern the family and the race; the more society will ask what it is and from whence it springs, and in an increased degree will it be true that "the glory of children are their fathers."[171]

Galton's photographic archive thus would function as a visual, and not simply written, proof of pedigree, organized under the patronymic.

Questions of pedigree, title, and property also arose at this time in relation to contemporary art and copyright, and in particular, debates over who had the right to "reproduce" a work of art and to what degree this should be enforced as a matter of law. An 1880 article in *The American Art Chronicle* laid out the case of Truman Howe Bartlett, a Boston sculptor.[172] According to the article, Bartlett believed he had been wronged by the son of a man for whom he had created a commissioned portrait bust when the son hired a stone cutter make an "unauthorized" copy. The author of the article concluded that U.S. copyright law gave the son every right to do so (though he might

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[171] John Amphlett, "Genealogy," *Gentleman's Magazine* 243 (July 1878), 117, 120.
[172] "Copyright in Works of Art," *American Art Chronicle* 1 (1880), 173.

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have shown greater courtesy by asking first), while also recommending that artists should lobby for changes to the law, as had writers in recent years.[173] In the same period in England, a law was being considered that would vest the ownership of copyright not through a written contract but through the signature on the painting, with the purchaser gaining the copyright along with the picture. The portraitist Henry T. Wells expressed concern over the legality of such a signature, asking, "Will a name painted with a brush and not attested by witnesses be enough? If so, to a certainty, fraudulent copyrights would not be uncommon."[174]

Pedigree and title also grew in significance in the 1870s with the expansion of the art market and the literature of connoisseurship. The documentation of provenance became a matter of special concern to Americans, the newest and least savvy art buyers. An 1879 *Art Amateur* article on "Spurious 'Old Masters'" warned collectors, "The title of a true picture is always preserved; for the title is the only thing which really makes a precious work of art *at any time* a marketable commodity. *Without its title*, an original picture is *at all times* a subject of doubt to the inexperienced—aye, even to the most experienced in matters of art."[175] The author then admitted:

> Notwithstanding all that is said about "true titles" in this brief introductory sketch, original pictures by "old masters" of the highest repute have at times gone astray, and their pedigrees being lost, the works when recovered have been criticised "ad nauseam"—accepted by some as veritable originals, repudiated by others, and at last have only been reestablished as the productions of genius by appeals to the taste and judgment of the general public.[176]

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[173] An English author took a similar position in "Artistic Copyright," *Westminster Review* 113 (April 1880), 172-7.
[174] Henry T. Wells, "Government and the Artists," *Nineteenth Century* 34 (December 1879), 982.
[175] "Spurious 'Old Masters,'" *Art Amateur* 1 (July 1879), 1.
[176] Ibid.

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Nevertheless, the author was not willing to forsake the idea of "signature style," adding, "It should always be borne in mind that the genuine character of a work of true art is not *a question* to be *debated*—it is a *fact* residing upon *evidence* broad and palpable; evidence primarily in the picture itself, and afterwards in the history of its existence."[177]

Despite this author's confidence in the concept of self-evident signature style, its limitations were made increasingly evident through Giovanni Morelli's writings and the enormous number of changes being made to attributions—few of them unanimously agreed upon—in the museums and galleries of Europe. As *The Saturday Review* reported in an 1884 discussion of the *Masters in German Galleries*, "Few books in the literature of a special subject have created so great a stir on their first appearance as that of which the present volume is a translation."[178] In France in 1879, when Edmond Duranty described recent catalogues from the Berlin Museum and the National Gallery, London, he anticipated the effects that each reattribution would cause with a list of the renamed pictures most likely to "inflict" changes upon related works in the Louvre.[179]

Another reviewer of the *Masters in German Galleries* took issue with Morelli's aggressive tactics in changing the authorship of paintings—or to put it another way, his legitimations of formerly illegitimate paintings, and his reversal of illegitimate legitimations. The reviewer suggested that Morelli's renamings posed a threat to order in the art world in much the same way that feminists who sought to promote women's rights to their own names under the law and to name an illegitimate child's father threatened the patriarchal order. (Morelli had most notoriously caused a commotion in 1880 by declaring Dresden' s beloved *Reclining Magdalene* to be a seventeenth-century pastiche and not a masterpiece by Correggio.) "He has a ready pen," the reviewer declared of the connoisseur, "and, apparently, a large collection of photographs. His self-confidence is

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[177] Ibid.

[178] "Morelli's Italian Masters in German Galleries," *Saturday Review* 57 (26 April 1884), 549.

[179] Edmond Duranty, "À propos des catalogues des peintures du Musée de Berlin et de la National Gallery de Londres," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (1 March 1879), 67: "inflige."

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unbounded, and a lively animus gives energy to the sharp remarks in which his pages abound, and which are not least insulting when they are veiled by mock humility and the affectation of deference. There is a good deal that is feminine in the bitterness of Signor Morelli."[180]

It is also interesting to note that Duranty's call for new forms of modern art, expressed most cogently in his 1876 essay, "La Nouvelle Peinture," is also inflected with broader concerns about legitimacy and title. In the 1876 essay, Duranty quoted a piece he had written 20 years earlier, in which he had "imagined painting attempting a vast series about society people, priests, soldiers, workers, and merchants" who would be depicted in "scenes that happen *frequently* and thus accurately express the everyday life of a country—marriages, baptisms, births, successions, celebrations, and family scenes," and reported that he had recently found the fulfillment of this wish in works by artists of *la nouvelle peinture.*[181] Notably, a number of the events Duranty specified as suitable subjects for this new painting (marriages, baptisms, successions) involve the legal inscription of legitimacy and right to property, both of which Duranty was denied because he himself was an illegitimate child.[182]

Legitimacy, artistic paternity, and challenges to the social order were also discussed in a novel of this period with regard to the female artist. Alphonse Daudet created a stir with his 1877 story of the Second Empire, *Le Nabab, moeurs parisiennes*, which included as one of its main characters "a strange girl," Félicia Ruys, a "true daughter of an artist, of a genial and dissolute artist" who "had never known her mother."[183] Félicia's father Sébastien understood his relation to his illegitimate daughter as one of "double paternity," creative and procreative, as his own life began to fade:

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[180] "Fine Arts," *Athenaeum* (29 March 1884), 415.
[181] Duranty, "The New Painting," 45.
[182] Nancy Locke, in *Manet and the Family Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), touches upon similar issues of paternity, illegitimacy, and art in relation to Manet's biography.
[183] Alphonse Daudet, *The Nabob* (1877), trans. W. Blaydes (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1902), 96.

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> he found in following Félicia's progress a certain consolation for his own ended career. He saw the boasting-tool, which trembled in his hand, taken up again under his eye with a virile firmness and assurance, tempered by all those delicacies of her being which a woman can apply to the realization of an art. A strange sensation, this double paternity, this survival of genius as it abandons the man whose day is over to pass into him [*sic*] who is at his dawn. . . .[184]

The mother is again supplanted in this scenario in which the artistic genius of the daughter is both transmitted through and nurtured by the father/master.

In the U.S. in 1878, an *Atlantic Monthly* writer attacked Daudet's naturalism, calling the book "the worst case thus far reported of absolute brutality towards characters and readers," and noting in particular that Félicia, "a young sculptress of divine genius and beauty, takes to prostitution, for no conceivable reason."[185] Some months later, the same writer reported, "I have looked in vain . . . to see if some one else was impressed as I was by the author's treatment . . . of the woman artist," for "few women can read the same without a sense of being personally somewhat cheapened and aggrieved."[186] Moreover, Daudet's description of the "suspicions which ever dog the steps of Felicia, because she was nurtured amidst all the freedom of her father's studio" seemed "strangely inconsistent with that reverence for the art career which most of us are wont to believe flourishes everywhere outside of our own country,—more especially in such a cradle of art as is France."[187] In the end, the writer concluded, "Surely some of our own hard-headed Philistines, who think a woman is reaching the last round of degradation when she essays to sketch from the living model, can carry their blind prejudices no further than do some of the people Daudet introduces us to in art-loving Paris."[188]

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[184] Ibid., 100.
[185] "The Contributor's Club," *The Atlantic Monthly* 41 (March 1878), 388.
[186] "The Contributor's Club," *The Atlantic Monthly* 42 (September 1878), 374.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid. In another (uncanny) coincidence, a reviewer of "The Yellow Wall-paper," writing in Philadelphia's *American* in 1899, linked Gilman's story to Daudet's biography, noting that Daudet had

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Though Daudet was writing of the recent past, little had changed in attitudes toward the woman artist by 1878. And even in 1898, when Charlotte Perkins Gilman published *Women and Economics*, the professional woman artist was still considered to be an anomaly. As I suggested earlier, Gilman's choice of a boy as representative of the child who wants to mark was not incidental, but important to her argument that while all humans have an instinctual need to create, only males are encouraged to pursue that need into the fine arts. "Half the human race," Gilman stated in *Women and Economics*, "is denied free productive expression, is forced to confine its productive human energies to the same channels as its reproductive sex-energies. Its creative skill is confined to the level of immediate personal bodily service, to the making of clothes and preparing food for individuals."[189] It is also not surprising that viewers, in Cassatt's time and in our own, often identify children whose gender is not immediately apparent as male, as is the case with the infants in *Mathilde Holding a Child* and *A Goodnight Hug*, in keeping with the male as the universal individual/subject as well the continuing characterization of boys as more inclined than girls toward possession and individuation. Cassatt's success at imagining a fine art career for herself in the 1860s is all the more remarkable in light of how little had changed almost 40 years later—and even more than 140 years later—regarding beliefs about women and women artists.

The discourses I have outlined above treating issues such as inheritance, legitimacy, and the female artist also contributed to an environment in which she was unlikely to be considered to fully possess a signature style or a body of works, or to be wholly "legitimate" as an artist. In 1882 Léon Giraud pointed out the absurd persistence of Aristotle's idea that "during generation, only the male gives the principle of life, movement, and form, and that seminal fluid is to generation what the sculptor is to

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long "suffered from nerves" and, in the midst of one long illness, had to change his room because "he thought a figure on the [wallpaper] frieze looked like the face of a vicious man." Quoted in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper,"* 106.

[189] Gilman, "Women and Economics," 117.

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marble," while "the role of the female is thereby solely limited to furnishing the necessary matter," despite the obvious visual fact that children as often resemble their mothers as their fathers, and despite contrary evidence about the female reproductive cycle having been discovered in the mid-nineteenth century.[190] (Though made at mid-century, Gregor Mendel's breakthrough studies of genetics were not publicly known until 1900.) Another belief discussed by Giraud, that children who resemble the mother but not the father are more likely to be the result of a pre- or extramarital union, also suggests the depth of masculine anxieties about paternity, which at that time was a fact only the mother could know, in the "absolute" sense of *savoir*, rather than *connaître*, as Giraud framed the question.[191]

The prevalence of such anxieties was touched upon by novelist Gustave Droz in his extremely popular *Monsieur, Madame and the Baby: A Series of Confessions.* Droz reported that a typical father, when told "how much your son resembles you!," might reply, "Well, yes; his profile is like mine."[192] But despite his seeming modesty, the father expects to hear the protest, "Why, my dear fellow, the child is your very image!"[193] Thus,

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[190] Giraud, *Essai sur la condition des femmes en Europe et en Amerique*, 233: "dans la génération, le mâle donne seul le principe de la vie, du mouvement et de la forme, et que la liqueur séminale est à la génération ce que le sculpteur est au marbre"; "le rôle de la femelle se bornant à fournir alors seulement la matière nécessaire." Jennifer L. Shaw, in "The Figure of Venus: Rhetoric of the Ideal and the Salon of 1863," *Art History* 14 (December 1991), 540-70, discusses how the idea that women's bodies played a "passive" role in procreation was often employed to suggest that women were also incapable of "active" creation, and shows how many writers, including Jules Michelet and various art critics and theorists such as Charles Blanc, sought to reassert these ideas despite scientific evidence to the contrary circa 1863.

[191] Giraud, *Essai sur la condition des femmes en Europe et en Amerique*, 236. By the 1880s it was generally believed that each parent contributed to the genetic inheritance of their offspring. However, some now-discredited ideas regarding resemblance persisted. For example, J. F. Nisbet, in *Marriage and Heredity: A View of Psychological Evolution* (1889) 2nd. rev. ed. (London: Ward and Downey, 1890), stated that the "fact is unquestionable" that children fathered by a woman's second husband can at times resemble the deceased first husband (127), or that "a child born of adulterous intercourse may resemble its legal as well as its actual father" because a "wife becomes innoculated, so to speak, with her husband's qualities" (129).

[192] Gustave Droz, *Monsieur, Madame and the Baby: A Series of Confessions* (1867), trans. Reavel Savage (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1881), 256. Cassatt was familiar with the work of Droz; in 1872 she wrote of a sum of money, "if there is anything left over it can go toward buying the 'Cahier Blue' of Gustave Droz"; Mary Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Parma, June 2, [1872], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 101.

[193] Droz, *Monsieur, Madame and the Baby*, 256.

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asked Droz, "Is not this resemblance a visible bond between himself and his child? Is it not his title of possession, a proof of his rights?"[194]

The mother, on the other hand, in her unselfishness and her supposed inability to transmit traits through reproduction, was denied this proprietary bond, according to William H. Davenport in the 1880 book, *Woman's Work and Worth in Girlhood, Maidenhood, and Wifehood.* "The father is proud of his son," wrote Davenport, "and sees in him one who will perpetuate his name, perhaps elevate and dignify it; sees in him his representative, and regards any success he may attain as something to which he has himself contributed."[195] However, a "mother's love is free from all such alloy; she gives up her heart to her child because she becomes absorbed in its existence,—looks upon it, in truth, as a part of herself. Yet she will trace in it the father's features; never her own."[196] Her love is "unalloyed"—pure, in other words—because she sacrifices all to the child while resisting the desire to make it over in her own image.

The mother embracing her child in Cassatt's *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3] might be understood in Davenport's terms, as being "absorbed" in the existence of this child who is "part of herself" despite the fact that she cannot trace her own features in it, and thus must assert her maternity in this way. Huysmans's commentary on the artist's 1881 pictures also raises the question of illegitimacy and resemblance, in relation to the first Dickens character he analogized to Cassatt's mother figures: Esther Summerson. Esther's life was hardly one of the "tranquil bonhomie" observed by Huysmans in Cassatt's work. To the contrary, much of her *Bleak House* narrative thread involves the search for her lost mother. When it is discovered that she is the illegitimate child of Lady Dedlock, in part because a physical resemblance is detected between the two women, the result is far from happy, for Lady Dedlock dies soon after fleeing in the attempt to escape the consequences

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[194] Ibid., 257.
[195] W[illiam] H. Davenport Adams, *Woman's Work and Worth in Girlhood, Maidenhood, and Wifehood* (London: John Hogg, 1880), 3.
[196] Ibid., 3-4.

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of the exposure of her secret. Esther herself only achieves contentment after suffering smallpox, which though disfiguring, erases her old face—the visual proof of her tie to a mother who failed to live up to her ideal.

Given a climate of general opinion which held that women could not (or would not want to) "trace" their own features in those of their children, whether through biological reproduction or through nurture, unless the child was illegitimate or the result of an adulterous union, most critics were limited in their willingness and ability to discern the efforts of a woman artist to reproduce her own originality and individuality on the surface of her art. If *A Goodnight Hug*, for instance, can now be read to some degree as an effort on Cassatt's part to establish that she, in Morelli's parlance, possessed and transmitted to each of her works "a type of hand and ear peculiar to [herself]"[197]—a stylistic marker that serves as a guarantee of her identity as an individual and an artist—it must have been difficult for her contemporaries to have seen the same in a positive sense, and is therefore all the more astonishing when they did.

But if many of Cassatt's contemporaries were unable to clearly see the greater implications of Cassatt's efforts to establish a signature style, these implications need not remain lost to us. Indeed, the fallacy of a "naturally" gender-appropriate handling is no more evident than in the Impressionist exhibition of 1881, for in a number of pictures shown by Cassatt in that year, she took her gestural mark-marking to a level of abstraction matched only by one other painter, a female painter: Berthe Morisot. Trianon observed of the Frenchwoman's work, "The drafts and sketches of Mme Berthe Morisot are not quite there," explaining that one child had features "so haphazardly indicated that they almost give the impression of a cancerous affliction."[198] Though he found her *Jeune femme en rose* to have a "more coherent appeal," *Nursing* [Fig. 5] was nothing more than

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197 Morelli, *Italian Painters*, 77. For more on this topic, see my Introduction.

198 Trianon, "Sixième exposition de peinture par un groupe d'artistes," 367: "Les ébauches et les esquisses de Mme Berthe Morisot n'en sont pas tout à fait là"; "indiqués tellement à la diable qu'ils donne presque l'idée d'une affection cancéreuse."

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"a half-seen *rebus*."[199] As for Cassatt, whose *A Goodnight Hug* he had praised, she "also pays her tribute to the sketch; sometimes, however, she achieves an effect, almost a painting."[200] *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61], in his view, was "a simple sketch," while the *Profile Portrait of Lydia Cassatt (Automne)* [Fig. 62] was "less than a sketch."[201]

The critic Elisée-Louis Baron de Montagnac (writing under the pseudonym "Elie de Mont.") also commented on this aspect of the works by Cassatt and Morisot. He praised them as "truly interesting," but found the French artist's pictures to be insufficiently finished: "if Mme Morisot had gone beyond this, without spoiling anything, she would have been an artist of the first rank."[202] Cassatt's work, on the other hand, had charm, but he (like Wolff) argued that she often took things too far:

> I certify the real qualities of observation and rendering in the *Lecture*, the *Jardin*, the *Mère et enfant*, the *Petite violoniste* and other portraits of "babys." Unhappily, alongside these qualities, such a singular agreement of color at times! Is it a prejudice? An aberration of taste?
>
> Here is an urchin of wallpaper 30 centimes for the roll, where the stripes and bouquets come to explode in the foreground of the picture; there a chair in a green that sets the teeth on edge, or gowns of a tone that would appear harsh to the inhabitants of Havana.—What a shame![203]

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[199] Ibid.: "un attrait mieux suivi"; "un *rébus* entrevu." The work exhibited by Morisot as *Jeune femme en rose* has never been identified.

[200] Ibid.: "paie aussi son tribut à l'ébauche; parfois cependant elle arrive à l'effet, presque au tableau."

[201] Ibid.: "une simple ébauche"; "moins qu'une ébauche."

[202] Elie de Mont. [Elisée-Louis Baron de Montagnac], "L'Exposition du boulevard des Capucines," *La Civilisation* (21 April 1881), 2, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 361: "si Mme Morisot pouvait aller au delà, sans rien gâter, ce serait une artiste de premier ordre."

[203] Ibid.:

> Je constate de réelles qualités d'observation et de rendu dans la Lecture, le Jardin, la Mère et l'enfant, la Petite violoniste et quelques portraits de babys. Malheureusement, à côté de ces qualités, quelle singulière entente de la couleur parfois! Est-ce parti pris? est-ce aberration du goût?
>
> Ici c'est un coquin de papier peint à 30 centimes le rouleau, dont les rayures et bouquets viennent éclater au premier plan de la toile, là un fauteuil d'un vert à faire grincer les dents, ou des robes d'un ton qui paraîtrait cru aux habitants de la Havane.—Quel dommage!

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De Montagnac disliked the palette of some of Cassatt's more boldly colored works as well as their highly abstracted patterns, some of which barely emerge out of roughly applied brush or pastel strokes. The plaids worn by the figures in *Profile Portrait of Lydia Cassatt (Automne)* and *Baby in Blue in His Carriage* [Fig. 63] in particular appear to be on the verge of dissolving into meaninglessness; without the slightly more conventionally finished faces and the suggestion of hands, it would be difficult to identify either work as a figural subject.

On the whole, though, critics appear to have tolerated the extraordinarily gestural handling in images like these far better than they had the works she had shown in her first two Impressionist exhibitions, such as *At the Theater* [Fig. 51], which was described as resembling the "scales of a mackerel, after a week's exposure at a fishmonger's."[204] Such rhetoric was not uncommon in Impressionist criticism; Albert Wolff, for instance, remarked of a Renoir nude shown in 1876, "Just try to explain to M. Renoir that a woman's torso is not a pile of decomposing flesh with the purplish-green splotches that denote a state of complete putrefaction in a corpse!"[205] Nonetheless, it was a far different matter for the male artist to experiment with color and facture in this manner, for he did not risk being identified with his female figures in the same way that Cassatt did with hers. When a critic for *The New York Times* remarked of *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* [Fig. 46], "I am sorry for Mary Cassatt; she is a Philadelphian and has had her place in the Salon – a great triumph for a woman and a foreigner; but why has she gone astray?" in portraying this "nasty representation of a dirty-faced female,"[206] or when the figure in *At the Theater* was described as looking like a rotting fish, it was implied that the artist, in

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[204] "Our Correspondent," "Art Abroad. France," 117.

[205] Albert Wolff, "Le Calendrier parisien," *Le Figaro* (3 April 1876), 1, reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 110: "Essayez donc d'expliquer à M. Renoir que le torse d'une femme n'est pas un amas de chairs en décomposition avec des taches vertes violacées qui dénotent l'état de complète putréfaction dans un cadavre!"

[206] "Art in Paris," *New York Times* (27 April 1879), 2.

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representing these "overexposed" and possibly indecent women, may have simultaneously prostituted herself to some degree.

By contrast, the bodies of the figures in *Profile Portrait of Lydia Cassatt (Automne)*, *Baby in Blue in His Carriage*, and *A Goodnight Hug* are barely seen, nearly lost in waves of choppy paint or pastel strokes; their faces, where visible, take on a sober dignity, evoking a certain strength of character that enables them to avoid being subsumed into their surroundings. In 1881, by moving away from theater subjects and toward family-oriented images, including mother-and-child pictures and depictions of her rather homely sister, Cassatt offered critics modern life subject matter that was at the same time morally unassailable, through which she could attempt pursue her formal experimentation without risking her personal reputation. Furthermore, her embrace of maternity as a subject represented a turn toward a field of study simultaneously beginning to interest (male) scientists and writers, though she paid more attention to the mother than they did—contesting their views. She became well-known for her naturalistic renderings of mothers and babies, for the "truth" in their poses and gestures, despite the contention of scientists like James Sully that women were incapable of the objective observation of children.

Though it is impossible to determine exactly why Cassatt took up the mother and child theme, it effectively served her as a means of balancing the "virile firmness and assurance" of her facture with "all those delicacies of her being which a woman can apply," as Daudet described expectations for the female artist in her time. By working in this "proper" subject matter, she could push the physical boundaries of her mark-making while avoiding, in the eyes of her critics and patrons, the appearance of impropriety, of having made herself too much like a man (or too much like a *fille publique*). The signature subject matter would function throughout her career as the title—"Mary Cassatt, *peintre des enfants et des mères*"—under which her identity was organized (beginning long before Segard would use it as the title of his biography). Under this title she could

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experiment with formal means that threatened her acceptance into the art world and into a larger culture of "possessive individualism" that for the most part was unwilling to grant women the right to fully possess their own property, let alone their individuality.[207]

III.

The year 1881 represented a high point of Cassatt's career; in 1882, she did not participate in the Impressionist exhibition, and more significantly, she suffered a great personal loss, with the death of her sister Lydia in November. The next few years would see a diminishment in her artistic production, for the most part due to family matters, some of them art-related, such as an effort to convince Whistler to finish the portrait of Cassatt's sister-in-law, Lois, begun in April 1883. In the fall of that year, Cassatt began work on *Lady at the Tea Table*[208] (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), a portrait of her mother's cousin Mary Dickinson Riddle. The work was famously refused by Mrs. Riddle and her daughter as insufficiently flattering to the sitter and put into storage by the artist until 1915, when it was exhibited and soon declared to be among her best pictures.

Cassatt returned to the Impressionist fold for the group's final exhibition, held in 1886. On the whole, the response to her pictures was less enthusiastic than it had been in 1881; about half of the critics praised her contributions, one quarter found them to be mediocre, and one quarter ignored them altogether. (Huysmans, who had been so taken with her imagery in 1881, devoted his entire discussion of the 1886 exhibition to Degas.) Though her works were once again of high quality, the fact that they represented no significant shift in her style meant that she was relegated to the second tier in an exhibition bracketed with Degas's infamous pastel series, *Suite de nuds* [*sic*] *de femmes se baignant,*

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[207] Allen Sekula, in "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 346, discusses the significance of the culture of "possessive individualism" (the idea that the legal basis of the self lies in the model of property rights) in the 1870s and 1880s in relation to the disciplinary archive of images of the body that was being assembled at this time, to which the "mug shot" illustrated as my Fig. 67 belongs.

[208] BrCR 139. In this same period, Mrs. Riddle's daughter commissioned (and received) a portrait of her daughter from John Everett Millais.

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se lavant, se séchant, s'essuyant, se peignant ou se faisant peigner, on the one hand, and newcomer Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande-Jatte* (The Art Institute of Chicago) on the other.

In contrast to Cassatt's earlier exhibitions, which were comprised of works that had not yet been sold (save one painting lent by Henri Rouart in 1879), four of the seven pictures she displayed in 1886 already belonged to collectors. One was her initial image of child care, *The Nurse* [Fig. 53], lent by Charles Haviland of the porcelain manufacturing family. Gustave Geffroy cited two other loaned pictures in his favorable review, stressing the delicate and feminine aspects of her work. To Geffroy, *Jeune fille à la fenêtre* (*Susan on a Balcony Holding a Dog*), c. 1883–86, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), owned by M. Berend, and *Jeune Fille au jardin* (*Young Woman Sewing in a Garden*) [Fig. 70], belonging to Antonin Personnaz, were

> graceful and flowering like plants in full growth; the one is standing, wearing a straw hat completely enveloped in gauze; the other is seated near red geraniums, leaning over the lace that she holds in her slender fingers. There is here more than painting—a sort of emanation of life, made from the summer temperature and the earthly perfume of the woman. It is to these paintings that one should lead those who deny that impressionism has delicacy and charm. In what kind of times do we live, then, when such an exhibition, following the one put on in 1881, does not silence criticism, does not bring in the crowds, does not result in the definitive designation of Mlle Mary Cassatt as the distinguished and knowing [*savante*] artist that she already is to some?[209]

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[209] Gustave Geffroy, "Salon de 1886: VIII. Hors du Salon: Les Impressionnistes," *La Justice* (26 May 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 451: "flexibles et fleuries comme des plantes en pleine croissance; l'une est debout, coiffée d'un chapeau de paille blanche tout enveloppé de gaz; l'autre, assise auprès de rouges géraniums, est penchée sur la dentelle qu'elle tient en ses doigts menus. Il y a ici plus que de la peinture,—une sorte d'émanation de la vie, faite de la température de l'été et du parfum charnel de la femme. C'est devant ces toiles qu'il faut conduire ceux qui refuse à l'impressionisme la délicatesse et le charme. En quel temps vivons-nous donc pour qu'une exposition semblable, ajoutée à l'exposition faite en 1881, n'arrête pas la critique, ne fasse pas venir la foule, ne

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Geffroy also liked *The Nurse*'s children, who, "white and pink, sleeping with the mouth open, or playing while seated on the ground, look like flowers blooming in the heat."[210]

Another picture that received a good deal of attention was Cassatt's *Two Children at the Seashore (Children Playing on the Beach)* [Fig. 71], who "are no less precious for their naturalism and truth," wrote Maurice Hermel, continuing, "Their cheeks, their plump arms, their chubby thighs have a beautiful sunburned tint, the firm and thick texture of nectarines. These are real 'babys' [*sic*] who play in the sand with conviction. . . ."[211] Henry Fèvre likewise praised Cassatt for avoiding the idealization of her figures, but nevertheless found something lacking: "Mademoiselle Mary Cassatt seizes well the realism of figures by conscientiously observing them, without cherubizing her children nor inanely haloing her mothers; she is the good worker of impressionism, powerful enough, but without élan, without inspiration."[212] Other critics complained that her handling no longer appeared delicate or tender. To Emile Hennequin, "Mme Marie [*sic*] Cassatt has very much lost her former grace of touch; this time she paints little girls with a fastidious hardness and monochromy,"[213] while the critic for *La République française* described her images as "very violent, with brutal and hard nuances."[214]

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désigne pas définitivement Mlle Mary Cassatt comme l'artiste distinguée et savant qu'elle est déjà pour quelques-uns."

Susan on a Balcony Holding a Dog is BrCR 125.

210 Ibid.: "blancs et roses, dormant bouche ouverte, ou jouant, à ras de terre, semblent des fleurs épanouies dans la chaleur."

211 Maurice Hermel, "L'Exposition de peinture de la rue Laffitte," *La France libre* (27 May 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 456: "0ne sont pas moins précieux de naturel et de vérité. Les joues, les bras dodus, les cuisses potelées ont la belle teinte hâlée, le grain ferme et dru des brugnons; ce sont de vrais babys qui jouent au sable avec conviction. . . ."

212 Fèvre, "L'Exposition des impressionnistes," 446: "Mademoiselle Mary Cassatt attrape bien le réalisme des figures en observateur consciencieux, sans chérubiniser ses enfants ni niaisement auréoler ses mères; c'est une bonne ouvrière de l'impressionnisme, assez puissante, mais sans élan, sans inspiration."

213 Emile Hennequin, "Notes d'art: Les Impressionnistes," *La Vie moderne* (19 June 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 454: "Mme Marie [*sic*] Cassatt a beaucoup perdu de son ancienne grâce de touche; elle peinte cette fois des petites filles avec une dureté et une monochromie fastidieuses. . . ."

214 "L'Exposition des impressionnistes," *La République française* (17 May 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 472: "très-violents, de nuances brutales et dures. . . ."

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As in 1881, there was little consensus as to the specific qualities of Cassatt's works—hard or soft, brutal or delicate, masculine or feminine—because they varied from work to work, and because different critics often viewed the same work in different ways. Hermel observed of an unidentified pastel titled *Mère et enfant*, lent by M. Nunès (perhaps *Mother's Goodnight Kiss* [Fig. 72] or *Agatha and Her Child* [Fig. 73]):

> there is more than a nuance of very touching sentiment; the touch is rich and savory, the facture a little effeminate, perhaps; but one can't resist the beauty of the maternal gesture, the sweet abandon of infancy, the bloom of their skin. It is in this tender work that the artist shows herself to be the most womanly, and for myself, I can't find fault with it. I don't know a more rare pleasure than that of clearly reading the temperament of an artist across her work.[215]

Jean Ajalbert also found Cassatt to be even more "womanly" than Morisot, declaring that while Cassatt often recalled her French colleague "in her choice of subjects, but not in the nervousness of rendering," Cassatt's art was "more level-headed, more womanly, than that of Mme Morisot, and much superior."[216]

Like Hermel, Octave Mirbeau applauded a number of Cassatt's pictures, and the *Mère et enfant* above all. After discussing Federico Zandomeneghi, Mirbeau observed,

> How I prefer Mlle Mary Cassatt, who possesses her own métier, a way of seeing and feeling that is very personal! Here at least we have the true temperament of a painter. What drawing, at once elegant, simple, and strong, such charming and vibrant tones, although a bit green, it seems to me, especially in the *Jeune Fille au jardin*! [Fig. 70]

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[215] Hermel, "L'Exposition de peinture de la rue Laffitte," 456: "il y a de plus une nuance de sentiment très touchante; la touche est grasse et savoureuse, la facture un peu efféminée peut-être; mais on ne résiste pas à la beauté du geste maternel, à ce doux abandon de l'enfance, à cette fleur de carnations. C'est dans cette oeuvre émue que l'artiste se montre le plus femme, et, pour moi, je n'y trouve pas à redire. Je ne sais pas de plus rare plaisir que de lire clairement le tempérament d'un artiste au travers de son oeuvre."

[216] Jean Ajalbert, "Le Salon des impressionnistes," *La Revue moderne* [Marseille] (20 June 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 432: "par le choix des sujets, non par la nervosité du rendu"; "plus rassis, plus femme, peut-être, que celui de Mme Morisot, de beaucoup supérieure."

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> But this is a minor criticism and it hardly matters because the figure is a curious piece of work, the essence of skill [*savante même*], and it is delicately bathed in atmosphere. The *Enfants sur la plage* [Fig. 71] are excellent, but the piece that I prefer is the *Mère et enfant*, a masterful pastel in which I find all the eminent qualities of knowing [*savoir*] and feeling [*sentiment*] that make Mlle Mary Cassatt one of the most interesting artists of our time.[217]

Unlike Hermel, who found a comfortable match between Cassatt's "très touchante" sentiment, her effeminate "touche," and the "beauté du geste maternel" in her *Mère et enfant*, Mirbeau found a mix of stereotypically male and female qualities, of *savoir* and *sentiment*. Both critics agreed, however, that Cassatt had achieved a personal métier: a signature style.

The question of style and its relation to gender arose with regard to a number of pictures shown by Cassatt and Degas at the 1886 Impressionist exhibition. Cassatt herself posed, trying on a hat, for one of these works: Degas's 1882 pastel, *At the Milliner's* [Fig. 74], which treats a typical notion of feminine style as personal ornamentation. That Degas subscribed to such a notion, and that Cassatt was able to challenge his belief, is the point of an anecdote reported by Segard in his 1913 biography. According to Segard, around 1886 Cassatt pronounced of a "great painter" friend of theirs, "He has no style," which caused Degas to laugh, "shrugging his shoulders, with a movement that meant: look at these women who mix themselves up in judging! Do they even know [*savent-elles*] what

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[217] Octave Mirbeau, "Exposition de peinture (1, rue Lafitte)," *La France* (21 May 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 466: "Combien je préfère Mlle Mary Cassatt qui possède un métier à elle, une façon de voir et de sentir très personelle! Voilà au moins un vrai tempérament de peintre. Quel dessin à la fois élégante, simple et fort, quels tons charmants, vibrants, bien qu'un peu verts, il me semble, surtout la *Jeune Fille au jardin*! Mais c'est une mince critique et qui n'importe pas, car la figure est d'une recherche curieuse, savante même, et très délicatement baignée d'atmosphère. Les *Enfants sur la plage* sont excellents, mais le morceau que je préfère, c'est la *Mère et l'Enfant*, pastel de maître où je retrouve toutes les qualités éminentes de savoir et de sentiment qui font de Mlle Mary Cassatt, une des plus intéressantes artistes de ce temps."

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style is?"[218] Degas's response raises two issues: whether women are capable of disinterested appraisal, and whether they possess the aesthetic ability to comprehend "style," a quality most often associated with the masculine when linked to creativity rather than the more feminine "art of dressing."

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the notion of the objective gaze and its characterization as masculine and disembodied through the use of descriptive terms such as "sharp" and "penetrating." One concept of style current in the late nineteenth century carried a similar connotation of masculine acuity, as argued by Émile Deschanel in his 1864 *Physiologie des écrivains et des artistes*:

> *Style*, in its primitive, etymological definition, was, for the ancients, the metal point with which they wrote on their wax-coated tablets. Depending on whether or not the hand was more or less light, more or less spirited and passionate, this style, this point, revealed [the writer] in the character of its imprint. . . .
>
> Therefore, *style*, whether literal or figural, is the mark of the writer, the impression of his nature in his writing.[219]

That style is more properly masculine than feminine—and that the two must never be confused ("God save us, in literature as in life, from beings whose sex is doubtful"[220])—was asserted by Deschanel in the passage I quoted in Chapter One regarding women writers, when he stated that the gifted female writer, while possessing "lightness, brilliance, flexibility," was also likely to employ "tricks, intuition, implications,

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[218] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 184: "un grand peintre"; "'Il n'a pas de style"; "haussant les épaules, d'un mouvement qui signifiait: voyez-vous ces femmes qui se mêlent de juger! Savent-elles seulement ce que c'est que le style?"

[219] Deschanel, *Physiologie des écrivains et des artistes*, 9-10:

Le *style*, dans son acception primitive, étymologique, était, pour les anciens, ce poinçon de métal avec lequel ils écrivaient sur des tablettes enduites de cire. Selon que la main était plus ou moins légère, plus ou moins fougueuse et passionnée, ce style, ce poinçon, le révélaient, par le caractère de ses empreintes. . .

Le *style* est donc, soit au propre, soit au figuré, la marque de l'écrivain, l'impression de son naturel dans son écrit.

[220] Ibid., 49.

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malice and sometimes dissimulation, in thought as well as in style."[221] Her style, being in a sense double (in the manner of Mitchell's hysterics, with their "alternate consciousnesses") and not sufficiently organized under masculine notions of complete "self-control," could thus not serve as a true "impression of [her] nature." And as I have also pointed out, women were more frequently linked with the sharp points of diaper pins and the knitting or sewing needles of domestic tasks than with pens or etching tools. They were also aligned, as intimated in Jean Ajalbert's response to *At the Milliner's*, with hat pins and the less savory aspects of female vanity: "A woman tries on a hat in front of a mirror that obliquely conceals the milliner from us. This hat, which she has been looking out for in the display for a long time, or has envied on another woman: that woman is forgotten in scrutinizing this new head; she imagines changes, a ribbon, a pin. . . . What a natural pose, what truth in this half-dress put on to rush to the milliner's."[222]

Hermel described Degas's millinery image in terms of a "woman's prerogative," read through her hand gestures: "The woman trying on a hat at the milliner's, so naturally posed in front of the mirror in which she consults her reflection, one hand searching for the tilt most favorable to her coiffure, the other hanging, half-open and indecisive: how lifelike it is, and how finely felt!"[223] Of another picture of two millinery employees with their "tiny motions, squirrel poses, sharp and vicious pencil leads of little errand girls," Hermel challenged, "Search among the genre pictures that abound in the Salon for something that is comparable to this malicious bonhomie, served by an absolute virtuosity. And it is no less precious in color, in the nervous and concise drawing that refines the

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[221] Ibid., 50.

[222] Ajalbert, "Le Salon des impressionnistes," 430: "Une femme essaie un chapeau devant la psyché qui nous dérobe obliquement la modiste. Ce chapeau, elle l'a guetté longtemps à la devanture, ou l'a jalousé à une autre femme: elle s'oublie à scruter sa nouvelle tête; elle imagine des changements, un ruban, une épingle. . . . Quelle pose naturelle, quelle vérité dans cette demi toilette hâtée pour courir chez la modiste."

[223] Hermel, "L'Exposition de peinture de la rue Laffitte," 456: "La femme essayant un chapeau chez sa modiste, si naturellement posée devant la glace qu'elle consulte du regard, d'une main cherchant l'inclinaison favorable à sa coiffure, l'autre pendante, à demi-ouverte et comme indécise, est-elle assez parlante, et finement sentie!"

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interpretation."[224] Following his examination of Degas's images of bathers, Hermel looked to Cassatt, and set the "incisive joke" of Degas's series against her "loving observation, affectionately, softly attained," which "seduces us by contrast."[225] Pictures such as the *Young Woman Sewing in a Garden* [Fig. 70] (a "virginal evocation" whose "small hands" are "fine at their work"), he wrote, feature a "softness of modeling caressed by an impalpably light touch and smoothness of the tones."[226]

L'Art moderne's critic Octave Maus similarly attended to the "incisive" aspect of Degas's millinery pictures, declaring that they "awaken, in the simplicity of their drawing, the idea of some intaglio neatly carved with the point of the burin and typifying in definitive fashion a corner of humanity."[227] And in looking at Cassatt, Maus singled out not the "impalpably light touch" admired by Hermel, but a more vigorous handling, particularly in *Girl Arranging Her Hair* [Fig. 75]: "No evasive effects in this robust painting betray the hesitation of a feminine hand. No difficulties of drawing nor eluded color. A personality, to be certain, especially marked in the very seductive study that shows a young girl in a chemise, amid the disorder of her dressing room, twisting her blond hair on her nape with a gesture simple and true."[228] Maus then compared Cassatt's work to Morisot's, stating that with "more femininity, but perhaps a less exact sense of

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[224] Ibid.: "menus gestes, leurs poses d'écureuils, leurs mines futées et vicieuses de petits trottins"; "Cherchez parmi les tableux de genre qui foisonnent au Salon, quelque chose qui soit comparable à cette bonhomie malicieuse servie par une virtuosité absolue. Et cela n'est pas moins précieux de couleur, nerveaux et concis de dessin que raffiné d'interprétation."

[225] Ibid.: "blague incisive"; "observation aimante, affectueuse, doucement attendrie"; "nous séduit par contraste."

[226] Ibid.: "virginale évocation"; "petites mains"; "bien à leur ouvrage"; "douceur des reliefs caressés par un frôlement impalpable, la suavité des tons. . . ."

[227] Octave Maus, "Les Vingtistes parisiens," *L'Art moderne* [Brussels] (27 June 1886), reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 463: "éveillent, en la simplicité de leur dessin, l'idée de quelque intaille nettement découpée à la pointe d'un burin et typant d'une façon définitive un coin d'humanité."

[228] Ibid.: "Aucun escamotage d'effet dans cette peinture robuste, qui ne trahit point l'hésitation d'une main féminine. Aucune difficulté de dessin ou de coleur éludée. Une personnalité, certes, accusée spécialement dans la très séduisante étude qui montre une jeune fille en chemise, dans le désordre du cabinet de toilette, tordant sur sa nuque sa chevelure blonde, d'un geste simple et vrai."

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color, Mme. Berthe Morisot ranks beside the American artist."[229] Works by the Frenchwoman that are similar in subject to *Girl Arranging Her Hair,* such as *Getting Out of Bed* (Collection Durand-Ruel, Paris) and *The Bath* (*Girl Arranging Her Hair*) [Fig. 76], were contrasted to Cassatt's "robust" technique through their alignment with the "adorable grace of a drawing from the eighteenth century" and "a real aristocracy of feelings and taste."[230]

These paintings by Morisot of women in intimate domestic settings do incorporate a measure of rococo prettiness and sensuality not at all evident in Cassatt's *Girl Arranging Her Hair.* Cassatt's figure refuses both the refined sensuality of Morisot's women and the sexuality seen by critics in Degas's bathers, who were characterized in 1886 as animal-like. Maus described Degas's project in these pastels: he "is solely preoccupied with the woman who believes that she is alone, absolutely alone, and who, having divested herself of all coquetry, abandons herself without reflection, naively, naturally, like a young cat, to the cares of her toilette, to washing in the freshness of the tub, to the frictions, to the soothing caress of the water."[231] Cassatt's *Girl Arranging Her Hair,* though "seductive" in Maus's view, is also without coquetry—in other words, without the "tricks, intuition, implications, malice and sometimes dissimulation" more generally believed to be characteristic of feminine style, as Deschanel phrased it.

That Degas came to agree with this assessment is the conclusion of Segard's anecdote regarding the rhetorical question about women: "Do they even know what style is?" According to Segard, Cassatt was stung by her colleague's assertion ["*Miss Cassatt se piqua*"—*se piquer* literally meaning to be pricked by a sharp object] and set about to

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[229] Ibid.: "plus de féminilité [*sic*], mais peut-être avec le sens moins exact des colorations, Mme Berthe Morisot a pris rang à côté de l'artiste américaine."
[230] Ibid.: "grâce mignard d'un dessin du XVIII[e] siècle"; "réele aristocratie de sentiments et de goût."
[231] Ibid., 462: "uniquement le préoccupe la femme qui se croit seule, absolument seule, et qui, dépouillant toute coquetterie, s'abandonne sans arrière-pensée, naïvement, naturellement, comme un jeune chat, aux soins de sa toilette, aux ablutions dans la fraîcheur du tub, aux frictions, aux lénifiantes caresses de l'eau."

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prove him wrong, deliberately choosing for her model "a very ugly woman, a typically vulgar sort of servant."[232] By selecting a pointed-elbow pose similar to those both she and Degas regularly employed, Cassatt activated a visual trope associated with a range of meanings from seductive exposure to willful self-possession as a statement of her own style, to represent her own appropriation of technical methods and subjects (such as the woman at her toilette) considered less appropriate for a woman artist. And at the same time, she toned down the more salacious connotations of this "movement of a woman who is preparing for bed,"[233] as Segard put it, by portraying her figure as homely,[234] chastely dressed, and likely preparing to go to bed alone.

Degas evidently accepted *Girl Arranging Her Hair* as a visual refutation of his claim regarding women and style, for not only did he purportedly write of the painting "*Quel dessin! quel style!*,"[235] but also acquired it for his personal collection, giving Cassatt a work from his notorious *Suite de nus*, the *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub* [Fig. 77] in exchange. (Perhaps it is not incidental that that pastel is one of the most unresolved, and least assimilable to the pretty, of the bather series.) Segard, too, utilized *Girl Arranging Her Hair* as evidence of Cassatt's ability to create with style even when depicting a model who might be viewed as unattractive or coarse: "One divines the acuity of her visual perceptions, one vaguely feels that which has provoked her nervous emotion, one sees the elegance of her technical work, one feels the distinction of her soul. This is an artist. She sees, she feels, and she executes as an artist."[236]

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[232] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 184-5: "une femme fort laide, une sorte de servante au type vulgaire."
[233] Ibid., 185: "mouvement d'une femme qui se prépare à se coucher. . . ."
[234] Here we might understand the word "homely" in relation to *Heim* and to Huysmans's "true mother" type—as descriptive of uncanny women who abjure the artifice and coquettishness of sexuality in favor of an asexual domesticity.
[235] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 185.
[236] Ibid., 183-4: "On devine l'acuité de ses perceptions visuelles, on sent obscurément ce qui a provoqué son émotion nerveuse, on voit l'élégance du travail technique, on sent une distinction d'âme. C'est une artiste. Elle voit, elle sent et elle exécute en artiste."

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Segard's evocation of Cassatt's "nervous emotion" speaks to the moment of transition that was 1886. The positivist valuation of Impressionist realism was giving way to a concern with an extreme sensitivity characteristic of Symbolism, as the findings on deviant psychological and bodily states being made by Freud's teacher, Dr. J. M. Charcot, and his colleagues made their way into the international literature of art and science.[237] The British physician and botanist Francis Warner, for example, published illustrations such as "The Nervous Hand" [Fig. 78], influenced by H. Meillet's studies of hand postures, made at Charcot's Salpêtrière laboratory, as well as his own observation of works of art including the Venus de Milo.[238]

While nervousness was often conflated with hysteria, it was by no means the sole province of the female; within limits, the male artist at the *fin de siècle* could adopt its visual signs in his subject matter or handling, in pursuit of a rarefied state of a nearly pathological creative genius.[239] (Max Nordau would depict the dandified male "specimens" attending French and English art exhibitions in his notorious 1892 tome, *Degeneration*: "Each one wishes to create a strong nervous excitement, no matter whether agreeably or disagreeably."[240]) Thus, Morisot could be defined by her "nervousness of rendering" (Ajalbert) and Degas by his "nervous and concise drawing" (Hermel) as well. Cassatt, too, would be described in these terms; Gustave Geffroy, for

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[237] Freud trained with Charcot in 1885–86.

[238] Francis Warner, M.D., *Physical Expression, Its Modes and Principles* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1886), 162-3. Warner's book was intended for the use of both scientists and artists.

As Amstrong explains in *Odd Man Out*, 186, accounts of deviance published at this time "seemed to be based on the assumption that *any* form of corporeal expressiveness denoted deviance and excess: gestures, stances, and expressions, which once had been signs of characters and passions, were now signs of the body's deviance from bourgeois norms." Cassatt's casting of the mother as inmate or prisoner in the 1881 *A Goodnight Hug* seems all the more uncanny given the emergence of this discourse on creativity.

[239] On this subject, see Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[240] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892) (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 9-10.

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example, observed in 1886 how her drawing "folds itself into the softness of fabrics, into the nervousness of hands, into the inflections of supple bodies."[241]

After the dissolution of the Impressionist group, Cassatt would turn increasingly toward her own version of style as the product of the stylus, in a group of works culminating in the drypoints and color prints that would establish her individual reputation apart from the Impressionists and continue to confuse gendered expectations for artists. (Raoul Sertat, for instance, commented in 1890, "Mlle Mary Cassatt, through some unforgettable *intimacies* in drypoint, gives to feminine and even masculine artists a perfect example of art that is sweet and strong, simple and penetrating.")[242] Any "nervousness" or degeneration perceived in her style, however, would give way to another aspect of Symbolism, as critics emphasized a healthy and almost religious purity in the mothers and the "marvelous children to whom she gives life with her pencil or burin."[243] In other words, the *peintre des enfants et des mères* would soon become the artist of the "Modern Madonna."

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[241] Geffroy, "Salon de 1886," 451: "se plie aux mollesses des étoffes, aux nervosités des mains, aux inflexions des corps souples."

[242] Raoul Sertat, "Les Peintres-Graveurs," *Le Voltaire* 30 (16 March 1890), n.p.: "Mlle Mary Cassatt, par d'inoubliables *intimités* à la pointe sèche, donne aux artistes féminines voire aux masculins, un parfait exemple d'art doux et fort, simple et pénétrant."

[243] Yveling Rambaud, "Miss Cassatt," *L'Art dans les deux mondes* (22 November 1890), 7: "merveilleux enfants auxquels son pinceau ou son burin ont donné la jour. . . ."

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CHAPTER FIVE — *"A BEAUTIFUL SCIENCE OF MOVEMENTS" AND "MODERN 'HOLY FAMILIES'": THE NATURAL AND THE SYMBOLIC IN CASSATT'S MOTHER AND CHILD IMAGES, 1888–1893*

While Mary Cassatt first began exhibiting pictures on the mother and child theme in 1881, it would not be for another ten years until her works were specifically identified by a critic as representing "*'Sainte Famille' modernes*," as Gustave Lecomte suggested in a review for *L'Art dans les deux mondes*.[1] In the period spanning the sixth Impressionist exhibition and Cassatt's first "one-person" show, held at Galeries Durand-Ruel in 1891, widespread cultural changes in the three countries I have tracked in this dissertation (France, the United States, and England) had made the idea of a "Modern Madonna" by an artist still identified with the Impressionist "school of the Real"[2] not only possible but desirable. In particular, the pressures of science, especially Darwinism and the "discovery of the unconscious," had led to complex debates as well as paradoxical alliances in the realms of religion, education, gender relations, and art, among others. For example, women were frequently encouraged to study the new "science of motherhood" based upon the latest findings of physiology and psychology even as they were told to refrain from delving into the physical facts and mental processes involved in sexuality and reproduction, for fear of corrupting the Virgin-like "purity" expected of them.

The relation of science to art had become enormously complicated by the late 1880s and early 1890s. From its inception, Impressionism had been loosely associated with science through its perceived alignment with concepts like Comtean positivism and

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[1] Georges Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," *L'Art dans les deux mondes* (18 April 1891), 261. While we tend to subscribe to a late twentieth-century concept of the "family," most frequently defined in its "nuclear" form comprised of mother, father, and child or children, the term "Holy Family" in the nineteenth century frequently signified the Virgin and Child alone. For example, Anna Jameson, in her discussion of "Holy Family" imagery, stated, "The simplest form of the family group is confined to two figures, and expresses merely the relation between the Mother and the Child"; see *Legends of the Madonna*, 252.

[2] Rambaud, "Miss Cassatt," 7: "école du Vrai."

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the optics of Helmholtz. As Richard Shiff has demonstrated, the Impressionists, like the Neo-Impressionists and the Symbolists soon to follow, shared a traditional concern for "the individual's means of arriving at truth or knowledge and the relation of this individual truth to a universal truth."[3] The Impressionists attempted to make their subjective perceptions objective by embodying them through a particular technical means, mainly the spontaneous, accentuated brushstroke and bright color that could signify both the artist's individual temperament and an impression that seemed universal because it appeared to have been taken directly from nature.[4] Impressionist naturalism could thus be understood as paralleling science in the aspects of its practice that involved the search for "truth."

By the time of the 1886 Impressionist exhibition, however, not only the younger artists associated with Neo-Impressionism and Symbolism but many of the core *Indépendants* had begun to question what seemed to them the overly contingent and materialist character of the Impressionist aesthetic and its reliance upon immediate sensation and the principles of naturalism. A new goal was being formulated among artists, defined later in 1886 by the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn: "to objectify the subjective (the exteriorization of the Idea) instead of subjectifying the objective (nature seen through a temperament)."[5] The Impressionist vision of nature no longer sufficed for those artists interested in responding to the turbulence of their era with an art that would speak to social conditions, at least as experienced on a personal level, without resorting to

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[3] Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 17. Shiff maintains in this book that the shift from Impressionism to "Post-Impressionism" (i.e. Neo-Impressionism and Symbolism) is therefore best characterized by the continuity between the two movements rather than by rupture, as is suggested in such books as Joel Isaacson, *The Crisis of Impressionism, 1878–1882* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1980). While my account of this transition in the paragraphs to follow is deeply indebted to Shiff, especially his pp. 17-9, 37-8, 41-7, I am also interested in the points of conflict between Impressionism and the movements that followed it. My understanding of these points and the critical reaction to Symbolism has been greatly informed by Michael Marlais, *Conservative Echoes in* Fin-de-siècle *Parisian Art Criticism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992). Marlais is also very informative on the issue of Symbolist ideas about science.

[4] Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 17-8.

[5] Gustave Kahn, "Réponse des symbolistes," *L'Événement* (28 September 1886), quoted and trans. in Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 38.

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realism. Now interior psychic conditions could serve as subject matter for the painter, manifested through recourse to symbolic languages, whether consisting of traditional emblems including religious icons, or more abstruse means, such as abstracted line and form and non-naturalistic color.

In the quest for a new aesthetic appropriate to the antinaturalist mood of the period, many artists and critics called the value of science into question. G.-Albert Aurier, for instance, in his 1886 essay, "Les Peintres symbolistes," contended, "After having proclaimed the omnipotence of scientific observation and deduction for eighty years with childlike enthusiasm, and after asserting that for its lenses and scalpels there did not exist a single mystery, the nineteenth century at last seems to perceive that its efforts have been in vain, and its boasts puerile."[6] The Neo-Impressionists drew upon some aspects of scientific research in the search for a more permanent aesthetic without following any practice dogmatically. Other artists looked to various aspects of religion to mediate between art and science in this era of intense Neo-Christian revival, believing or simply hoping that some questions would always remain outside the purview of objective inquiry. Lewis Morris, for instance, voiced a common fear in an 1891 *Murray's Magazine* article when he posited, "It is perhaps conceivable that a growth of scientific intelligence, so complete as to leave no room for mystery or speculation, might dry up many springs of poetic thought."[7] Morris turned to religion as an enduring impetus for art in his conclusion, recommending that "All the varied impulses and wants of our modern life should find treatment by the poet of the future—the great gains of science should not be ignored by him, nor the insoluble but ever-recurring problems of the relations of the

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[6] G.-Albert Aurier, "Les Peintres symbolistes," *Revue encyclopédique* (April 1892), trans. H. R. Rookmaker, quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art, A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 93.

[7] Lewis Morris, "Some Thoughts on Modern Poetry," reprinted from *Murray's Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 190 (12 September 1891), 643.

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human to the divine."[8] Nevertheless, he warned, "the task may well be as hard as the production of a modern Madonna or Achilles."[9]

This chapter investigates the emergence and reception of Cassatt's "Modern Madonna"—a figure seen by most critics as successfully negotiating the demands of both an Impressionist-derived naturalism with which the artist remained associated and the new Symbolist quest for a more abstract and universal language of meaning—at a particular moment of conflict and convergence regarding art, science, and religion. Not coincidentally, this moment also saw the ascent of a mainstream movement calling for expanded access to education for women and for female suffrage in politics, as well as a great increase in art by women, concurrent with an explosive growth in the fine and popular arts of images depicting women as idealized androgynes and *femme fatales*.[10]

Nancy Mowll Mathews has skillfully situated Cassatt's mother and child works of the late 1880s through the early 1900s within the broad context of the "Madonna as mother" concept and Marian imagery in her pioneering 1980 dissertation, "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century."[11] My aim in this chapter is more specific: to consider how the artist's mother and child pictures dating from 1888 to 1893 as well as her "Modern Woman" mural for the 1893 Columbian Exposition were seen in

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[8] Ibid., 648.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Two recent sources for the study of these types of images are Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent,* and Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876–1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). On the topic of the expanding opportunities for women in the arts, see Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

[11] Nancy Mowll Mathews, "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1980). As far as I have been able to determine, the first use of the term "Modern Madonna" to describe Cassatt's works appeared in "Current News of Art," *Chicago Record-Herald* (23 October 1904), page number unknown (original found in Cassatt file at Art Institute of Chicago library). Given the popularity of the term following Mathews's dissertation and later writings, its invocation by Lewis Morris in 1891 as a type of image to aspire to, and its usefulness as a means of understanding Cassatt's works following her 1891 exhibition at Durand-Ruel, Paris, I have chosen to employ it here in addition to Lecomte's actual 1891 description of Cassatt's work as representing "*'Sainte Famille' modernes.*"

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the late 1880s and early 1890s with regard to contemporary ideas about science and symbolic languages, and how these ideas were inflected by gender.

Chapter Five is divided into three parts. The first looks at Cassatt's graphics, including a group of drypoint etchings from the late 1880s, seen at the time as combining intuitive feminine perception with a masculine incisiveness of drawing technique, and the Japanese-inspired color prints of 1890–91, which were interpreted by some critics with regard to gendered theories of ornament. The second section of Chapter Five explores Cassatt's paintings and pastels from the same period, variously characterized by critics as naturalistic in their physiognomic observation and symbolic in their appeal to old master Madonna precedents. These works will be studied in relation to contemporary debates about symbolic languages, among them the significance of Marian imagery and children's expressive gestures. The third section of Chapter Five briefly examines Cassatt's 1893 mural, in which "Modern Woman" is depicted apart from—yet literally framed by—babies. A number of mother and child images relating to the mural will also be viewed alongside Symbolist theories about *décoration* and the depiction of the female body. By examining these three groups of works we will gain a better sense of how Cassatt mediated between the naturalism with which she first gained fame and the anti-realist demands of Symbolism in order to maintain a place, albeit a conflicted one, given her gender and subject matter, within the trajectory of modernism.

I.

Following the dissolution of the Impressionist group after the 1886 exhibition, Cassatt involved herself in numerous family matters, including the search for a new residence in Paris. In 1887, after she and her parents settled in the apartment at 10, rue de Marignan, which the artist would keep for the rest of her life, the family enjoyed visits by Alexander and Gardner Cassatt and their wives and children. At this moment Cassatt also returned to printmaking, after having practiced the art only sporadically since 1879–80,

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when she created a number of etchings related to the works she exhibited in the Impressionist exhibitions of those years.[12] While these early prints often combined techniques such as softground etching and aquatint, in the mid-1880s Cassatt turned her attention to drypoint, which required great control in drawing directly on the plate with an extremely sharp needle. Most of her drypoint prints of the mid-1880s depict family members, and were done in concert with a group of paintings and pastels memorializing the same subjects.

Among these drypoints is *Gardner Held by His Mother* [Fig. 79], 1888. In this depiction of her nephew and sister-in-law Jennie, Cassatt utilized bold lines and fine hatching strokes to convey a remarkable presence with a great economy of means. The composition appears as if drawn directly upon the plate as the artist searched for the right lines to shape the contours of the figures. The result emphasizes her touch and endows the figures with a sense of spontaneity and motion. At the same time, Cassatt created a feeling of gravity by isolating the heads at the top of a largely blank composition, indicating the mother's body solely by means of a thick, dark line that moves from her neck toward the lower left portion of the sheet, her elbow nothing but a mere trace. The effect almost suggests that the two heads share one body, for the child's corpus is even more ephemeral than the mother's, consisting only of light lines that stand in for his upper arms and mark his shoulders and back. The separation of the two bodies is indicated only at the juncture of their faces.

Cassatt first had an opportunity to show new works like this drypoint at an important venue when she participated, along with Degas and Pissarro, among others, in the inaugural exhibition of the *Société de peintres-graveurs*, organized during the general printmaking revival of the late 1880s. Cassatt showed two drypoints and a pastel at the

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[12] As Nancy Mowll Mathews points out in "The Color Prints in the Context of Mary Cassatt's Art," in Mathews and Barbara Stern Shapiro, *Mary Cassatt: The Color Prints* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with Williams College Museum of Art, 1989), 33, Cassatt exhibited prints with the Impressionists in 1879 and 1880, but not in 1881 or 1886.

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exhibition, which opened in January 1889 at Galeries Durand-Ruel in Paris. Félix Fénéon, who had been disappointed with Cassatt's contributions to the 1886 Impressionist exhibition,[13] found much to his liking in her new productions, and in *La Cravache* he cited her now unidentified pastel as being among the very few original works worthy of admiration in the show.[14] As for her two prints, also unidentified, he described a *Mère et enfant* that could be *Gardner Held by His Mother* or a similar work, praising the drypoint for its "delicacies of skin . . . the modeling of the face of the mother, the downy cranium of the child."[15] Fénéon's choice of words, especially the contrast between hard (the precise "cranium" [*crâne*]) and soft ("downy" [*duveteux*]), captures something about both the handling and the mood of the picture, indicating that Cassatt was skillful enough to create tender visual and emotional effects using a potentially "dry" medium but without relying upon the excess sentimentality so often associated with mother and child subjects. Frantz Jourdain, in *La Revue indépendante*, also lauded these "delicate drypoints," which to him exhibited "a distinction and a serenity of drawing that recall qualities of Clouet."[16]

Alfred de Lostalot, in a review for the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, took pains to emphasize Cassatt's technique and subject matter as appropriately and inherently feminine,

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[13] Félix Fénéon, "Les Impressionnistes," *La Vogue* (13-20 June 1886), reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 442: "Mademoiselle Mary Cassatt is here with children and young girls, strong studies, with a distinguished and conscientious trace, without a doubt, but with color a bit hard, and not enough passionate searching"; ("Mademoiselle Mary Cassatt est là avec des enfants et des jeunes filles, fermes études, d'un tracé distingué et consciencieux sans doute d'un coloris un peu dur et sans recherches bien passionnantes").

[14] Félix Fénéon, "Les Peintres-Graveurs," *La Cravache* (9 February 1889), reprinted in Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, vol. 1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), 142.

[15] Ibid., 139: "délicatesses d'épiderme . . . le modelé du visage de la mère, le duveteux crâne de l'enfant."

[16] Frantz Jourdain, "Les Peintres-Graveurs," *La Reuve indépendante* 10 (January–February 1889), 345-6: "délicates pointes sèches . . . la distinction et la sérénité du dessin rappellent les qualitiés de Clouet. . . ." There are three well-known artists named Clouet: Jean Clouet the Elder, who emigrated from Flanders to France c. 1460; a man thought to be his son, also named Jean Clouet (died c. 1540–41); and this man's son, François Clouet (c. 1510–72). Though it is not possible to determine to which of the Clouets Jourdain was referring, it may be the middle Jean Clouet, who is best known for high-quality drawings characterized by their naturalism and skillful use of hatching strokes.

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as he had when discussing her work at the 1879 Impressionist exhibition. "Drypoint has taken . . . all honors at the exhibition," he claimed in 1889, continuing,

> This mode of expression has served the delicate talent of Miss Cassatt as well as it has the proud, sculptural mastery of M. Rodin. The tool, in changing hands, becomes supple in the graceful and tender labors that reclaim from it an exquisite artistic nature, doubled by a female nature. The young mothers in the company of their Babies, whom Miss Cassatt has portrayed on copper with no other ambition than the pleasure of painting them in their effusions of maternal love, offer to her a spectacle of which she never grows tired, and which has constantly brought joy to her in her paintings. . . .[17]

De Lostalot's language echoes claims made about women artists almost 30 years earlier, at the start of Cassatt's career, in the 1861 *Gazette de Beaux-Arts* essay quoted in the *Crayon* as "Woman's Position in Art." Léon Lagrange, who declared that women were best suited to the painting of domestic objects such as porcelain pieces, and to subjects featuring the "sentiment of maternal tenderness," opined that a woman's

> nimble fingers, accustomed to wield the needle, lend themselves more easily to minute operations, to the use of small instruments, to the almost imperceptible shades of manipulation that wood-engraving exacts. Cutting on copper and steel demands also a patience and minutia much more compatible with the nature of woman than with that of man. It is only in *womanizing* himself, in some degree, that man

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[17] Alfred de Lostalot, "Expositions Diverses, Peintres-Graveurs, Société des Aquarellistes Français," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 March 1889), 235-6: "La point sèche a eu . . . tous les honneurs de l'exposition. Ce mode d'expression a servi le talent délicat de Miss Cassatt, aussi bien que la maîtrise fière, sculpturale, de M. Rodin. L'outil, en changeant de main, s'est assoupli aux travaux de grâce et de tendresse que réclamait de lui une exquise nature d'artiste, doublée d'une nature femme. Les jeunes mères que Miss Cassatt a portraiturées sur le cuivre en compagnie de Bébé, sans autre ambition que le plaisir de les peindre dans leurs effusions d'amour maternel, lui offraient le spectacle dont elle ne se laisse jamais et qui lui a constamment porté bonheur dans ses peintures. . . ."

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> succeeds in obtaining the development of these faculties so contrary to his physical constitution, and always at the expense of his natural force.[18]

While Rodin, in de Lostalot's view, employs the burin in a masculine manner, Cassatt "womanizes" the drawing tool by means of her feminine physical suitability to that which is small and requires patience, whether tiny stitches or tiny infants. That she would depict mothers and infants is also viewed as natural, and according to de Lostalot she does so not to "master" her material in the manner of Rodin, but rather "with no other ambition" than to please herself. By insisting upon the self-pleasing aspects of this practice, de Lostalot presents Cassatt as something of a self-absorbed infant, basking in the "effusions" of the mother she continues to depict and from whom she has yet to fully individuate.

Writing of Cassatt's prints, de Lostalot furthered his analogy of female artist-as-infant by adding, "this time she has made two works, delicious in such traits as a singular firmness and a feeling of naïveté that is no longer of our age; one would have to go back almost four centuries in order to find the artistic models in which Miss Cassatt finds her inspiration, unconsciously, without a doubt."[19] We have previously seen this evocation of the "primitives" in Cassatt criticism, particularly in relation to her contributions to the 1881 Impressionist exhibition. Yet the critics writing in that year, in addition to commenting upon the congruence between her domestic subject matter and "primitive" depictions involving the Virgin and Child, were also making reference to her use of faded pastel colors and matte paint surfaces, formal aspects that do not apply to the black-and-

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[18] Lagrange, "Du rang des femmes dans les arts," 36, quoted and trans. in [John Durand], "Woman's Position in Art," *Crayon*, 28 [emphasis in English trans. only]: "doigts agiles, habitués à tenir l'aiguille, se prêtent plus facilement aux menues opérations, à l'emploi des petits outils, à la succession de mouvements imperceptibles, qu'exige la taille du bois. Le travail du cuivre et de l'acier demande aussi une patience et une minutie bien plus compatibles avec la nature de la femme qu'avec celle de l'homme. Ce n'est qu'en se féminisent, en quelque sorte, que l'homme arrivent à obtenir le développement de ces facultés, contraires à sa constitution physique, et c'est toujours aux dépens de sa force."

[19] de Lostalot, "Expositions Diverses, Peintres-Graveurs," 235: "elle en a fait cette fois deux images délicieuses en quelques traits d'une singulière fermeté et dans un sentiment de naïveté qui n'est plus de notre âge: il faut remonter à près de quatre siècles en arrière pour trouver les modèles d'art dont Miss Cassatt s'est inspirée, inconsciemment sans doute."

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white drypoints. De Lostalot may be referring to Cassatt's simplification of means and a linearity reminiscent of painters such as Botticelli, but his main thrust appears to be an effort to characterize Cassatt and her line as "naive."

The terms de Lostalot employed to describe Cassatt also point toward an awareness of current psychological theories, including the idea of "doubling," which was frequently connected to hysteria and the "split personality."[20] His statement that her debt to the "primitives" must be "unconscious" carries this connotation, for, as Frederic W. H. Myers reported later in 1889, recent experiments had shown that "printed words which have passed before the retina, but have not been *read* by the conscious mind, may be capable of being afterwards visually presented to the conscious self, emerging out of latency as a kind of hallucination."[21] Myers hypothesized, "not only may our familiar perceptions, images, memories, &c., be split up in various ways between alternating or coexistent personalities, but also there are probably an indefinite number of perceptions, images, memories, &c., which under ordinary circumstances never enter our normal personalities at all, but which can be included therein by experimental artifice or by some so-called spontaneous impulse of their own."[22] The context of de Lostalot's comments, however, and his use of the modifier "*sans doute*" suggest he intended to imply that Cassatt imitated artists of the past not as the result of the mysterious actions of the unconscious mind now becoming scientifically associated with creativity and genius, but rather in the mode of an unsophisticated and instinctual child who chances upon the right word or most suitable image in the course of play.

After the success of Cassatt's showing at the 1889 exhibition of the Peintres-Graveurs, she continued to experiment with printmaking, sending a series of 12 drypoints [see Figs. 80, 82-84] and another group of prints identified as aquatints to the second

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[20] These ideas will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
[21] Frederic W. H. Myers, "Janet's Psychical Automatism," *Nineteenth Century* 26 (August 1889), 342.
[22] Ibid.

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exhibition of the *Société*, which opened in March of 1890.[23] This time, the drypoints were even more warmly received by critics such as Firmin Javel, who singled out a "young mother carrying a nude infant in a Raphaelesque pose" among Cassatt's "astonishing" drypoints.[24] Although these works, with their anatomical distortions, sharply angled tabletops, and general lack of finish cannot be completely reconciled with the classical legibility and equipoise of the Italian master's *oeuvre*, the sensitive draughtsmanship and figural arrangements evoke a Raphael-like mood tempered by late nineteenth-century realism. The exquisitely drawn *Mother and Child (Baby's Back)* [Fig. 80], for instance, recalls the standing *Madonna dell Granduca* [Fig. 81], while *The Stocking* [Fig. 82] and *Nursing* [Fig. 83] bring Raphael's pyramidal compositions more readily to mind.

Firmin Javel's comparison may in fact reflect ideas stemming from new scholarship on Raphael.[25] Lady Eastlake, for instance, emphasized the naturalism of his Madonna and Child imagery in an 1883 essay. "Raphael has been called the creator of the Madonna and Child," she wrote, clarifying, "He was rather the restorer of both to their genuine human nature."[26] Portrayals of the subject were "stiff, dark, and unnatural" until Raphael "first revealed the world of feeling and endearment between them, and opened that fount of beauty which, if less orthodox in the sense of dogma, is more sacred in that of Nature."[27] Moreover, Lady Eastlake continued,

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[23] These "aquatints" were little documented or discussed; Mathews, in "The Color Prints," 35, gives some likely suggestions about which works they might have been, as well as positing that they may have been less compelling to critics because they appeared more quickly drawn and less refined than the incisive drypoints. The entire series of drypoints is illustrated in Mathews's essay, pp. 40-41.

[24] F[irmin] J[avel], "Les Peintres-Graveurs," *Gil Blas* 12 (7 March 1890), 3: "jeune mère portant un enfant nu, dans un attitude raphaëlesque. . . ."; "étonnantes."

[25] Jean Paul Richter, in "Recent Criticism on Raphael," *Nineteenth Century* 22 (September 1887), 343, commented, "The life and works of Raphael have been studied during the last few years with a zeal previously almost unknown."

[26] [Lady Eastlake], "The Life and Works of Raphael," *Edinburgh Review* 157 (January 1883), 191. Lady Eastlake's article, like Richter's "Recent Criticism on Raphael," is a defense of Giovanni Morelli's method and a discussion of works written by other scholars in Morelli's wake.

[27] Ibid.

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> It was the child who especially gained under Raphael's new treatment. In his hands the supreme idea was raised rather than lowered, for instead of quenching the natural in the divine, he sought and expressed the divine in the natural. . . . He knew that a beautiful and healthy baby, unlike most men and women, needs no idealising;—that there were moments when the expression of an unconscious child "over whom his immortality broods like the day," realises all a painter can image of the Godlike and apart.[28]

Firmin Javel's invocation of Raphael may therefore be a response to the combination of naturalism and the mother and child subject in Cassatt's work, so unidealized in comparison to popular Salon imagery of similar themes by artists like Bouguereau.

It is interesting to note that Lady Eastlake also gave a definition of "Rafaelesque" [*sic*] that resonates with the remarks of other Cassatt critics in 1890, when she explained that Raphael's predominant quality was "the gift of a most exquisite grace."[29] This was, however, not strictly a feminine quality, for "When a work is termed 'Rafaelesque,' it means that it is imbued with a feeling [of grace] which no other artist has possessed in such a degree or combined with such masculine concomitants."[30] Most critics were quite comfortable with Cassatt's mix of naturalism and grace in 1890, but some would continue to be uneasy about the relation of her gender to her incisive style, which was considered to be more properly masculine.

Many critics found a match between Cassatt's talent for physiognomical characterization and the drypoint, which facilitates a linear and descriptive style of drawing. Auguste Dalligny stated, "Mlle Marie [*sic*] Cassatt draws with a great deal of precision and puts a feeling of very real life in the heads of her young mothers who nurse

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[28] Ibid., 192. The quotation that appears in this passage ("over whom his immortality. . . .") is from William Wordsworth's 1803–06 poem, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood."
[29] Ibid., 178.
[30] Ibid.

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their children. She handles aquatint and drypoint with equal sureness of hand."[31] Léonce Bénédite wrote that the print section of the exhibition included

> a showing of perfectly exquisite fineness by Mlle Mary Cassatt. There are two series of proofs in drypoint and aquatint, comprising studies of young women, pensive young mothers, and adorable little babies, expressed with a profound accent of life, a precision of gesture, and a discreet, subtle, and original art at the same time. There are kids who suck wholeheartedly in delicious fashion, ravishing little bodies of children drawn with a few fine and sober lines, and a pretty little scene of girls reading [Fig. 84] that has a charm of expression and light that cannot be surpassed.[32]

Léon Roger-Milès, in *L'Événement*, pressed even further the comparison between Cassatt's linear drypoint style and the vividness of gesture and expression in her figures, making an analogy between her technique and writing:

> Mlle Mary Cassatt, with a series of a dozen drypoints, dedicated no doubt to the compassion of mothers, merits a long look from the visitor; a distinguished simplicity of manner: a line of admirable sureness, and in the heads, a tight and precise drawing, a surprising strength of expression and vitality. These are not yet masterpieces, but it is difficult to imagine anything more striking and better *written*.[33]

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[31] Aug[uste] Dalligny, "La Deuxième Exposition de Peintres-Graveurs," *Le Journal des arts* 12 (14 March 1890): "Mlle Marie Cassatt dessine avec beaucoup de précision et met un sentiment de vie très réel dans les têtes des ses jeunes mères allaitant leurs enfants. Elle manie avec une égale surété de main l'aqua-tinte et la pointe-sèche."

[32] Léonce Bénédite, "L'Exposition des peintres-graveurs," *L'Artiste* 121 (March 1890), 166-7: "l'exposition d'une finesse tout à fait exquise de Mlle Mary Cassatt. Ce sont deux séries d'épreuves de pointe sèche et d'aquatinte, comprenant des études de jeunes femmes, jeunes mères pensives et petits bébés adorables, exprimés avec un accent profond de vie, une justesse de geste et un sincérité d'expression parfaites, en même temps qu'avec un art discret, subtil et original. Il y a des marmots qui tètent à plein coeur, d'une façon délicieuse, de ravissants petits corps d'enfants dessinés en quelques traits fins et sobres, et une jolie petite scène de fillettes lisant, qui a un charme d'expression et de lumière qu'on ne peut dépasser."

[33] L[éon] Roger-Milès, "Beaux-Arts, Le Salon des Peintres-Graveurs," *L'Événement* 19 (11 March 1890), n.p.: "Mlle Mary Cassatt, avec une série de douze pointes sèches, dédiées sans doute à l'attendrisement des mères, mérite d'arrêter longtemps le visiteur; une distinguée simplicité de manière: un trait d'une admirable sûreté; et dans les têtes, un dessin serré et précis, une étonnante force d'expression et de vitalité. Ce ne sont pas encore des chefs-d'oeuvre: mais il est difficile de rêver rien de plus saissant et de mieux *écrit*."

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Roger-Milès's comments, as well as the general interest in Cassatt's gestures (factural and depicted), should also be understood in the context of a late 1880s resurgence of certain "sciences" of character, such as graphology. As unconscious forms of behavior began to occupy a wide range of theorists in this era, handwriting came under new scrutiny, especially as an "automatic" action expressive of subconscious emotions, and in 1886 the Congress of the Sorbonne officially designated graphology a science.[34] The question of gesture as it relates to temperament also served as a focus in graphological writings. Jules Héricourt, for example, claimed "there is no doubt that the majority of particular characteristics of an individual come to be painted in the number, breadth, and vivacity of his movements."[35] New books on the subject appeared in the years to follow, the most significant being Jules Crepieux-Jamin's 1888 *L'Écriture et le caractère*, in which he explained, "Handwriting may be considered as a combination of gestures expressive of personality, and thus a relation exists between character and handwriting of the same order as between character and gesture."[36]

Other fields treating the "science of character" also regained favor in these years, among them physiognomy, phrenology, and palmistry, in the popular as well as the scholarly press. Dr. Frank Baker, publishing his "Anthropological Notes on the Human Hand" in the first issue of *The American Anthropologist* (1888), saw some value in palmistry, and reproduced illustrations from Francis Warner's *Physical Expression, Its*

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[34] Thornton, in *Handwriting in America*, 84, notes that nineteenth-century efforts to ascertain signs of personality in handwriting often employed a pre-Freudian concept of the unconscious, particularly during the Romantic era.

[35] Jules Héricourt, "La Graphologie," *Revue philosophique de la France et et de l'étranger* 20 (November 1885), 502: "il n'y a nul doute que la plupart des caractères particuliers d'un individu ne viennent se peindre dans le nombre, l'ampleur, la vivacité de ses mouvements."

[36] Jules Crepieux-Jamin, *Handwriting and Expression* (1888), trans. and ed. John Holt Schooling, from the 3rd French ed. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1892), 30. Two other important books on the subject published around this time are Cesare Lombroso, *Grafologia* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1895) and William T. Preyer, *Zur Psychologie des Schreibens* (Hamburg: L. Voss, 1895). Preyer, a physiologist, was better known for his trailblazing volume, *Die Seele des Kindes, Beobachtungen über die geistige Entwicklung des Menschen in den ersten Lebensjahren* (1882), published in English as *The Mind of the Child, Observations Concerning the Mental Development of the Human Being in the First Years of Life*, trans. H. W. Brown (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890).

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Modes and Principles, including "The Nervous Hand" [Fig. 78].[37] W. L. Courtney, writing in 1890 in response to the question, "Can There Be a Science of Character?," found phrenology to be a likely answer in the affirmative.[38] On the less scientific side, an author in *The Atlantic Monthly*'s March 1892 issue reprised Lavater to support the contention that Raphael's Madonnas "one and all bear the closest resemblance to Raphael Sanzio," taking Lady Eastlake's ideas about that painter's balance of grace and masculinity to a physiognomic extreme.[39]

Courtney made a significant observation about these fields of inquiry by stating, "Closely connected with these attempts to distinguish character is the effort to distinguish between the mental characteristics of the two sexes."[40] In the 1880s and early 1890s, however, this effort served not so much to approach the distinctions between men and women afresh but rather to reassert traditional divisions. In an 1892 *Woman's Herald* article discussing "The Hand, an Index to Character," the author claimed:

> I do believe that women in general feel a greater interest in the study of human nature, as such, than men feel. . . . Around [woman] gathered the first home, and the first home gave her the first opportunity of watching from the dawn of infancy onward a constant display of character. And down to the present date, it is the mother who first notes the play of inherited tendencies, and who, by a chain of deductions, predicts more or less correctly what the future man will be. If she be a phrenologist, she reads her child's head; if a physiognomist it is his little face she scans; and if she believe in palmistry, or rather that character is shown on the hand, she waits till the little digits

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[37] Frank Baker, M. D., "Anthropological Notes on the Human Hand," *American Anthropologist* 1 (January 1888), 69.
[38] W. L. Courtney, "Can There Be a Science of Character?," reprinted from *National Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 70 (19 April 1890), 169.
[39] "The Contributors' Club," *Atlantic Monthly* 69 (March 1892), 432.
[40] Courtney, "Can There Be a Science of Character?," 168.

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> take a somewhat definite form, and then begins to mark its shape, its size, and the relation of its parts to the whole.[41]

The female phrenologist-physiognomist-palm reader is not a "scientific mother," despite the updating of this well-worn argument with a reference to "inherited tendencies." Rather, she is a modern primitive who remains absorbed in the "dawn of infancy" as she has been since the dawn of time.

To many of Cassatt's critics, then, her ability to observe the nuances of infantile gesture and expressions of maternal love was natural and scientifically verifiable, but not necessarily scientifically oriented. Yet, that she could record her observations with the precision and incisiveness most commonly associated with the aims of positivism and science was remarked upon by critics, some of whom believed this capacity to be more commonly masculine. Raoul Sertat of *Le Voltaire* found in her work an acceptable and appealing balance between gendered qualities, writing, "Mlle Mary Cassatt, through some unforgettable *intimacies* in drypoint, gives to feminine and even masculine artists a perfect example of an art that is sweet and strong, simple and penetrating."[42] Jules Antoine, however, disclosed unease in an *Art et critique* review:

> Mlle Cassatt shows a series of very remarkable drypoints. Women artists are numerous in our era, but few of them are as worthy as Mlle Cassatt. Without bias, one is obligated to state that feminine works, in general, have an artificial allure showing their authors to be incapable of making an idea profound or feeling a form; one divines in them a horror of truth, and a search for the pretty, which are at the heart of all feminine temperaments. In Mlle Cassatt there is nothing of all this; she possesses a style of drawing that is precise and supple, and a frankness of execution

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[41] J. M. D., "The Hand, an Index to Character," *Woman's Herald* 7 (10 December 1892), 10.
[42] Sertat, "Les Peintres-Graveurs," n.p.

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worthy of a man, and a man of great talent. The drypoints and the canvas on exhibition here . . . would give honor even to an esteemed artist.[43]

Antoine's praise for Cassatt is notably double-edged: she has nearly become an "esteemed artist" by working in a masculine manner, but the fact of her gender will always prevent her from reaching the pinnacle of artistic achievement.

Antoine's commentary also raises another important matter, regarding not only what the critics saw in these pictures, but what they simultaneously chose not to see. Antoine's described Cassatt's drypoint series as comprising "a suite of studies of young women carrying a child," but this is inaccurate; in reality, only half of the 12 images depict mothers and children. The other half included five images of solitary women, seated in evening dress or hat and coat, adjusting a bonnet, playing the mandolin, and holding a parrot.[44] The remaining drypoint, "a pretty little scene of girls reading" [Fig. 84], was mentioned only by Bénédite, the sole critic to adequately account for the full range of subjects on view. Of all the known reviews of the 1890 exhibition of the Peintres-Graveurs, not one specifically mentioned an image of a solitary adult woman.

It also worth considering that while a number of critics remarked upon the precise depiction of gestures and lively expression in the drypoints, many of the figures are better described as stiff or static and the faces impassive. It may be that critics equated the sense of life created by the combination of taut linearity and soft hatching in Cassatt's drawing with an expressiveness more commonly conveyed through depicted gesture; it may also be

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[43] Jules Antoine, "Beaux Arts, Galerie Durand-Ruel.—Deuxième exposition des peintres-graveurs," *Art et critique* 2 (15 March 1890), 172: "Mlle Cassatt expose un série d'eaux-fortes très remarquables. Les femmes-artists sont nombreuses à notre époque, mais peu d'entre elles valent Mlle Cassatt. Sans parti-pris, on est bien obligé de constater que les oeuvres féminines, en général, ont une allure superficielle montrant leurs auteurs incapables d'approfondir une idée, ou de sentir une forme; l'on y devine toujours l'horreur de la vérité, et la recherche du joli, qui sont le fond de tout tempérament féminin. Chez Mlle Cassatt rien de tout cela; elle possède un dessin précis et souple, et une franchise d'exécution digne d'un homme, et d'un homme de beaucoup de talent. Les eaux-fortes et la toile exposées ici . . . feraient honneur à plus d'un artiste coté."

[44] These five works are, respectively, Br.133, Br.131, Br.137, Br.130, and Br.138.

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that they preferred to understand the mother-child relation as one of inherently visible "maternal effusions," despite the lack of such obvious sentiment in Cassatt's pictures.

The visible signs of maternal love had been occasionally investigated during the second half of the nineteenth century, and usually in relation to Old Master depictions of the Madonna and Child. Charles Darwin dealt a blow to popular investment in the idea of obvious maternal sentiment when he described it as nearly invisible in his 1872 *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal*. The idea of the inherent visibility of maternal love would not die so easily, however, and a writer in *The Quarterly Review* protested that had Darwin "carefully studied the Madonnas of some of the great masters, he would have found abundant reasons for a different opinion."[45] This writer saw no need to distinguish between the Madonna's love for her divine Child and that of the mortal mother for hers, for the expression of maternal love in general

> is marked not only by absorbed devotion, but by infinite yearning and an almost divine compassion. It has, moreover, an element of latent sadness, of *attendrissement* inseparable, perhaps, from the depth and intensity of pure affection. The utter self-forgetfulness of the emotion, the complete outgoing of heart to the beloved object, subdues the harsher lines with which the violent and selfish passions—such as fear and jealously, hatred and revenge—furrow and sear the countenance. All hard lines and unlovely shadows melt away in the softened and radiant fulness [*sic*] of maternal fruition. From the object of devotion being neither superior in nature as in heavenly love, nor in position and power as in conjugal affection, but wholly dependent and usually infolded within the caressing arms, the eyes will naturally have a downward gaze, and the lids, from the constancy of habit, will be slightly drooped.[46]

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[45] "Darwin on Expression," reprinted from *Quarterly Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 118 (5 July 1873), 20.

[46] Ibid., 20-1.

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This author also claimed that the signs of "strong maternal yearning" are generally so evident in the eyes and mouth "that there are many celebrated pictures, where, apart from the presence of the Divine Child, or other accessories, the expression of the Madonnas would at once be recognized as that of maternal love."[47]

Edmond Duranty very briefly touched upon the expression of maternal love in his 1877 "Promenades au Louvre." Given his preference for a Northern-identified realism, it is not surprising that he mocked the Italian masters for painting Virgins who, in "displaying the *Santo Bambino* for the piety of the faithful," are "too often so preoccupied with executing *tours de force* with the infant Jesus that they support him by a single foot."[48] As an exception he offered a nursing Madonna, a "young mother" by Antonio Solario "who carefully, naturally, gives her breast to the child."[49] He saved for his highest praise a work attributed at the time to Rembrandt [Fig. 85], which he applauded for its "feeling of maternal tenderness, simple and true," despite its title, *Venus et Amor*, explaining, "It has a mother who caresses the cheek of her child. None of the Italians ever thought of this ordinary characteristic."[50]

In the 1880s, sociologist Jean-Marie Guyau approached the question "how does the child learn to love?" with a combination of scientific observation and poetic metaphysics regarding the expression of maternal emotion.[51] "Can we say that in the child love is natural and innate, and not a work of education?," he asked, positing that the first movements "express nothing but the *ego*."[52] But soon, "seeing around it the tenderest love manifested by the most palpable signs, feeling or believing itself to be loved, the child

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[47] Ibid., 21.

[48] Duranty, "Promenades au Louvre": "d'exposer le *Santo Bambino* à la piété des fidèles" (286); "trop souvent préoccupées de faire exécuter des tours de force à l'enfant Jésus, qu'elles portent par un seul pied" (287).

[49] Ibid., 286: "jeune mère de Solari [*sic*] qui donne avec soin, avec naturel, le sein à son enfant."

[50] Ibid., 287: "tendresse maternelle simple et vraie. Il a une mère qui caresse la joue de son enfant. Aucun des Italiens n'a songé à ce trait vulgaire."

[51] Jean-Marie Guyau, *Education and Heredity, A Study in Sociology* (1889; published posthumously), 2nd ed., trans. W. J. Greenstreet (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1891), 86.

[52] Ibid.

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at length wishes in some measure to deserve this love . . . Through seeing others smile, the child smiles."[53] The process by which this happens, however natural and spontaneous it appears, is the result of perseverance and will, and Guyau declared, "Follow with the eye the moral life of the child reflected on its face: you will see the preliminary sketch filled in with countless shades and colours; but how slowly! No painting of Raphael ever cost so much effort."[54]

At the same time, according to Guyau, the expression of maternal love, no matter how subtle, was indisputably perceptible but also uncannily beyond visibility:

> the young child, when incapable of noticing the care lavished upon it, is nevertheless conscious of the mother's love by the sudden gentleness of her glance, by her caressing gestures, by the accent of her voice as she seems to linger over the lullaby. That is the tenderness of the mother made visible to the eyes and to the heart; and therefore it is the poetry of maternal love. The distinctive characteristic of poetry is that it surges up into the heart and overflows just as love itself; it outstrips the visible form in which it is manifested, and beyond this it presents something of the infinite.[55]

For all his poeticizing, Guyau was unusual in the serious nineteenth-century scholarly community for his interest in the mother and for his belief, *contra* the more prevalent Neo-Kantian aestheticians, that there was a place for all the senses in the arts.[56] (The general disinterest in the maternal body and the repudiation of all but the most disembodied senses are by no means unrelated.)

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[53] Ibid., 86-7.
[54] Ibid., 87.
[55] Ibid., 208.
[56] Jennifer L. Shaw, in *Dream States, Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), provides an interesting discussion of Guyau's republican social philosophy, which was characterized by "a version of aesthetics that recognized pleasure and desire as integral to the experience of art," in contrast to the Neo-Kantians. See pp. 62-4, 135-6, 158-9. For a general study of Guyau's body of work, see F. J. W. Harding, *Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-1888), Aesthetician and Sociologist* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1973).

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As I have discussed in earlier chapters, most students of infant development were less interested in observing the subtleties of mother/child interaction, preferring to prescribe behavior for the mother and to consider the child as if his/her growth and progress occurred without benefit of (female) caretakers. This is evident in studies of early childhood movements, particularly reflex actions, which took on new importance in the 1880s in relation to psychology as well as physiology. Defined by the renowned physiologist Dr. William B. Carpenter as the "*primarily* automatic or *instinctive* movements, which are performed by every Human being, and are necessary to the maintenance of his Organic functions," reflex actions are fundamentally stimulated by contact: "the first movement of Inspiration in the new-born infant is excited by the contact of cold air with its skin, more particularly with that of the face; the first act of suction by the contact of the nipple with its lips."[57]

By the 1890s, reflex or automatic behavior had become an important focus of study for those wishing to ascertain the boundaries between man and animal, the learned and the innate, the conscious and the unconscious. James Mark Baldwin, for instance, in his highly influential 1895 volume, *Mental Development in the Child and the Race, Methods and Processes*, was especially interested in the child's hand gestures, noting that, "The facts that the most motile organs have acutest sensibility, notably the hand and fingers; that certain marked types of action, such as imitation, arise early in connection with the hand; that the central organic preparation for volition is secured first in the arrangements for hand movements,—all these facts indicate that the hand movements are the best index of general and special sensibility in the infant."[58]

Cassatt's works of 1890, particularly the most active images, seen in the drypoints *The Stocking* and *Nursing* [Figs. 82-83] and in pastels of the same subjects, *The Stocking*

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[57] Carpenter, "What is Common Sense?," 404.

[58] James Mark Baldwin, *Mental Development in the Child and the Race, Methods and Processes* (1895), 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1906), 41-2.

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[Fig. 86] and *Maternité* [Fig. 87], also bring to mind questions of reflexive and self-reflexive gestures as they look back to Degas's controversial 1886 *Suite de nuds [*sic*] de femmes se baignant, se lavant, se séchant, s'essuyant, se peignant ou se faisant peigner* [Figs. 77, 88] and forward to Cassatt's 1891 series of color prints. With the 1890 drypoints, she exhibited works explicitly belonging to a "series" for the first time (even if critics only chose to see half of the series' components in their reviews), depicting movements that allude to but do not completely recapitulate the assortment of self-reflexive gestures of the toilette and tactility on display in the group of pastels exhibited by Degas in 1886. If the gestures depicted in Degas's series of nudes are best described as those of "bodies turned insistently toward and in on themselves," in negation of both the positivist dimension of Impressionist gesture and the fetishization of the female body,[59] in 1890–91 Cassatt explored the actions of mothers or nurses absorbed by children as they wash, dress, feed, or simply embrace them, in addition to the reflexive gestures of infants before they have fully mastered the self-reflexive tasks that will allow them to turn away from the maternal body and toward the social world. The gesture of the child reaching out shown in the pastel and etched versions of *The Stocking*, or in *Mathilde Holding a Baby Who Reaches to Right* [Fig. 68], shows Cassatt to have been interested in the same types of developmental movements that would be studied by scientists such as Baldwin.

The sucking motion of the breastfeeding child was also recognized as one of the very first reflex actions, and Cassatt treated the theme at this time in depictions including *Nursing* and *Maternité*. While images of nursing were popular in the visual arts throughout the nineteenth century, I can think of no pictures that concentrate attention on the physical dimension of this subject to the same degree as Cassatt's, and her *Maternité* in particular.[60] Cassatt's nursing pictures are extraordinary representations of the sensuous

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[59] Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 184.

[60] A survey of breastfeeding images in French art alone would be too lengthy to attempt here, but a few words on the topic are in order. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the nursing subject had most often appeared in either an allegorical form (for instance, in Honoré Daumier's representations of *The Republic*,

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relation of the child to the maternal body, these infants "who suck wholeheartedly in delicious fashion," in Bénédite's words. (The adjective "delicious" recurs a number of times in relation to Cassatt's drypoints of 1889–90, raising questions of oral gratification fantasies on the part of her critics.[61]) The connection between mother (or nurse) and child forms a circuit, traced in points of contact: hand to back, hand to hand, hand to foot, mouth and hand to breast. Chains of gesture encircle the child, recreating a uterine space outside the mother's body. But while the communion between these two figures is presented as intensely intimate in both *Nursing* and *Maternité*, the spectator's relation to the figure varies between the drypoint and pastel.

In the *Nursing* drypoint, as with the other prints in the series, the bodies may be closely interconnected but the spectator is kept at a distance. The absence of bodily mass lessens the figures' sense of presence, not to each other, but to us. Cassatt's line is almost clinical or journalistic, with the stark contrast of black on white echoing the dispassionate appearance of ink on paper associated with writing. In *Nursing*, the viewer is further prevented from entering into the scene by the sharp edge of a table that points awkwardly toward the picture plane. The *Maternité* pastel, in contrast, proffers what could easily be experienced as an uncomfortable closeness to the viewer. The meeting of mouth and breast is placed almost centrally in a half-length composition that overflows the boundaries

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Bouguereau's imagery of *L'Age d'Or* and figures of *Charity*, or in numerous mural projects by Puvis de Chavannes) or in genre pictures of the agrarian life (as in many harvest scenes by Jules Breton and Léon-Auguste Lhermitte). A number of artists associated with the Impressionists also created nursing scenes, including Degas [see Fig. 54], Adolphe-Félix Cals, Armand Guillaumin, Pissarro, and Paul Gauguin, but none of their treatments of the subject exhibits the same extreme foregrounding of the physical act as seen in Cassatt's work. The closest analogues to her imagery might be found in a group of sculptures depicting the full body of the nursing mother with child created by Jules Dalou in the 1870s and '80s, which also focus on the embodiedness of the figures. However, their three-dimensionality, smooth surfaces, and lack of color create an experience in the viewer differing from that of Cassatt's pastels. The subject would also be taken up by the Symbolists on occasion, and by Maurice Denis in particular, who played upon its associations with religious imagery of the Virgin nursing the Christ child. (This information is derived from a forthcoming study of images of breastfeeding being prepared with Patricia Ivinski.)

[61] See, for example, de Lostalot, "Expositions Diverses, Peintres-Graveurs," 35; as well as Philippe Burty, "L'Exposition De Peintres-Graveurs," *Le Journal des arts* 12 (7 March 1890), 3: "Mlle Mary Cassatt gathered some etching-aquatints and drypoints after nature, true and delicious. . . ." ("Mlle Mary Cassatt a réuni des eaux-fortes et des aqua-tintes, et des pointes-sèches d'après la nature, vraies et délicieuses. . . .")

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of the support. Instead of black-on-white, the pastel's palette favors rosy, red-blooded tones surrounding an area of milky white. Although the woman's torso is barely indicated with loose burgundy pastel strokes representing her robe, the carefully finished skin and an abundance of fleshy cheeks, chins, and breast, as well as plump arms and legs and an enormous right hand combine to present a convincing embodiedness, made all the more dramatic by the child's sharp gaze extending the connection directly to the viewer at a moment when we might expect him/her to be entirely absorbed in the maternal presence. We are not called upon here to adore the Christ child, as in old master depictions of the Virgin feeding her Infant; instead, we are called upon to witness or even confront a profoundly private moment—as the child confronts and witnesses us, almost challenging us with an intimacy that we cannot share.

In *Maternité* Cassatt pushed her realism to its limit, as had Degas in his 1886 *Suite de nus*, not by turning her figures in upon themselves like Degas's bathers and allowing the spectator to see them without being seen, but by turning this most unexpected of confrontational figures—an infant in full suck—toward the viewer.[62] In this image, the woman's breast is radically desexualized without being sacralized, at the same time that the sensuous bond between mother and child is dramatically emphasized. The radicality of Cassatt's image becomes clear upon comparing her picture to a similarly posed depiction of breastfeeding in an 1886 painting by Renoir, also titled *Maternité* [Fig. 89]. Renoir's picture shows him to have already moved away from the strict naturalism of Impressionism and into the monumental aspects of Symbolism. While the landscape

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[62] That the public display of breastfeeding—whether occuring in person or in imagery—continues to be at issue in the twenty-first century is evident in numerous recent controversies. See, for example, "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore," in the Baltimore *City Paper* (21 March 2001), 13, which reported on the defeat of Maryland legislation that would have barred any attempt to "restrict or limit the right of a mother to breastfeed her child" in public; or Winnie Hu, "Removal of Painting Irks Nursing Mothers," *New York Times* (28 February 2002), B6, which relates how a painting featuring an image of breastfeeding was removed from an exhibition at the airport in Newburgh, New York, after complaints that it was "making some passengers uncomfortable." For a broader consideration of these sorts of issues, see Linda M. Blum, *At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

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setting and the use of his own family members as models continue in the tradition of Impressionism's *plein-air* informality, the arrangement of the figures recalls old master pyramidal compositions, and the hats on both figures echo haloes. But against this sacred idealization, the child who grasps his foot and lifts his leg to reveal an immense thigh and decidedly male genitals is almost too cute. While this pose looks back to the tradition of drawing attention to the genitals in Madonna and Child paintings in order to stress the "sexuality of Christ" and his humanity, it lacks solemnity here. Futhermore, the inclusion of the cat cleaning itself at lower right implies an analogy between its animal activities and those of child and mother, this woman who gazes out of the canvas with an inviting expression and offers her breast not only to the child but also to the spectator.

Even in her earliest Impressionist works, Cassatt experimented with aesthetic trends that would be fully developed by the Symbolists, such as a concern for decorative effects which would become widely popular by the late 1880s. The artist's drypoints and pastels of 1888–90, however, show her to have been working between an extreme abstraction and an exqually extreme realism at the moment just before she would turn to the more symbolic languages of *fin-de-siècle* anti-naturalism. Like Renoir, she would now create a group of images mediating between Impressionism's "spontaneity" and the hierarchizing tendencies of traditional religious imagery. But unlike Renoir, one of the most masculinist of painters, and a majority of the Symbolists, in her imagery Cassatt would continue to resist the stereotyping messages so often embedded in pictures of the era.

* * *

A few months before Cassatt first exhibited her greatest achievement as a graphic artist, the series of ten color prints done "in imitation of the Japanese," in addition to the paintings and pastels identified by Lecomte as "'Modern 'Holy Families,'" the first article dedicated solely to her oeuvre prepared a position for her work between the Impressionist realism of the recent past and the Symbolism that had since come to the fore. Yveling

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Rambaud's "Miss Cassatt" appeared in the first issue of *L'Art dans les deux mondes*, an illustrated journal published by Durand-Ruel. Her 1890 drypoint *The Map* [Fig. 84] was reproduced on its first page.[63]

Rambaud, who also served as the journal's editor, opened his essay with a negative declaration, which he turned to Cassatt's favor:

> Women who paint sincerely are rare.
>
> In spite of their studies, in spite of their real intentions to paint truthfully, it seems that they involuntarily cede to an imperious need for convention that is like a fatal consequence of their temperament, their education, their role in society.
>
> Thus, we are happy to salute, in the first issue of a journal consecrated to Art, the vigorous personality of Miss Mary Cassatt.[64]

Returning to the question of sincerity, Rambaud explained, in three fascinating paragraphs that mark a shift from Cassatt's placement within the "school of the Real" into the general atmosphere of Symbolism:

> This sincerity is such that it dominates her character, and has become for her the occasion for a gift of second sight, of an altogether singular, unconscious impression. In fact, and we hope she will pardon us for this detail, which will cause the reader to know about a corner of her private life, Miss Cassatt is devoted to Art as other women are to religion. Miss Cassatt is not married.
>
> Now, it is impossible for those who follow her work closely, who have admired its simple and so natural graces and the marvelous children to whom she gives life with her pencil or burin, not to recognize the feeling of maternal charity, the well-

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[63] Rambaud, "Miss Cassatt," 1, 7.

[64] Ibid., 7:

Les femmes qui font de la peinture sincère sont rares.

Malgré leurs études, malgré leur intention réele de peindre vrai, il semble qu'involontairement elles cèdent à un besoin impérieux de convention qui sertait comme une conséquence fatale de leur tempérament, de leur éducation, du rôle qu'elles ont dans la société.

Aussi sommes-nous heureux de saluer, dans ce premier numéro d'un journal consacré à l'Art, la personnalité vigoureuse de miss Mary Cassatt.

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proven emotion that seems the monopoly of motherhood in the psychological sense of the word.

The mothers and children of Miss Cassatt are the result of this kind of double consciousness so often observed by those who occupy themselves with psychical studies.[65]

These paragraphs are worth examining in closer detail for a number of points they raise relating to the Cassatt's growing involvement with principles of *décoration*, the emergence of her "Modern Madonna" imagery, and the reshaping of her reputation. First, the sincerity that is initially aligned with a masculine concern for truth becomes amplified, going beyond the masculine and positivistic depiction of nature into a traditionally feminized realm of almost supernatural or uncanny powers of observation: "*double vue*" or "second sight." Likewise, her impression is "unconscious" [*ignorée*], mysteriously appearing out of the unknown.

Then, to create a sense of intimacy with the reader parallel to the *intimités* portrayed in Cassatt's work, Rambaud promises to let the reader know [*connaître*] something else, a detail about "a corner of her private life": he reveals that the artist "is devoted [*s'est vouée*] to Art as other women are to religion" and is unmarried. In the next sentence, he describes "the marvelous children to whom she gives life with her pencil or burin" with "a feeling of maternal charity," evoking an image of this unmarried female artist as a sort of artistic nun, or better yet, a Virgin Mary-like figure, because she is able

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[65] Ibid.:

Cette sincérité est tellement la dominante de son caractère, qu'elle est devenue pour elle l'occasion d'un don de double vue, d'impression ignorée tout à fait singulière. En effet, et qu'elle nous pardonne ce détail qui amène le lecteur à connaître un coin de sa vie privée, miss Cassatt s'est vouée à l'Art comme d'autres femmes à la religion. Miss Cassatt ne s'est pas mariée.

Or, il est impossible à ceux qui suivent de près son oeuvre, qui ont admiré dans leurs grâces si simples, si naturelles, les merveilleux enfants auxquels son pinceau ou son burin ont donné le jour, de ne pas reconnaître le sentiment de charité maternelle, l'émotion éprouvée qui semble le monopole de la maternité dans le sens psychologique du mot.

Les mères et les enfants de miss Cassatt sont la résultante de ce genre de dédoublement si souvent observé par ceux qui s'occupent des études psychiques.

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to (pro)create without the taint of sexual knowledge. At the same time, by describing her as devoted to the religion of "Art," Rambaud locates a place for Cassatt within a Symbolist movement that saw certain artists claim for themselves the role of "priest-king" (Sâr Joseph Péladan) or "prophets" (the Nabis) of art.

Rambaud's discourse also functions to explain Cassatt as a marginal figure—an unmarried woman artist—to a culture with deep misgivings about the *vieille fille* ("old maid"). Henri Thulié, discussing "sanctified sterility" and the reasons why women become nuns in his 1885 *La Femme, Essai de sociologie physiologique*, employed language quite similar to Rambaud's with regard to sincerity and rarity. Adding a third term of "ugliness"—a term that will be invoked increasingly with regard to Cassatt's work—Thulié wrote, "Certain ugly women are conscious of their ugliness; they have character and spirit because this sincerity regarding themselves is something rare, both in men and women."[66] Most of these women would eventually enter the convent, said Thulié, a situation he lamented, for "they would have made such tender mothers!" due to the heightened sensitivity they had developed as a result of their sincerity.[67] Rambaud's description of Cassatt as "devoted to Art" thus normalizes her to some extent by associating her with the nun, an admired figure in a culture that highly disapproved of women who rejected maternity.

Rambaud's language also resonates with terms closely connected to recent trends in psychology and "psychical studies," both of which he specifically cited. The conjunction of "*double vue*" ["second sight"] and "*dédoublement*" ["double consciousness"] points to the intersection at this moment of studies of paranormal and abnormal activities. While *dédoublement* is most commonly translated in current

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[66] Dr. H[enri] Thulié, *La Femme, Essai de sociologie physiologique* (Paris: Adrien Delahaye et Émile Lecrosnier, 1885), 114: "Certaines femmes laides ont conscience de leur laideur; elles ont du caractère et de l'esprit, car cette sincerité vis-à-vis de soi-même est chose rare, aussi bien d'ailleurs chez les hommes que chez les femmes."

[67] Ibid., 115: "elles eussent été de si tendres mères!"

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dictionaries as "split personality" (now more properly called "multiple personality disorder"), the word as used in the late nineteenth-century is better rendered as "double consciousness," referring not only to the possibility that a person could develop a second personality unknown to the "real" personality, but also the growing scientific belief that every person possesses two levels of personality, one conscious and the other unconscious.[68] The term was coined by Eugène Azam in his 1877 book, *Amnésie périodique, ou Dédoublement de la personnalité*, and by the late 1880s the phenomenon of double consciousness—the extreme form of which, like hysteria in general, was believed to be an overwhelmingly female malady—had become a hot topic. Azam revisited the subject in his 1887 *Hypnotisme, double conscience et altérations de la personnalité*, and in 1889 Pierre Janet, a student of Charcot, published *L'Automatisme psychologique*, a treatment of the theoretical basis of hypnosis and dissociation that became a founding text in the modern field of psychiatry.[69] While these studies focused on the manifestations of *dédoublement* in hysterical women, they were more generally seen as providing definitive scientific proof of the existence of the unconscious, a fact declared by Jules Héricourt in the *Revue scientifique* in 1889.[70]

Janet's 1889 book was reviewed in the English language press by two prominent figures who were also deeply involved in parapsychology, both of whom were admired by Cassatt: the British classicist Frederic W. H. Myers, and the American psychologist and

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[68] My understanding of this issue has been greatly informed by Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious, The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970). Examples of literature in English c. 1890 discussing these questions include S. Weir Mitchell's medical text, *Mary Reynolds: A Case of Double Consciousness* (1888), reprinted from the *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Wm. J. Dornan, Printer, 1889); and, in the popular press, H. C. Wood's "A Study of Consciousness," *Century Magazine* 40 (May 1890), 72-6, which outlined a number of what Woods called "cases of double consciousness." The findings of the French psychologist Alfred Binet were also published in the U.S. as *On Double Consciousness, Experimental Psychological Studies* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1890).

[69] Ellenberger, in *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, assigns Janet a position of great importance in the founding of modern psychiatry, dedicating an entire chapter to his life and work.

[70] Jules Héricourt, "L'Activité inconsciente de l'esprit," *Revue scientifique* 26 (1889), 257-68.

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philosopher William James.[71] Among their interests was automatic writing, on which they published at this time,[72] and James later studied automatic drawing. (Cassatt would recommend an "automatic writing researcher" to a friend in 1903, when they were hoping to contact deceased relatives.)[73]

By the mid-1880s, phenomena such as automatic or reflexive actions were being studied from numerous angles, whether as evidence of the existence of subconscious facets of the personality, the transmission of information from an otherworldly dimension, or, from an evolutionary perspective, inherited knowledge (the "collective unconscious"). Alfred Binet, for example, when investigating *automatisme* in children in 1889, noted how easily they could be distracted, while adults could hold two or more ideas in the mind at once. This led him to posit that the passage to adulthood entails integrating various levels of the personality.[74] The choice of Cassatt's *Map* to illustrate Rambaud's article might thus be viewed as speaking to this more "normal" instance of doubling: the two girls of quite similar appearance, their bodies and heads pressed close together, could be seen as

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[71] See Myers, "Janet's Psychical Automatism," 341-3; and William James, "The Hidden Self," *Scribner's Magazine* 7 (March 1890), 361-73. Both Myers and James were involved in the founding of the Societies for Psychical Research, Myers with the British version in 1882, and James with its American counterpart in 1885.

Cassatt discussed her interest in Myers's *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903) in a letter to Theodate Pope, Mesnil-Beaufresne, November 30 [1903], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 290, and in another letter to Pope, October 12 [1910], 300, she called the death of James "a national loss," wishing she could send Mrs. James a note of condolence, but she felt it was inappropriate as they had met only once.

[72] Frederic W. H. Myers, "Automatic Writing," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 3 (1885), 1-63; 4 (1886-7), 209-61; and William James, "Automatic Writing," *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 1 (1885-9), 548-64.

[73] Cassatt to Theodate Pope, Mesnil-Beaufresne, November 30 [1903], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 290. Gertrude Stein is another figure to express interest in automatic writing at this time. While still a medical student, she collaborated with Leon M. Solomons on an article titled "Normal Motor Automatism," *Psychological Review* 3 (September 1896), 492-512, in which they sought through automatic writing to "determine the limits of normal automatism, and, if possible, show them to be really equal to the explanation of the second personality; and incidentally to study as carefully as possible the process by which a reaction becomes automatic" (493).

[74] Alfred Binet, "Recherches sur les movements chez quelques jeunes enfants," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 29 (March 1890), 303-5.

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representing the two personalities of one girl before she had consolidated them in reaching maturity, or perhaps as performing a "reading" or practicing automatic writing.

The degree to which writing and artmaking relied upon the unconscious and automatic gesture—a concept we have already encountered in Morellian connoisseurship—also began to interest a wide range of theorists at this time. Jean-Marie Guyau, in *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, claimed that artists functioned under a *dédoublement de la personnalité* that allowed them to imaginatively inhabit the minds of their subjects. This ability was essential to the social element of art, which he believed was its most significant aspect, but at the same time he worried that "Genius, by force of making a man leave himself in order to enter into another, can make the artist lose himself one day, on the way effacing the distinctive mark of his self, troubling the balance that constitutes his healthy personality. Genius is a soul haunted, as with some old houses, by phantoms that have been caged up for too long."[75] Guyau's comments not only bring to mind Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-paper," who struggles through her creeping and writing to rediscover and maintain the "distinctive mark" of her self, but also Albert Wolff's response to Cassatt's 1881 pictures, in which he described her as having a sort of alternate consciousness that emerged only to transform her positivistic-oriented works into something "deformed and monstrous" by means of non-local color and poor drawing. At the same time, Guyau suggests that the artist doubles him- or herself in the process of artmaking, raising the issue of the uncanny double, the subject of numerous nineteenth-century stories by authors ranging from Poe to

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[75] Jean-Marie Guyau, *L'Art au point de vue sociologique* (1889; published posthumously), 11th ed. (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1920), 30: "Le génie, à force de faire sortir l'homme de lui-même pour le faire entrer dans autrui, peut faire que l'artiste se perde un jour lui-même, voie s'effacer la marque distinctive de son moi, se troubler l'equilibre qui constituait sa personnalité saine. Il est des âmes hantées, comme les vieilles maisons, par les fantômes qu'elles ont trop longtemps abrités." Ellenberger cites Guyau as one of the most important influences on Janet and young intellectuals of his generation; *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 402.

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Dostoevski to E. T. A. Hoffman (whose "The Sandman" inspired Freud's 1919 essay on "The 'Uncanny'").

Some doctors at this moment also gave an answer to a question formulated by Binet—"how and why, in hysterical patients, a division of consciousness takes place"[76]—involving issues of female sexuality and procreation. One answer, given by the American gynecologist A. F. A. King in 1891, is that each person is governed by two physiological "departments," those of "reproduction" and "self-preservation."[77] If a woman fails to reproduce, by circumstance or choice, the unsatisfied "department of reproduction" will precipitate a hysterical crisis that manifests itself in the appearance of a second personality. Though King's theories were not published until the year after Rambaud's article on Cassatt (in an American medical journal), ideas about the sexual psychogenesis of hysteria were beginning to be explored in the late 1880s, particularly after the 1886 appearance of Richard Krafft-Ebing's widely influential *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In addition, motherhood was popularly understood as having a consolidating effect on the female personality. For instance, Mathilda Betham-Edwards, discussing Alphonse Daudet's 1888 novel *L'Immortel: moeurs parisiennes*, described one character as typifying the average Frenchwoman, who "makes it her boast that as soon as a child is born to her, the wife is merged in the mother, and she ceases to become *épouse*, and is only *mère*."[78]

Rambaud's characterization of Cassatt's images of mothers and children as resulting from the "kind of double consciousness so often observed by those who occupy themselves with psychical studies" does then appear to imply that the artist herself suffers from a *dédoublement* that is perhaps the product of her "sanctified sterility." (Max

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[76] Binet, *On Double Consciousness*, quoted in Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 143-4.
[77] A. F. A. King, "Hysteria," *American Journal of Obstetrics* 24 (May 1891), 513-32; quoted in Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 144.
[78] Betham-Edwards, "French and English," 694. That Daudet (a close friend of Charcot) was well-known to Rambaud is almost certain, for the novelist is listed as a "principal collaborator" on the masthead of the issue of *L'Art dans les deux mondes* in which the article on Cassatt appeared.

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Nordau, in *Degeneration*, applied a related though more deprecating argument to the pictures of Kate Greenaway, stating that her "love of children, diverted from its natural outlet, has sought gratification in the most affected style of drawing, wherein the sacredness of childhood is profaned under absurd disguises.")[79] In Rambaud's view, Cassatt, though not a mother herself, is able to create a mothering self in her works through her *double vue* and her *dédoublement*, in satisfaction of the reproductive instinct.

The association of artists and pathologized mental states was by no means completely pejorative at this time: many Symbolists embraced the idea of the artist's "divine" or even "degenerative madness" as a means of rejecting bourgeois norms and approaching the sublimity of genius. Nonetheless, this same creative pathology could just as easily be employed to further marginalize the female artist.[80] Moreover, like Guyau's artist of double consciousness, who risks, for example, believing him- or herself an evil character when depicting an evil character, Cassatt also faced a danger. In identifying too closely with the "feeling of maternal charity" that is synonymous with what the 1873 *Quarterly Review* writer described as the mother's "utter self-forgetfulness"—the complete denial of self expected of women caring for children—Cassatt hazarded self-erasure. However, through her "vigorous personality," the life-giving power that proceeded from her line-making ability ("the marvelous children to whom she gives life with pencil or burin"), and her "writing" she was enabled to retain her "self" while setting herself apart from insincere women artists.

Rambaud's description of Cassatt and her work, then, reconfigured her Impressionist realism within the concurrent intersection of psychology and parapsychology. In his assessment she brought together two types of mind—the "scientific-academic mind" associated with the French-identified "study of character" and

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[79] Nordau, *Degeneration*, 8.

[80] On this subject, see Patricia Mathews, *Creative Discontent*, especially chapters 3 and 4, "The Ecstasy and the Agony: Creative Genius and Madness" and "The Gender of Creativity: Women, Pathology, and Camille Claudel."

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the "feminine-mystical mind" open to belief in paranormal activity—that William James, in his review of Janet's *L'Automatisme psychologique*, claimed could meet only in the rarest of circumstances.[81] Her incisive observational and drawing skills could thus be valued as "modern" without being too closely aligned with the scientific positivism that Lewis Morris feared would "leave no room for mystery or speculation" and "dry up many springs of poetic thought."[82] Cassatt, herself a Virgin-like figure "devoted to Art as other women are to religion," could combine her naturalistic skills with an uncanny ability to channel "the feeling of maternal charity" as if she were a spiritualist or medium, to fulfill Morris's call for a "Modern Madonna."

* * *

In April of 1890, an exhibition of Japanese graphic arts opened at the École des beaux-arts, and Cassatt was enthralled. "You who want to make color prints you couldn't dream of anything more beautiful," she wrote to Berthe Morisot, "I dream of it and don't think of anything else but color on copper."[83] Cassatt proposed that they visit the show together, and urged again, "You *must* see the Japanese—*come as soon as you can.*"[84] In late January 1891, Cassatt's mother wrote, "Mary has been quite as busy as she was last winter—but this time it is with *colored* 'eaux-forts' & not with etching. It is very troublesome also expensive & after making the plates of which it takes 2 or 3 or 4 (according to the number of colors required), she has to help with the printing which is a slow proceeding and if left to a printer would not be at all what she wants."[85] In addition to the matters of expense and labor, there was also a question of reception. "I am not sure

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[81] James, "The Hidden Self," 362: "The scientific-academic mind and the feminine-mystical mind shy away from each other's facts, just as they fly from each other's temper and spirit. Facts are there only for those who have a mental affinity with them."

[82] Morris, "Some Thoughts on Modern Poetry," 643.

[83] Mary Cassatt to Berthe Morisot, Paris, [April 1890], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 214 (original in French, trans. Mathews).

[84] Ibid.

[85] Katherine Cassatt to Alexander Cassatt, Paris, January 23, 1891, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 217.

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that they will be so much liked by the public as the dry points," Mrs. Cassatt worried, "but that can not be known until the exhibition takes place in the spring."[86]

Cassatt intended that these works be shown in the third exhibition of the Peintres-Graveurs, which had now become an important outlet for her latest productions. However, a problem soon arose. In early 1891, the group modified its program, and, seeking to promote a more nationalist rather than strictly aesthetic agenda, had renamed itself the *Sociéte des peintres-graveurs français*.[87] Cassatt and Pissarro (a Danish national born in the West Indies) were now excluded from the group as foreigners. Durand-Ruel, who hosted the Peintres-Graveurs' shows, remedied the situation by agreeing to hold concurrent one-person exhibitions of works by the two artists. This served not only to draw increased attention to Cassatt and Pissarro but also got back at those who had rejected them, according to *Le Matin*: "Of the very first rank one must cite Mlle Mary Cassatt, who, because a foreigner has not been invited the regular way, has been given the honor of a reserved salon, which created, in parentheses, some jealousy among the members of the society themselves."[88] She showed two paintings, two pastels, and a series of ten color prints [Figs. 90-94, 96-98].[89] In general, the critics found little to link the the Japoniste prints with the "Modern 'Holy Family'" imagery of her paintings and pastels except the shared subject matter of domestic scenes. Many of the critics' reviews read like evaluations of two distinct Cassatt exhibitions, even though the same models were represented in all three mediums.

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[86] Ibid.

[87] For more on the group, see Lindsay Leard, "The Société des peintres-graveurs: Printmaking 1889–1897" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1992).

[88] "Les Peintres-Graveurs, La troisième exposition de la Société—Les principaux envois," *Le Matin* 8 (5 April 1891), 2: "Il faut citer en tout premier rang Mlle Mary Cassatt qui, ne pouvant être, comme étrangère, régulierement invitée, a eu les honneurs d'un salon réservé, ce qui lui a fait, entre parenthèse, quelques jaloux parmi les sociétaires eux-mêmes."

[89] I will illustrate eight of the ten prints in this chapter, omitting *Afternoon Tea Party* (Br.151) and *The Lamp* (Br.144).

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Félix Fénéon appreciated the paintings and pastels shown by Cassatt in 1891, but was more interested in the prints, which he introduced in terms of their decorative abstraction:

> Ten other numbers present familiar subjects, gracefully chosen, set on the page so that they are lost in vast empty spaces, in arrangements more ornamental than descriptive, and these compositions without shadows, modeling, or values are colored with bright tints that, taking refuge in their hearts, stagnate in their purity. In their figures and, more especially, in certain details—the hair of a woman, the role of a mirror, the decoration of a carpet—this series satisfies the program announced by the catalogue: to attempt an "imitation of the Japanese Print."[90]

Fénéon was somewhat unsettled regarding his opinion of these works. The subjects are familiar, yet they become lost in the large blank areas of the page. Their colors are bright, but the flat purity of the tones accomplishes nothing (color for color's sake?). And though certain details succeed in imitating the Japanese print, Fénéon worried that Cassatt's dependence upon these sources might compromise her personal vision.[91]

Auguste Dalligny, who had lauded the precise drawing and physiognomy of Cassatt's etchings from the previous year, also expressed concern about Cassatt's originality in his reaction to the 1891 color prints:

> They are attempts, these impressions, that produce, at first glance, an effect such as it is likely to kill all that surrounds them. However, the merit of this singular attempt, which consists of grafting Japonisme upon Britainisme, should not be exaggerated. To represent Europeans and children with slit eyes is not a personal art, it is not to create,

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[90] Félix Fénéon, "Cassatt, Pissarro," *Le Chat noir* (11 April 1891), 1728: "Dix autres numéros présentent, selon une mise en page qui les perd en de vastes espaces libres, des sujets familiers, d'une choix gracieux, d'une arrangement plus ornemental que descriptif, et ces compositions sans ombres ni modelés ni valeurs se colorient de claires teintes qui, réfugiées dans leurs coeurs, y stagnent pures. Par ses caractères et, plus spécialement, par certains détails, les cheveux d'une femme, le rôle d'un miroir, la décoration d'un tapis, cette série satisfait au programme qu'énonce le catalogue: essayer une 'imitation de l'Estampe japonaise.'"

[91] Ibid.

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it is to have reminiscences and to remember things seen elsewhere, that the imagination amalgamates."[92]

To Dalligny, Cassatt failed to assimilate her sources, abandoning the naturalism of her earlier work in favor of a pastiche that ineffectually combined British and Japanese aesthetics. Most critics reviewing the exhibition applauded Cassatt's use of Japanese sources, but not without reservations. In general, they found the prints treating non-maternal subjects to be more successful and original, a situation that may be explained in part by reviewing concurrent critical ideas about Japanese art.

Late nineteenth-century French views of Japanese art tended to center around a number of beliefs, the most significant being the idea that Japanese citizens on the whole were more closely connected to nature, physiologically suited to perceiving bright and unmodulated colors, and psychologically inclined to approach the world and its representations from the unreflective perspective of the child.[93] This is the opinion presented in one of the most oft-quoted essays on Japanese art from the period, Théodore de Wyzewa's 1890 "La Peinture Japonaise," from the *Revue des deux mondes*. De Wyzewa describes the Japanese in terms that recall concurrent psychological theories: "Having no clear consciousness of their own personality, they hardly know how to distinguish themselves from the surrounding world: they lose themselves in it with delight, charmed by the least detail which strikes their eyes."[94] This view is related to a broader

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[92] Aug[uste] Dalligny, "L'Exposition de peintres-graveurs français," *Le Journal des arts* 13 (16 April 1891): "Ce sont des essais, ces impressions, qui, à première vue, produisent un effet tel qu'il est de nature à tuer tout ce qui les entoure. Il ne faut pas cependant s'exagérer le mérite de cette singulière tentative, qui consiste à greffen du Japonisme sur du Britannisme. Représenter des Européens et des enfants avec des yeux bridés, ce n'est pas un art personnel, ce n'est pas créer, c'est avoir des réminiscences et se souvenir de choses vues ailleurs, que l'imagination amalgame."

[93] On this topic, see Elisa Evett, "The Late Nineteenth-Century European Critical Response to Japanese Art: Primitivist Leanings," *Art History* 6 (March 1893), 82-106.

[94] Théodore de Wyzewa, "La Peinture Japonaise," *Revue des deux mondes* 60 (1 July 1890), 115: "N'ayant pas une claire conscience de leur personnalité, ils ne savent pas se distinguer du monde environnant: ils s'y perdent délicieusement, charmés par les moindres détails qui frappent leurs yeux." An article summarizing and extensively quoting from de Wyzewa's essay, from which the translation of the passage above is taken, appeared as "The Secret of Japanese Art. A Child-Life Which Is All Play," in *The Review of Reviews* 2 (August 1890), 150.

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interest in the "primitive," and more specifically, to the growing field of child study as a means of simultaneously understanding the development of the child and the evolution of mankind.[95]

It should also be noted that many of these writings also function to align the Japanese child-mind with that of the Western woman. Roger-Marx, a critic who would eventually write favorably of Cassatt's works and even make her acquaintance, began a long sentence on the appeal of Japanese art in highly flattering terms, proclaiming that "it has won a position amongst us by its ingenious and subtle charm, by the wealth of its imagination, by its delicate qualities of observation, slightly sceptical and ironical, as much as by its clearly defined individuality. . . ."[96] Here Roger-Marx attributed the appeal of Japanese art to a combination of gendered traits, both traditionally male and female. However, he concluded the sentence with a list of traits that fall heavily on the side of the instinctive and "feminine":

> but, above all, we love it because it is the expression of a supremely sensitive people, vibrating in harmony with all the perception of a nation of children artists, because in it all is intuitive, spontaneous, full of unerring tact, of innate delicacy, and because by its very nature this delicacy unites the freshness of impression, the searching *naïveté* of the early masters with all the subtleties and abstractions of societies which have grown old and polished by the lapse of centuries.[97]

The section of this sentence discussing that which is "intuitive, spontaneous, full of unerring tact, of innate delicacy" could have been lifted word for word from any number of late nineteenth-century articles describing the physiological, intellectual, emotional, and

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[95] Evett, "The Late Nineteenth-Century European Critical Response to Japanese Art," 87-9.

[96] *Le Japon artistique*, the journal in which this article appeared, was simultaneously published in French and English. This quotation is taken from the English version, Roger-Marx, "On the Role and Influence of the Arts of the Far East and of Japan," *Artistic Japan* 6 (1891), 464. On the friendship between Cassatt and Roger-Marx, see letter from Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Mesnil-Beaufresne, [December 24, 1902], 277-8: "I wish you knew Roger Marx you must meet him . . . Monet is painting a series of views reflections on water, you see nothing but the reflection! Marx was interesting on him."

[97] Ibid.

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artistic capabilities of the Western woman, with her child-like temperament. That most critics would find Cassatt's borrowings from the Japanese to be well-suited to her images of women is therefore not surprising. Fénéon, who singled out "certain details—the hair of a woman, the role of a mirror, the decoration of a carpet" as the aspects of her prints most successfully patterned after her Japanese model, might thus be seen as having selected the details that are most revelatory of the kinds of female vanity also associated with the traits listed by Marx above.

A critic writing for the Belgian *L'Art moderne* under the initials G. L. (Georges Lemmen?) distinguished between the artist's maternal and non-maternal imagery with regard to tradition and originality in the color prints:

> In eight engraved sheets (drypoint and aquatint), Mlle Cassatt is innovative. Intimate and worldly scenes, her engravings after the fashion of Japanese prints are printed in color. If the first, the *Bain d'enfant* [Fig. 90], is, in its study after their process, a deliberate European translation of Utamaro (and the artist entitles it: *Essai d'imitation de l'estampe japonaise*), the *Lettre* [Fig. 91], the *Jeune femme essayant une robe* [Fig. 92], promise thoroughly charming and new works of a perfectly personal nature.[98]

G. L. has here taken Cassatt's catalogue literally: though "*Essai d'imitation de l'estampe japonaise*" is in fact printed directly under the title for print number one, *Bain d'enfant*

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[98] G. L., "Expositions à Paris, Pastellistes Français, Peintres-Graveurs, Camille Pissarro, Mary Cassatt," *L'Art moderne: Revue critique des arts et de la littérature* (26 April 1891), 136: "En huit planches gravées (point sèche et aquatinte) Mlle Cassatt innove. Scènes intimes et mondaines, ces gravures à l'instar des planches du Japon, sont imprimés en coleurs. Si la première, ce *Bain d'enfant*, est, pour l'étude du procédé, une voulue traduction européene d'Outamaro (et l'artiste l'intitule: *Essai d'imitation de l'estampe japonaise)*, la *Lettre*, la *Jeune femme essayant une robe* font prévoir des oeuvres d'une nouveauté d'art charmante et parfaitement personelles."

Gustave Lecomte and Georges Lemmen, a Belgian artist and member of *Les XX*, both wrote for *L'Art moderne* in this period. Because this article differs significantly from the signed Lecomte review of the exhibition that appeared in *L'Art dans les deux mondes* (to be discussed later in the chapter), it seems reasonable to believe the author here to be Lemmen. He also designed the catalogue cover for the 1892 *Les XX* exhibition in Belgium, to which Cassatt and Durand-Ruel sent the series of ten color prints. See *Les XX and the Belgian Avant-Garde*, ed. Stephen H. Goddard (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1992), 251.

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(now known as *The Bath*), it seems likely that Cassatt intended the subtitle to refer to the entire series. (In addition, there were ten, and not eight color prints, as stated by G. L; or did he mean to imply that only eight were innovative?) Of the ten color prints shown in 1891, four took as their subject child care, while the other six explored various activities of adult women, including washing or dressing, taking tea, letter writing, and dressmaking. Whereas critics reviewing the twelve drypoints exhibited by Cassatt in 1890 generally acknowledged only the six images depicting mother-and-child scenes, in 1891, when discussing the color prints, they devoted most of their attention to the six images featuring non-maternal women. G. L. intimated that Cassatt would be best capable of absorbing her Japanese sources when treating non-maternal scenes, as in the *Lettre* (now known as *The Letter*) and *Jeune femme essayant une robe* (now known as *The Fitting*).

Georges Lecomte, too, mentioned only three prints, all non-maternal: *The Letter, The Fitting*, and *Woman Bathing* [Fig. 93]. He opened his review by comparing her 1891 exhibition to her 1890 works: "Mlle Mary Cassatt some time ago exhibited drypoints of a very summary delineation; she has returned for the most part to scenes and poses of an acute modernism."[99] He then distinguished between the drypoints and color prints:

> This time, she has been tempted to complete her drawings with flat tints, quite delicate and lively, which give the vigorous harmony of Japanese prints to her proofs. Then, to accentuate her return to the decorative processes of Nippon, she has interpreted the lines of the body, the folds of fabrics, the direction of movements in accordance with ample curves, quite logical, and deliciously ornamented. She overcomes the exigencies of her modernist vision with the laws of this ancient art, and thus, she rejects modeling, values, aerial perspective. She scarcely admits linear perspective. But, in contrast to Japanese prints, with their free stroke, so alert at the end of a raised

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[99] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261: "Mlle Mary Cassatt exposait jadis des eaux-fortes d'une délinéation très sommaire: elle restituait largement des scènes et des attitudes d'un modernisme aigu."

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> wrist, traced with thick, wide lines, Mlle Cassatt draws spindly contours that neither flatten nor amplify in order to accent an area of volutes. Her drypoints retain their character of beautiful sobriety.[100]

The drawing that a year earlier had been interpreted as precisely naturalistic has now been transformed into something decorative and ornamental by means of a Japanese aesthetic. Though in the end it retains a "beautiful sobriety," the drawing simultaneously flirts with the sensual aspects of the decorative line, which was so often associated with the erotic image in Japanese art. Lecomte's description of Cassatt's line brings to mind not so much the purified, non-representational line favored by William Morris in wallpaper or tapestry patterns as the erotic imagery of Kitagawa Utamaro, the artist to whom Cassatt was mostly frequently compared at this time.

It is possible to imagine color prints like Cassatt's *The Fitting* or *The Coiffure* [Fig. 94], with their focus on the partially undressed female body set within an environment of patterned fabric, as belonging to the same Utamaro series as *Lovers in Summer* [Fig. 95]. Indeed, Lecomte recommended in a later paragraph that Cassatt could improve her prints by emphasizing the eroticized qualities of the Japanese line:

> One wishes that Miss Cassatt would interpret the poses and movements of her women following the Japanese type that is extremely slender and gives to them even more of the fine suppleness of leg [*tige*] that the silly little women by certain of the island's engravers have. In their works, this slim flexibility of the torso broadens, suddenly, near the bottom of the body, in beautiful undulations of line. This is a feminine type of

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[100] Ibid.: "Cette fois, elle a tenté de compléter son dessin par des teintes plates, fort délicates et vives, qui donnent aux épreuves la vigoreuse harmonie des estampes japonaises. Puis, accentuant son rétour aux procédés décoratifs du Nippon, elle a interprété les lignes du corps, les plis des étoffes, la direction des mouvements selon d'amples courbes, fort logiques et d'une ornementation délicieuse. Elle soumet les exigences de sa vision moderniste aux lois de cet art ancien, et ainsi, elle supprime le modelé, les valeurs, la perspective aérienne. À peine admit-elle une perspective lineaire. Mais, à l'encontre des estampiers japonais, dont le libre pinceau, si alerte au bout du poignet levé, traçait des larges traits gras, Mlle Cassatt dessin de grêles contours qui ne s'écrasent ni s'amplifient pour accentuer l'arrondissement des volutes. Ses pointes sèches conservent leur caractère de belle sobriété."

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> a very delicate grace that would permit her to even better interpret the svelte elegance of our contemporaries.[101]

Lecomte's use of the word *tige*—literally "stem" or "stalk"—to describe the legs of this more desirable type of woman further suggests that the ornamental devices abstracted from natural materials such as flowers or foliage often retain a reference to the sexualized female body. Moreover, the critic's recommendation that Cassatt pursue "fine suppleness of leg," "slim flexibility," "beautiful undulations," and "svelte elegance" also implies that he wished her to create figures more closely resembling those of Utamaro, characterized by de Wyzewa as "long figures of an undulant and provocative beauty" and "haughty sensuality."[102]

We may now be able to interpret Cassatt's pictures of these types as rejecting the gender stereotypes or fantasies and class biases so often perpetuated in images by her male contemporaries.[103] Male critics of her period, however, obviously could not see them in the same way—and there is no reason to think that they would have wanted to. And if Lecomte encouraged Cassatt to alter her line, making it less non-objective and more sensual in her images of women, it seems equally likely that he could not see the prints treating maternal subjects at all. It would have been difficult for many viewers, including Lecomte, to reconcile the sensuality of Japanese prints with the Western mothers depicted

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[101] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261: "On souhaiterait que Mlle Cassatt interprétât les attitudes et les mouvements des ses femmes suivant un type japonais plus gracile et leur donnât davantage encore ces fines souplesses de tiges qu'ont les femmelettes de certains graveurs insulaires. Dans leurs oeuvres, cette flexibilité menue du torse s'élargit, soudain, vers le bas du corps, en belles ondulations des traines. C'est un type feminine d'une grâce plus délicate qui permettrait de mieux interpréter encore la svelte elegance de nos comtemporaines."

A good recent discussion of the question of sensuality in Cassatt's prints after the Japanese is Eliot Bostwick Davis, "Mary Cassatt's Color Prints," *The Magazine Antiques* 154 (October 1998), 484-93.

[102] De Wyzewa, "La Peinture Japonaise": "longues figures d'une grâce onduleuse et provocative" (132); "sensualité hautaine" (133). According to Joan Ungersma Halperin, in *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 154, de Wyzewa was an intimate of the same circle that included Fénéon and Lecomte. My account of Fénéon and his circle to follow relies heavily upon Halperin's work.

[103] See, for example, Griselda Pollock's compelling analysis of *The Fitting* and *Woman Bathing* in terms of a refusal to figure the female body as an object of masculine fantasy, in *Mary Cassatt, Painter of Modern Women* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 167-77.

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in Cassatt's prints, including *The Bath* [Fig. 90], *The Omnibus* [Fig. 96], *Mother's Kiss* [Fig. 97], and *Maternal Caress* [Fig. 98].

Many present-day writers on Cassatt's work have also refrained from addressing such issues, neglecting to specify that many of the mother and child images by Utamaro to which Cassatt's works are compared, such as *A Mother Bathing Her Son* [Fig. 99], represent courtesans and their offspring. That the celebration of sexuality in these prints was a major factor in their popularity is undeniable, even in the maternal images, such as the Utamaro print used for the January 1891 cover of *Le Japon Artistique* [Fig. 100]. This aspect of Utamaro's oeuvre was brought to the fore in 1891 with the publication of Edmond de Goncourt's monograph on the artist, subtitled "*le peintre des maisons vertes*" ("green houses" meaning brothels). "Among the works of this painter of women of the 'green houses,'" he observed, "there is a curious side, that is, a tendency for his brush to represent maternity, to depict the mother in her tender concern for her infant."[104] Unafraid to bring together works that others have had difficulty considering side by side—and likely wishing to do so for that very reason—Goncourt continued, "Nothing in the images of Europe is comparable to these prints by Utamaro on the subject of nursing. These are the leanings of our Virgin over the divine *bambino*; the ecstatic contemplation of the nursing mother; the loving envelopings of the arms, the delicate winding of a hand around an ankle, at the same time that the other hand caresses the nape of the neck of the child suspended at her breast."[105] Goncourt here relished the image of a sexualized maternity in works by this Japanese artist, whose oeuvre did not seek to repress the connection between copulation and generation but rather celebrated it.

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[104] Edmond de Goncourt, *Outamarou, le peintre des maisons vertes* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1891), 56: "Chez ce peintre de la femme des Maisons Vertes, il y a un côté curieux, c'est la tendance de son pinceau à représenter la maternité, à figurer la mère dans l'occupation tendre de son enfant."

[105] Ibid.: "Rien de comparable dans les images de l'Europe, aux planches d'Outamaro sur l'allaitement. Ce sont les penchements de tête de notre Vierge sur le divin *bambino*; c'est la contemplation extatique de la mère-nourrice; ce sont les enveloppements amoureux de ses bras, l'enroulement délicat d'une main autour d'une cheville, en même temps que la caresse de l'autre derrière la nuque de l'enfant, suspendu à son sein."

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Goncourt was especially interested in the gestures in Utamaro's maternal prints, like those in the "marvelously realistic" image of a Japanese mother helping her "*bambino*" to "make *pipi.*"[106] (The repetition of the word *bambino* serves as another means of linking this vulgar picture to the Virgin and Child imagery mentioned by Goncourt.) He also commented that in many of these works, "the existence of the two beings is, so to speak, not yet completely separate . . . the life of the child seems to be passed from the womb of the mother through her knees and shoulders."[107] He then singled out for special praise a print in which "a mother has her baby on her back, leaning forward over her shoulder, and the two of them regard themselves in the water in the hollow of the trunk of a tree, and their two figures appear to be reunited, to be brought close together, to almost be embraced in the reflection of this mirror of nature."[108]

When reviewing Cassatt's 1891 exhibition, Lecomte emphasized a similar physical and visual connection between the mothers and children in her oils and pastels, observing that "an intimate, necessary line unites these beings; they live for one another. Their facial expressions are interdependent."[109] He did not mention related effects in the prints, though in *Maternal Caress* [Fig. 98] and *Mother's Kiss* [Fig. 97] in particular the sense of union is even stronger than that found in her paintings, bringing to mind the adult couplings portrayed by Utamaro but translated here into the mother-child relationship. Because the child's body and the mother's head and hand are tinted with the same unmodulated beige tone, only the drypoint line serves to mark the distinction between their two bodies in these images. At the same time, in *Mother's Kiss* the woman's hands curve into and around the child's body in such a manner that one line serves to define two

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[106] Ibid., 57: "merveilleuse de réalité"; "faire *pipi.*"

[107] Ibid.: "l'existence des deux êtres n'est, pour ainsi dire, pas encore complètement séparée, et . . . des entrailles de la mère, la vie de l'enfant semble être passée sur ses genoux, sur ses épaules. . . ."

[108] Ibid., 58: "une mère a son enfant sur son dos, penché en avant par-dessus sur épaule, et tous deux se regardent dans l'eau de creux d'un tronc d'arbre, et leurs deux figures paraissent se réunir, se rapprocher, s'embrasser presque, dans le reflètement de ce miroir de nature."

[109] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261: "Un lien intime, nécessaire, unit ces êtres; ils vivent l'un pour l'autre. Leurs expressions de visage sont associées."

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separate bodily parts: the inside of the mother's left hand outlines the exact contour of the child's left arm and elbow, while the outside of that hand indicates his back, and the inside of her right wrist doubles as the curve of his right buttock.

Lecomte's presentation of the "*'Sainte Famille' modernes*" in Cassatt's oils and pastels also involved an emphasis on the sensuous physical bond between mother and child. But because he wanted to stress the sensuality of Cassatt's Japanese-like line in the prints in the same review, he may have found it difficult to draw attention to sites where sensuous maternity and sensual linearity meet: *Mother's Kiss*, *Maternal Caress* [Fig. 98], and *The Bath* [Fig. 90]. The fourth maternal image, *The Omnibus* [Fig. 96], posed another challenge to his distinction between the kinds of line found in Cassatt's oils and pastels as opposed to her prints, for these three fully-clad figures would also be inappropriate subjects for the sexually suggestive, undulating line associated with the Japanese printmakers.

Félix Fénéon, in contrast to Lecomte, discussed the resemblance of Cassatt's color prints to those of Utamaro without completely shying away from their connotations, especially when he invoked a specific type of decorative figure, the arabesque. After noting that she should take care to "generalize" her sympathy for Japanese sources, he continued, "Today, one is made to think too much of dear Utamaro in the way that she treats the web of arms, shoulders, all the lines of the nude in general, but here the lines are more swollen than those of Utamaro and therefore influenced by the fleshy napes of Kiyonaga, without a trace, however, of that which is a little facile, a little vulgar, in his naturalism."[110] (Torii Kiyonaga was another Japanese printmaker well-known for his images of courtesans.) In further discussing her drawing, Fénéon added another arachnid metaphor to the "web" invoked above, stating, "The enveloping lines—this stroke wants

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[110] Fénéon, "Cassatt, Pissarro," 1728: "Aujourd'hui, c'est trop au cher Outamaro que fait songer la façon dont celle traite en lacis les bras, les épaules, généralement toutes les lignes de nu, mais ici lignes plus gonflantes que dans Outamaro et, alors, influencées par ce Kiyonaga aux grasses nuques, sans trace pourtant de ce qu'a d'un peu facile, d'un peu vulgaire le naturalisme de Kiyonaga."

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them clean, and often succeeds; it makes the inner lines sinuous; and for the attentive examiner of these so little overfreighted proofs it translates its hesitations into a spidery scrawl: nothing here could be disagreeable."[111]

In Chapter Four I discussed the remarks of Albert Wolff, who in 1881 described Cassatt's technique as looking like the work of a spider who adds badly drawn hands, touches of unpleasant color, and even "deformed and monstrous" passages to pictures begun by the artist's "beautiful intelligence."[112] Wolff imagined the artist as a case of "double consciousness" whose dominant personality created images that conformed to a rational, masculine positivism, but whose alternate self moved her imagery too far in the direction of a subjective, even "blind" feminine tactility, taking liberties in personal expression, especially in terms of the formal effects that brought her images near to the abject. Fénéon's spider is an even more complicated figure, weaving together lines that are sinuous and hesitant, swollen but not vulgar, enveloping but not overfreighted.

In general, Fénéon commended both the truth of expression and the decorative abstraction in the prints:

> The physiognomic observation of these women, these children, is fine, calm. With little exertion this letter writer's effort to look over what she has written in her epistle and her hesitation to bring it to a close are expressed, or the fleeting anxiety and curiosity of the *Jeune femme essayant une robe* are traced. And always, the large hands, the beautiful masculine hands that Cassatt loves to give to her women have decorative functions, especially when they are set against the nude bodies of children; they disturb the outlines, then combine with them in the unexpected creation of arabesques.[113]

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[111] Ibid.: "Les lignes enveloppantes, ce trait les voudrait nettes et souvent réussit; les internes il les détermine sineuses; et, a l'examen attentif d'épreuves si peu chargées, il traduit en arachnéens gribouillis ses hésitations: rien là qui puisse déplaire."

[112] Wolff, "Courrier de Paris," 372.

[113] Fénéon, "Cassatt, Pissarro," 1728: "L'observation physiognomique des ces femmes, des ces enfants est fine, calme. C'est sans charge que cette épistolière exprime un effort à recenser les dires de sa lettre,

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This, the final passage of Fénéon's Cassatt review, contains a number of interesting assertions regarding physiognomic truth and decorative functions, masculine-appearing female hands and the creation of arabesques. Before analyzing it more closely, and returning to the notion of the "spider," I would first like to look to concurrent ideas about the arabesque, a device that concerned Fénéon in particular at this moment.

The arabesque, an ornamental device with an ancient history, came to prominence again around 1890 with the widespread rise of an aesthetics of *décoration*, which in France took various forms ranging from the revival of national craft traditions to the Symbolist interest in non-representational form and color.[114] The Nabis, for instance, inspired by the Japanese prints in which arabesques frequently appeared, employed the S-curve for its abstracting line and coiled tension. At the same moment, art historian Aloïs Riegl investigated the evolution of the arabesque from a naturalistic stem form found in the Greco-Roman and Byzantine cultures to the Islamic ornament type with which the term remains most closely associated.[115] Riegl, like Friedrich Schlegel a century earlier,

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de l'hésitation à la clore, ou que cette 'Jeune femme essayant une robe' marque une fugitive inquiètude, de la curiosité. Et, constamment, les grandes mains, les belles mains masculines que Cassatt aime donner à ses femmes ont des fonctions décoratives, surtout quand, s'opposant aux corps d'enfants nus, elles en perturbent les lignes, puis s'associent à elles pour une imprévue creation d'arabesques." (In the original, Fénéon provided catalogue numbers for *The Letter* and *The Fitting*; I have removed them for ease of reading.)

[114] Sources providing important information on the arabesque are Joseph Masheck, "The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness," *Arts Magazine* 51 (September 1976), 82-109, which places this device within a history of the drive toward abstraction; Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 34, 80-2; Rae Beth Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and by the same author, "Poe: Optics, Hysteria, and Aesthetic Theory," *Cercles* 5 (1994), 49-60. Mascheck's extremely dense article has greatly informed the following argument and my thinking on issues of decoration and abstraction.

[115] See Aloïs Riegl, *Problems of Style, Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain, ed. David Castriota (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), especially chapter 4, "The Arabesque: Introduction." Other important works on ornament from the second half of the nineteenth century include Ralph Wornum, *Analysis of Ornament: The Characteristics of Style* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), Jules Bourgoin, *Les Éléments de l'art arabe, le trait des entrelacs* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1879), and Jules Bourgoin, *Théorie de l'ornement*, new ed. (Paris: Ducher & Cie., 1883).

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privileged the arabesque as the *ursprungliche Form* (primordial form), from which all other decorative figures had developed.[116]

Yet, the arabesque, and ornament in general, could also be viewed as excessive, inessential, and even morally reprehensible additions to form, especially when associated with femininity (and lace in particular, which was both traditionally manufactured by and worn by women) and with middle-class taste.[117] In addition, the arabesque was frequently allied in literature with an uncanny undecidability, repressed sexuality, and the "caprices of a disordered imagination."[118] Long before the protagonist of "The Yellow Wall-paper" became obsessed with the creeping figures on her walls, Edgar Allen Poe wrote a story featuring a bedroom whose surfaces were covered with an arabesque pattern that could seem either calm and abstract or filled with "ghastly forms," depending on one's position in the room.[119] In a similar vein, Charles Blanc observed that the hypnotic repetitiveness common to types of art featuring the arabesque, such as Islamic ornament, might inspire "deepening reverie" but also "a sort of mental intoxication" that leads to the "delirium of the dance" and the "ecstasy" of dervishes.[120] Nevertheless, Blanc also appreciated the abstract aspect of "complication" in this type of ornament [Fig. 101]. Claims about the arabesque and its abstract musicality promulgated by Eugène Delacroix and theorists concerned with Wagner also concerned the artists, writers, and critics of Fénéon's circle, among them the "psychophysical" researcher Charles Henry, who drew upon Eduard Hanslick's concept of the "living arabesque" to formulate a theory that life is cyclical and

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[116] Gordon, *Ornament, Fanasy, and Desire*, 32.
[117] Ibid., 3-4, 32.
[118] C. Boutereau, in the 1847 *Nouveau manuel complet du dessinateur*, claimed that the arabesque, having once been based upon natural shapes, had shifted to the realm of dreams and chimera, and the designer who used it risked "abandoning himself to all the caprices of a disordered imagination." Quoted in Gordon, "Poe: Optics, Hysteria, and Aesthetic Theory," 54.
[119] Edgar Allen Poe, "Ligeia" (1838), reprinted in *Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1951), 48.
[120] Blanc, *Art in Ornament and Dress*, 14.

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results from a "continual autogenesis."[121] Henry's studies regarding such matters as reflexes and instincts and the capacity for expressing pleasing emotion (*dynamogénie*) or sad emotion (*inhibition*) through line and color greatly interested Fénéon, who with his friend Paul Signac often assisted Henry in measuring sensory reactions. In one project, Henry and Fénéon each made a copy of a Japanese print, in order to "do a study together of lines and their rhythms," as Henry explained.[122]

Fénéon delighted in the unabashed eroticism of Japanese graphic art and admired Utamaro to the point that he intermingled their names to form a playful pseudonym, "Utagawafénéon," in 1890.[123] But while he could be occasionally supportive of women artists, Fénéon generally believed "not only women's art, but women themselves should be primarily 'decorative.'"[124] He may have turned to the feminine spider metaphor and the language of the arabesque in Cassatt's prints as a means of accounting for the subtle but undeniably sensual linearity of the mother and child imagery, a style would not have seemed appropriate to the subject, especially given the artist's gender and cultural unease about such matters, but one that clearly intrigued him in her work. If the spider in Albert Wolff's 1881 Impressionist criticism used its multiple limbs to run roughshod over pictures that should be pretty and delicate, the spider invoked by Fénéon speaks to an artist paying

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[121] José Arguëlles, *Charles Henry and the Formation of a Psychophysical Aesthetic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 131; quoted in Mascheck, "The Carpet Paradigm," 89. In "The Carpet Paradigm" Mascheck points out that, although Hanslick had opposed Wagnerianism and Hermann von Helmholtz had challenged the concept of the arabesque in musical theory, the Symbolists were able to reconcile these disagreements in formulating their own concept of the device (85, 104 n. 24). Groom, in *Beyond the Easel* (54 n. 19), also mentions Claude Debussy's 1888 composition *Deux Arabesques*, and explains that the Nabis employed a loose definition of the arabesque as suited their needs at a particular moment.

[122] Charles Henry to Félix Fénéon, May 11, 1889, quoted and trans. in Halperin, *Félix Fénéon*, 123. Henry, a librarian at the Sorbonne during the 1880s, became the director of the Laboratoire de Physiologie des Sensations at the Sorbonne in 1897. The conjunction of Henry's theories and Japanese aesthetics circa 1890 is evident in Signac's *Portrait of Félix Fénéon, Opus 217* (New York, Museum of Modern Art), with its kaleidoscopic background that makes reference but does not strictly adhere to Henry's ideas about color and line as well as abstractly patterned Japanese prints. Coincidentally, Signac's painting was on view in Paris at the same time as Cassatt's 1891 exhibition.

[123] From Kitagawa Utamaro; see Halperin, *Félix Fénéon*, 144.

[124] Ibid., 25.

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homage to "sources" valued for their linearity, weaving them into her own work but in some danger of failing to escape by extricating her images from theirs. It also speaks to Cassatt's depictions of the moment when a child is still part of an eight-limbed (four-legged, four-armed) being, unsure of the boundaries between self and (m)other—and not necessarily desiring to make that distinction. The "web of arms, shoulders, all the lines of the nude in general" reads like an orgy of body parts entangled, or better, woven together with the spider's gift for delicate pattern and ornament, as well as a primal feeling of physical connection often celebrated in Japanese prints but repressed in Western imagery. And if this web reminds one "too much of dear Utamaro," this is not too strong a criticism; after all, Utamaro is "*cher*" to Fénéon.

Moreover, Cassatt's lines, if more distended than Utamaro's, and thick like Kiyonaga's, are nevertheless neither facile nor vulgar, and not overly sensual. The contours defining the bodies—the "enveloping" lines (*envelopper*, in French, commonly means to wrap up an infant)—are crisp and terse; and the inner lines are serpentine and lightly sensual, not so much defining boundaries as simply marking the pleasurable surface where two bodies touch. Facial expressions, like hesitation or anxiety, are translated through a "spidery scrawl," suggestive of an agile tactility capable of capturing, without too permanently etching, a figure's constantly changing emotions.

And then there are the hands, which seem overly large for a woman but play an important role in forming decorative arabesques in Cassatt's compositions. The hands of the women in the prints are often large, and in the case of *Mother's Kiss* [Fig. 97], enormous. Fénéon's interest in them may relate to his concurrent fascination with the anthropometric system of Alphonse Bertillon [Fig. 102], which was the subject of a good deal of publicity around 1891.[125] Bertillon's method, which promised that "A man

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[125] See, for example, the following publications by Alphonse Bertillon: *Alphonse Bertillon's Instructions for Taking Descriptions for the Identification of Criminals and Others by the Means of Anthropometric Indications*, trans. Gallus Muller (Chicago: American Bertillon Prison Bureau, 1889), reprint ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1977); *La Photographie judiciare, avec un appendice sur la classification et*

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individualized by measurements of this character is *mathematically* identified,"[126] appealed to Fénéon, who cited both Bertillon and Galton in support of Charles Henry's ideas in an 1889 article, "Une Esthétique scientifique."[127] In 1890, when preparing a book of the late Jules Laforgue's poems, Fénéon even went so far as to call for the measuring of the original sheets of papers on which they were written, in order to "offer the reader every aspect of the poet's creation."[128]

For someone interested in measurements and Bertillon's system, the large hands of Cassatt's female figures certainly would lead to an association with the male sex. And if Fénéon, following Henry, believed the arabesque to be a life-giving force that (re)creates itself by means of "autogenesis," he might have wished to insert a masculine element into what may have seemed to him a powerful but too exclusively feminine force in these works by a female artist, an idea that is also in keeping with the etymological link between "spider" and "spinster." For rather than treating inanimate landscape subjects, Cassatt's arabesques were intimately intertwined with mother and child figures that equally symbolized the giving and sustaining of life and furthermore came from the hand of a woman who was not a mother.

Fénéon was likely aware that the arabesque has an underside, the dangerous aspect that concerned Poe and Blanc; a double consciousness, so to speak. Or to put it another way, the arabesque has yin-and-yang sides, rational and irrational, masculine and feminine, where surface and background are interchangeable, one not dominant over the other. Recognizing that one could not always measure the art in art,[129] Fénéon may also have

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l'identification anthropométriques (Paris: Gauthier-Villars et fils, 1890); and "The Bertillon System of Identification," *Forum* 11 (May 1891), 330-41.

[126] Gallus Muller, "Introduction," in Bertillon, *Alphonse Bertillon's Instructions*, 6.

[127] Félix Fénéon, "Une esthétique scientifique," *La Cravache* (18 May 1889), reprinted in Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, 146.

[128] Halperin, *Félix Fénéon*, 164.

[129] In 1891 Fénéon wrote that Signac "is not enslaved by these graceful mathematics; he knows well that a work of art is inextricable." In Félix Fénéon, "Paul Signac," *La Plume* (1 September 1891), reprinted in Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, 198: "ne s'est pas asservi à cette mathématique gracieuse; il sait bien qu'une oeuvre d'art est inextricable."

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realized that it could be experienced in various ways: as an overwhelming pleasure, and as a sometimes frighteningly seductive force, or both at once.

Fénéon may have been responding to this tension in Cassatt's prints when he complained about the contrast between the black ink she used to describe the hair, the top of the skull, the eyes, and top of the nose of her figures, and the sepia ink employed for all body parts below the bottom of the nose. The contrast, he felt, "renders the upper part of the face hard, discordant, and sometimes almost baroque on the whole."[130] This technique is most evident in *Mother's Kiss* [Fig. 97], in which the mother's hands appear to merge with the child's body, and least obvious in *The Letter* [Fig. 91], the print which represents the most independent and willful woman in the series. Fénéon's objection to the formal effect may also register an uneasiness about the psychological effect. The part of the body which is least fleshy and houses its center of cognition and most "intellectual" perceptual organs (the eyes) is that which Cassatt made hard and black; the parts of the body which are soft, more fluid, and more likely to be pressed into, intertwined, and even temporarily merged with the parts of another are those she printed in sepia. Fénéon did not specify which ink color he would have preferred, all black or all sepia, but one suspects he wanted one or the other, which is precisely what this print refuses, with its child who wears an expression of some discomfort, as if he wishes to break away from his mother's embrace.

Fénéon's review suggests that Cassatt's prints are like spider webs, mesmerizing in their beauty and potentially strangling in their enigmatic and seductive power, much in the manner of Arabic ornament as described by Blanc, and in the Arabs' "endless tales, in which imaginary events are woven and mingled together, and in which we like to lose ourselves with the narrator."[131] But the pleasures of this potentially dangerous seduction generally occur in Western culture in relation to the sexualized or abstracted female

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[130] Fénéon, "Cassatt, Pissarro," 1728: rend dur le haut du masque, discordant et parfois presque baroque son ensemble."

[131] Blanc, *Art in Ornament and Dress*, 44-5.

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figure—a body that is specifically figured as non-maternal. Cassatt's 1891 color prints of maternal subjects, with their powerful, masculine-appearing hands that disturb outlines while creating arabesques, may also have functioned to disturb some viewers and their sense of outlines or boundaries. Because they echoed the sensuality of Japanese courtesans and deftly wove Japanese sources into the fabric of an original aesthetic vision, Cassatt's maternal color prints may have been too uncanny for most of the critics who first viewed them, to the point that they were repressed in reviews—made invisible. The majority of critics found these images to be "unspeakable," perhaps threatened by their challenges to certain notions of propriety, including those which bind "mother" and "child" together but hold "mother" and "sensuality" apart. Fénéon alone allowed himself the pleasures and dangers of being caught up in their voluptuous maternal lines.

II.

At the same moment that Cassatt created her 1890–91 color prints, which incorporated some principles of decoration important to the Neo-Impressionists while also drawing upon an earthy, Japanese-derived sensuality at odds with gendered expectations for the female artist and her subject matter, she produced the first of her pictures to be specifically identified as "Modern 'Holy Families.'" On the whole, the paintings *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103] and *The Child's Caress* [Fig. 104] and the pastels *Hélène of Septeuil* [Fig. 105] and *Baby's First Caress* [Fig. 106] were viewed as successfully mediating between the registers of realism, in which she had first made her artistic mark, and Symbolism, which had since emerged as the dominant aesthetic trend. Before considering the critical response to these works when exhibited in 1891, I would like to outline some of the shifts that made the subject of the "Modern Madonna" acceptable within an environment that only a few years before had rejected most symbolic content in art.

As is well known, these works partake in the Symbolist return to certain figures of religious iconography, which itself must be located within the Catholic revival of the period. Pius IX, the reigning pope from 1846 to 1878, led the French Church into a

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deeply conservative and politically reactionary period, and in 1864 his *Syllabus of Errors* condemned the "absolute rationalism" of the positivistic science that had come to dominate the French establishment. In contrast, his successor, Leo XIII, actively sought to reconcile the Church with some aspects of modern science and political thought. His efforts, however, served to inflame a small but influential group of reactionary literary figures who, through a *renouveau religieux*, opposed both the contemporary culture of science and positivism and the liberalizing policies of the Church, becoming, in essence, more conservative Catholics than the Pope himself.

Both Pius IX and Leo XIII were especially devoted to the Virgin, who remained appealing to Catholics across the political spectrum.[132] Catholic France had long considered itself to have a special relationship with the Virgin, a feeling that intensified after reports of Marian apparitions, including Lourdes in 1858, and with the growth of the French pilgrimage movement after 1873. The figure of the Virgin could also be used in the Catholic right's protest against the Republican government, as in 1883, when the daily paper *La Croix* attacked a statue of Marianne unveiled on Bastille Day as an "impure Venus" created by "pagan demons."[133] The national holiday and its figure of France were derided in favor of "Mary, queen of the Gauls," to whom Louis XIII had dedicated the country in the seventeenth century, and the celebration of the Assumption.[134] It is important to recognize that the publishers of *La Croix* did not use symbols such as the Virgin in a doctrinaire way, but rather according to religious and political necessity, a situation that holds true for most who employed Marian imagery throughout the

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[132] For example, Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, and Leo XIII sought to increase Marian veneration among the laity with a number of decrees beginning in 1883. For a good introduction to the importance of the Virgin in France during the later nineteenth century, see Barbara Corrado Pope, "Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century," in *Immaculate & Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, eds. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 173-200.

[133] For more on this matter, see Pope, "Immaculate and Powerful," 185-6. As she points out, *La Croix* also played a leading role in the dissemination of anti-Semitic propaganda during the Dreyfus Affair.

[134] Ibid., 186.

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nineteenth century and in various Western nations. Furthermore, the appeal of Marian imagery was not limited to Catholics or Catholic countries but held a "recessive position" in mainstream Protestantism in England and the United States.[135]

The figure of the Virgin was thus employed in support of a broad range of religious, societal, and political positions, and around the time that Cassatt began to produce her "Modern Madonnas" it was utilized in a number of specific ways, many of which functioned to encourage women to adhere to traditional patriarchal values and to reject the burgeoning feminist movement. For example, Barbara Corrado Pope observes of Marian apparitions that "they never carried a message of social transformation or suggested that the realm of Mary or the coming of Christ meant the overcoming of exploitation or oppression. The political direction they augured was always backward rather than forward: in favor of kings and the old social order, and fearful of change."[136] Much the same could be argued about Marian iconography in relation to women's roles at the *fin de siècle*.

One important aspect of the appeal of the Madonna (as opposed to other religious symbols) during the second half of the nineteenth-century can be gleaned from an 1868 article on "Celebrated Sanctuaries of the Madonna." According to its author, the cult of the Madonna has "something in it of itself very attractive to weak and fallen humanity: it comes with the force of *home* and all its dear recollections."[137] Who better to find solace in the image of the Madonna in the 1890s than important literary figures including Joris-Karl Huysmans, who turned to Catholicism only after working among the "Decadents," a

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[135] John Gatta, *American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 8. Gatta cites Anna Jameson's often reprinted *Legends of the Madonna* (first edition 1852) as a sympathetic reading of Marian aesthetics by an Anglo-Irish Protestant, and novels by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe and prose by Margaret Fuller and Henry Adams as evidence of the widespread persistence of the Madonna as a symbol in Protestant America.

[136] Ibid., 195. Mathews explores various dimensions of "The Nineteenth Century Concept of the Madonna as Mother" in her dissertation chapter of this title, in "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century," 97-116.

[137] "Celebrated Sanctuaries of the Madonna," reprinted from *Christian Remembrancer* in *Littell's Living Age* 98 (15 August 1868), 417.

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loosely-affiliated group of writers who demonstrated their opposition to naturalism by exaggerating the artificial and even sickly aspects of modern life?[138] In the last chapter I discussed Huysmans's "true mother" type, the woman who has renounced sexuality in order to better devote herself to feeding and comforting those around her, and Huysmans's identification of the women in Cassatt's 1881 Impressionist images as "true mothers" by comparing them to women who served the same role in the novels of Dickens. The "true mother" is, of course, a secularized version of the Madonna.[139] By 1898, Huysmans had returned to the Church and published *La Cathédrale*, a meditation on Chartres. As one critic explained, in this book Huysmans's protagonist "registers the vow, 'Je ne veux plus aimer que ma mère Marie'; and devotion to the Virgin—who in the religion of the pious Frenchman occupies much the same place as his own mother fills in his family affections—becomes inextricably mingled with his aesthetic reveries on line and colour."[140]

Paul Bourget, another writer associated with the Decadents, also experienced a return to Catholicism, publishing *Sensations d'Italie* in 1891, a memoir of his attempts to return to an early Renaissance past that represented to him a more meaningful union of faith and its expression in art. An *Atlantic Monthly* writer described Bourget as going "from picture to picture of the old Tuscan and Umbrian painters, charmed with the truth and devout feeling of one and another Madonna, and gaining, as so many less susceptible tourists have done, a certain strong composite impression from the reiteration of the same

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[138] Huysmans's most important work of "decadent" literature was the novel *À rebours* (1884). It should be noted, as Michael Marlais explains, that "Decadence" as a movement is not synonymous with Symbolism, though there are a number of points of contact between the two. While *À rebours* can be understood as a major statement of both Decadence and Symbolism, many Symbolists were actually resistant to Huysmans and his work. See *Conservative Echoes*, 80-91.

[139] As Lloyd puts it in *J.-K. Huysmans and the* Fin-de-Siècle *Novel*, 81: "This debased ideal leads ultimately to the author's cult of that supernatural and immaculate intercessor for all men, the Blessed Virgin Mary."

[140] Virginia Crawford, *Studies in Foreign Literature* (1899) (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1970), 83.

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story testified to by so many reverent interpreters."[141] In addition, Marian imagery was being reinterpreted, with varying degrees of piety, by a number of avant-garde artists, among them Paul Gauguin and his colleagues at Pont Aven at this same moment.[142]

Marian imagery was also being revived at this time by British and American writers on art, who approached the subject from two slightly different but mainly secular angles, both enabled by recent advances in mechanical reproduction. Articles responding to the growth of interest in connoisseurship, stemming from the popularization of the controversial Morellian method and the flow of American dollars into the old master market, began to appear in great numbers. Many of these writings were monographical studies of Italian painters long beloved for their Madonna and Holy Family pictures, such as Raphael, Botticelli, and Correggio.[143] Others compared works by different artists treating the same subject matter, including that of the Madonna and Child, which was often presented as a study of the iconography of "childhood," perhaps in response to the new interest in child study.[144]

An image like Cassatt's *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103], then, entered into public consciousness at a moment when critics, dealers, and patrons were well-prepared to understand and accept the idea of a "Modern Madonna," an image that was interpreted as merging the traditional religious symbol with psychological insights gleaned from contemporary science. It is also worth mentioning that in 1889 Cassatt also become

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141 "Recent French Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 69 (January 1892), 125. Bourget would also explain the literary movement with which he was involved directly to English-language readers in the article "The New Moral Drift in French Literature," *Forum* 16 (November 1893), 282-8.

142 Mathews provides an important overview of the persistance as well as revival of Madonna imagery during the nineteenth century, from the Nazarenes to Eugène Carrière and Paula Modersohn-Becker, in chapter 5 of "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century," 118-42.

143 These articles were often repackaged into books, such as William J. Stillman, *Old Italian Masters* (New York: The Century Co., 1892), which gathered pieces published in *Century Magazine* from 1888–92.

144 See, for example, the following articles: J. Hungerford Pollen, "Childhood and Art," *Art Journal* 44 (June 1882), 185-8; Henry J. Van Dyke, "The Nativity in Art," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 72 (December 1883), 2-24; Horace E. Scudder, "Childhood in Medieval Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 56 (July 1885), 24-31; and Charles Newton Scott, "The Child-God in Art," *Contemporary Review* 50 (July 1886), 97-111.

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involved in old master art in a different manner, serving a connoisseurial role of sorts as the adviser to her friend Louisine Havemeyer and her husband, Henry O. Havemeyer, an American industrialist, as they sought to assemble a historically important art collection.[145] Cassatt would assist the Havemeyers with their purchases, as well as involve herself in various efforts to secure important pictures for American museums, through about 1920, when she began to grow frail.

The "Modern Madonna," too, was highly suited to the concurrent "double retreat"[146] of Impressionist art into the museum and the interior, or better, into the private interior as museum: the type of aesthetic setting preferred by collectors like the Havemeyers. *The Quiet Time* and similar works would appeal to the American market, toward which Durand-Ruel had begun to move by 1886, when the gallery presented the first important exhibition of Impressionism to be held in the U.S. in New York. That mother and child imagery could be successfully sold, especially to Americans, was a lesson the firm had learned when he handled the works of Bouguereau under exclusive contract (1863–66).[147] Indeed, some of the clients who had purchased works by Bouguereau from Durand-Ruel in the 1860s had expressed interest in Cassatt's work in the early 1890s, among them Baltimore art agent George A. Lucas, and New York print dealer and patron Samuel P. Avery, who already owned a group of her early prints.

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[145] The Havemeyer collection has indeed played an important role in the history of America's museums, for much of it was eventually given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Many of Cassatt's old master recommendations, however, have not withstood the test of time, and have now been reattributed to followers or schools of the various masters to whom they were originally attributed. On Cassatt's role as an adviser to the Havemeyers, see Frances Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), and Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen et al., *Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).

[146] Martha Ward treats this subject in the essay, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *Art Bulletin* 73 (December 1991), 599-622; and also in *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[147] On Bouguereau's business relationship with Durand-Ruel, see Louise d'Argencourt, "Bouguereau and the Art Market in France," in *William Bouguereau, 1825–1905* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1984), 95-103. Durand-Ruel is generally credited with encouraging Bouguereau toward "happy family" imagery after the artist's classicizing work was rebuffed at the Salon of 1863.

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Works like *The Quiet Time* possessed a number of qualities that made them desirable to American collectors, including a close resemblance to what Mrs. Jameson termed the "Mater Amabilis" [Fig. 107] type of Marian imagery.[148] It is not known whether Cassatt was personally familiar with Jameson's frequently reprinted *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts* (the 7th edition, for example, was published in 1888), but the similarities between her 1889–90 drypoints and the etching and woodcut illustrations done by Jameson herself are remarkable. Had Cassatt read Jameson, she would likely have found her views to be highly sympathetic, for the Englishwoman was deeply interested in maternal images and often interpreted them with regard to contemporary debates about women's issues, rather than offering traditionally pious readings.[149] Jameson frequently wrote on social issues in addition to art, at times employing a cool sarcasm to point out the absurdity of many patriarchal principles, especially those limiting women from work outside the home.[150]

Given the types of beliefs shared by Jameson and Cassatt, it is not surprising to find points of contact between the "Mater Amabilis" and Cassatt's "Modern Madonnas." Compositionally, old master works of this genre were generally "those innumerable half-length figures of the Madonna holding her Child in her arms,"[151] as Cassatt's would be. In terms of content and meaning in the "Mater Amabilis,"

> The Virgin is not here the dispenser of mercy; she is simply the mother of the Redeemer. She is occupied only by her divine Son. She caresses him, or she gazes on him fondly. She presents him to the worshiper. . . . If the profound religious sentiment of the early masters was afterwards obliterated by the unbelief and conventionalism of

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[148] Mathews first links Cassatt's "Modern Madonnas," Jameson, and the "Mater Amabilis" in "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna' of the Nineteenth Century," 168-70.

[149] Adele M. Holcomb, "Anna Jameson: The First Professional English Art Historian," *Art History* 6 (June 1983), 184. See also Holcomb's "Anna Jameson on Women Artists," *Woman's Art Journal* 8 (Fall1987/Winter 1988), 15-24.

[150] See for example, Anna Jameson, "'Woman's Mission,' and Woman's Position," *Memoirs and Essays Illustrative of Art, Literature and Social Morals* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1846), 129-52.

[151] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, 115.

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> later art, still this favourite subject could not be so wholly profaned by degrading sentiments and associations. . . . No matter what the model for the Madonna might have been,—a wife, a mistress, a *contadina* of Frascati, a Venetian *Zitella*, a *Madchen* of Nuremberg, a buxom Flemish *Frow*,—for the Child was there; the baby innocence in her arms consecrated her into that "holiest thing alive," a mother. The theme, however inadequately treated as regarded its religious significance, was sanctified in itself beyond the reach of a profane thought. Miserable beyond the reach of hope, dark below despair, that moral atmosphere which the presence of sinless unconscious infancy cannot for a moment purify or hallow![152]

Cassatt's pictures of the "Modern Madonna" type could thus find a comfortable place within the homes of art-worshipping American Protestant millionaires: in her works, as in the "Mater Amabilis," sanctified childhood took precedence over any specific religious doctrine that might be read into the scene. The preferred sites for display of "Mater Amabilis" imagery, as Jameson described them, also coincided with the spaces of the private collector, for these works were usually painted for private oratories and chapels or domestic spaces including studies and libraries.[153]

Jameson was also an important figure in shaping the Romantic conception of "moral physiognomy," the idea that a painting reveals something about the character of the artist as well as the subject, which served as a significant precursor to late nineteenth-century concepts of unconscious expression in art.[154] In particular, Jameson believed that portraiture, a genre she identified as being commonly practiced by women, involved a level of representational doubling—the artist and her subject[155]—prefiguring ideas like

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[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Holcomb, "Anna Jameson on Woman Artists," 21. For Jameson's writings on physiognomy, see, for example, *A Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art In and Near London*, Part I (London: John Murray, 1842), xlv-xlvii; and "Physiognomy of Hands," in *A Commonplace Book of Thoughts, Memories, and Fancies* (London: Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), 288.
[155] Holcomb, "Anna Jameson on Woman Artists," 21.

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those of Guyau or even Rambaud. Her belief that religious art was shaped within a specific social, historical, and even personal context, rather than being trans-historical, was not incompatible with more modernist views of the late nineteenth century. Of the "Mater Amabilis," she wrote, "Though unimportant in comparison with the comprehensive and magnificent church altar-pieces . . . there is no class of pictures so popular and so attractive, none on which the character of the time and the painter is stamped more clearly and intelligibly, than on these simple representations."[156] The collector of Cassatt's "Modern Madonna" works could thereby duplicate the experience of the owner of an old master "Mater Amabilis" by purchasing a work also suited to veneration within the "private museum," while at the same time enjoying the contemporary "character of the time and the painter" as "stamped" on the work by an artist who came to maturity as an Impressionist "painter of modern life."

To suggest that Cassatt's "Modern Madonna" or "*'Saint Famille' modernes*" fulfilled certain commercial desires is not to say that Cassatt specifically altered her style with sales in mind, nor that Durand-Ruel pressed her in a certain direction for crass financial reasons. Rather, I have attempted to show that, while the moment was ripe for the emergence of a "Modern Madonna," Cassatt—probably consciously *and* unconsciously—was able to adapt her aesthetic to a much changed avant-garde climate while also refraining from "shocking" potential patrons.[157] Moreover, Durand-Ruel, the man who would soon become her primary dealer, cannily—and perhaps uncannily—succeeded in securing for her a position of importance among her colleagues, critics, and patrons, for she would indeed achieve a new level of renown with her first one-person exhibition, in 1891. In any case, it was clearly important for Cassatt, as a woman

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[156] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, 115.

[157] Camille Pissarro, in a letter to his son Lucien, Paris, April 3, 1891, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 219 (original in French, trans. Mathews), reported that Durand-Ruel was having great success selling Monet's paintings in America. Pissarro complained, "they all want *Sheaves in the Setting Sun!*," and added, "All this comes, as Durand remarked to me, from not shocking the collectors!"

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artist, to sell, not only in order to be self-supporting, but also to demonstrate that, despite gendered expectations, she could hold her own in the contemporary market.

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Prior to 1891, critics occasionally associated Cassatt's imagery with the works of the Italian primitives, as had Havard and Ephrussi in 1881, and Firmin Javel remarked upon the "Raphaelesque pose" of a mother figure in one of her 1890 drypoints. In the criticism of her 1891 exhibition, the relationship of her new paintings to old master Madonna precedents was brought to the fore by a number of writers, including the critic for *Le Matin*, who commented that Cassatt had focused "a little too narrowly on the same subject: a mother holding a child in her arms. But what charm and ability in these variations inspired by nature alone and also at times a bit of the Italian primitives."[158] *L'Art moderne*'s "G. L." had a similar view:

> Mlle Cassatt concerns herself little with bright or brilliant painting in her oils and pastels: she is above all a draughtsman, and is Degas's only student. A master in her own right, of variations on a theme: mother and child. But in addition to the marvelous style of her honest works, which almost evoke a memory of Ghirlandaio, there is an unexpected, exquisite grace in the childish gestures that only a feminine soul could so subtly observe and translate.[159]

By this moment the "Italian primitives" were being increasingly invoked by critics like Aurier as artists who abjured realism, the "general tendency in painting" throughout

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[158] "Les Peintres-Graveurs," *Le Matin*: "à peu près le même sujet: une mère tenant une enfant dans ses bras. Mais que de charme et d'habilité dans ces variations inspirées que de la seule nature et parfois un peu aussi des primitifs italiens."

[159] G. L., "Expositions à Paris, Pastellistes Français, Peintres-Graveurs, Camille Pissarro, Mary Cassatt," 136-7: "Mlle Cassatt s'inquiète peu, en ses huiles et ses pastels, de peinture claire ou éclatante: elle est surtout dessinateur, et c'est de cette unique élève de Degas. À son tour un maître, des variations sur ce thème: une mère et son enfant. Mais en sus du merveilleux style de ces probres oeuvres, allant jusqu'à évoquer le souvenir du Ghirlandajo [*sic*], c'est l'exquise grâce imprévue de gestes infantins que seule une âme féminine pouvait ainsi subtilement observer et traduire."

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history.[160] While it is difficult to know just how G. L. felt Cassatt's works resembled those by Ghirlandaio, in pose and mood they do appear quite similar to a work attributed to him during the nineteenth century [Fig. 108], and Jameson described his paintings as having an ideal elegance as well as grace. It seems likely that both the *Matin* and the *Art moderne* critics were responding to a subtle and naturalistic attention to gesture and expression in Cassatt's works combined with a simplication of form and hieratic quality that reminded them of the early Italian masters.

While a number of critics detected but did not explain certain resemblances between Cassatt's images and old master pictures, Gustave Lecomte specifically related her works to the tradition of *Saintes Familles*, finding that her images drew upon that tradition while reworking its meaning. Writing in Durand-Ruel's *L'Art dans les deux mondes*, Lecomte stated:

> Mlle Cassatt exhibits . . . two pastels and two oil paintings representing, in quite varied poses, mamas and their *Babies* [in English in original]: one could justly speak of modern "Holy Families." It is no longer a question of an ecstatic virgin, holding on her rigid knees, without tenderness, an infant totally conscious of his exalted destiny and who is already in flight. These are infinitely human and loving mothers who press against their breasts the rosy flesh of rather lively babies without any other concern than that of maternal caresses.[161]

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[160] See G.-Albert Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture, Paul Gauguin," *Mercure de France* (9 February 1891), reprinted in G.-Albert Aurier, *Le symbolisme en peinture; Van Gogh, Gauguin et quelques autres*, ed. Pierre-Louis Mathieu ([Caen]: L'Échoppe, 1991), 22: "tendance générale de la peinture." Aurier also noted that "quelques-uns des grands maîtres de la Renaissance" were among the anti-realists (ibid.).

[161] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261: "Mlle Cassatt expose . . . deux pastels et deux tableaux à l'huile représentant, dans des attitudes fort variées, des mamans et leurs Babies: on dirait plus justement des 'Sainte Famille' modernes. Il ne s'agit plus d'une Vierge extatique tenant sans tendresses, sur ses genoux rigides, un enfant tout conscient de sa haut destinée et qui déjà s'enfuit. Ce sont des mères infiniment humaines et aimants qui serrent contre leur sein les chairs roses des bébés bien vivants et sans autre souci que celui des caresses maternelles."

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In Lecomte's eyes, Cassatt, like Lady Eastlake's Raphael and Mrs. Jameson's painters of the "Mater Amabilis," has represented the "unconscious" child who, despite his humanity, bestows holiness upon his mother by involving her in consecrated motherhood.

Lecomte found Cassatt's two oils, *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103] and *The Child's Caress* [Fig. 104] to be the most obviously identifiable as "*'Sainte Famille' modernes*":

> Her oil paintings, in particular, are embellished with an austere gravity. Mlle Cassatt gives to her mothers the domed foreheads of Virgins by certain Primitives; they are full of thoughts, but of a purely human order and nothing of the supernatural. The mother imagines her duties, and the future. Clarity illuminates her forehead, but it signifies the intelligence of her tenderness and not ecstasy. The slow and cold eyes have a tender severity for contemplating the child.[162]

Lecomte explicitly linked the physiognomy of Cassatt's mothers to "Virgins of certain Primitives," and her "Modern Madonnas" owe much to fifteenth-century Florentine sculpture, particularly the bas reliefs of Luca della Robbia and his contemporaries, such as Desiderio da Settignano [see Fig. 109].[163] Judith A. Barter has outlined the revival of these works in France during the early 1880s,[164] attributing their popularity to the appeal of their blond coloration and naturalism. Frederick Wedmore, upon viewing an exhibition of Impressionist pictures put on by Durand-Ruel in London in 1882, brought together the artists of both eras by way of this shared naturalism. Wedmore described the physical features of a typical Virgin as depicted by della Robbia in terms that bring to mind a

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[162] Ibid., 262: "Dans les peintures à l'huile, en particulier, elles s'ornent d'une gravité austere. Mlle Cassatt donne à ses mères ce front bombé qu'ont les vierges de certains Primitifs; il est plein de penseés, mais d'ordre purement humain et point de tout surnaturel. La mère songe à ses devoirs, à l'avenir. Une clarté illumine son front: elle signifie l'intelligence de sa tendresse et non l'extase. Les yeux lents et froids ont une tendre sévérité pour contempler l'enfant. "

[163] See Mathews, "Mary Cassatt and the 'Modern Madonna,'" 174-5.

[164] Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 77-80. For French articles on these works, see Eugène Piot, "Exposition Universelle: Sculpture à l'exposition rétrospective du Trocadéro," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 October 1878), 576-600; and Louis Courajod, "Observations sur deux bustes du Musée de Sculpture de la Renaissance au Louvre," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 July 1883), 26-42.

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modern *Parisienne* painted by Manet or Degas, with her "low, broad forehead, the calm eyes wide apart and a little upraised, the pure young curve of the cheek, the *nez retroussé* (if a *nez retroussé* may be allowed to a Madonna)."[165] Represented "without austerity, without idealisation," she was someone who might be seen "to-day taking the afternoon drive under the trees of the Cascine, or to-night, plying her fan with a slow to-and-fro in the best front corner of a box at the Pergola."[166] Wedmore then observed that the sculptor prefigured the Impressionists because "he knew at all events—what they believe—that the art that has the chance of living is generally the art that is inspired by the life of its own day."[167]

Barter aligns Wedmore's della Robbia and his contemporaries with certain blond-toned theater images by Cassatt from the late 1870s and early 1880s and then with Cassatt's mother and child pictures from the 1890s.[168] However, it may be a different della Robbia who interested artists and critics of the Symbolist period, one who was valued as much for the flatness of his relief, the linear patterns created by this relief, the restraint of his palette—and for the symbolic meanings that could be read into these formal qualities—as for his naturalism. Some of these aspects were brought out by writers in the period, including E. D. R. Bianciardi, who in 1880 praised della Robbia's modeling as "characterized by an exquisite purity," and declared that the expression of his Madonnas and angels "often reminds us of the paintings of Fra Angelico."[169] Rather than their

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[165] Frederick Wedmore, "The Impressionists," *Fortnightly Review* 33 (1 January 1883), 75.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Barter specifically mentions Cassatt's *Two Young Ladies in a Loge* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), BrCR 121, as a work seen by Wedmore at the 1882 Impressionist exhibition in London. However, a review describes the theater picture on view as an image of "two gentlewomen, the one armed with a fan and the other with an opera glass," a work more likely to be *In the Box* (Private collection), BrCR 62. See "The 'Impressionists,'" [London] *Standard* (1 July 1882), 3, reprinted in Kate Flint, ed., *Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception* (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 45, and Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 78. Regardless of the confusion about which work was exhibited, Barter's argument about the resemblances between this type of image and early Renaissance sculpture still holds true.
[169] E. D. R. Bianciardi, "Luca Della Robbia and His School," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 60 (April 1880), 698.

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contemporaneity, Bianciardi stressed the virtuousness of della Robbia's figures, inferred from their resemblance to Fra Angelico's immaculate angels and Virgins, and from the chaste simplicity of the sculptor's formal means.

In 1884 Kenyon Cox appreciated how, in the works of della Robbia and his contemporaries, the "hand of the sculptor has paused, with delicate self-control, just before the suggested form was quite completed, and has left the rest to the imagination."[170] This was not a casual lack of finish, he claimed; rather, "the surfaces are caressed into beauty with an infinity of loving care."[171] While Cox understood that the resulting low relief contributed to the attractive naturalism of della Robbia's work, he did not equate its lack of finish with Impressionist spontaneity and contingency of vision, but rather with something closer to Symbolist "suggestion." The ancient Greeks, he wrote, had also made beautiful bas reliefs, but in them relied too much upon "large abstraction and generalization," which resulted in "an ideal of what nature ought to be."[172] The lowness of Renaissance bas reliefs, in contrast, only approached abstraction, while still allowing for "suggestiveness and vagueness and its accompanying naturalism and individuality"; in this way, artists are "no longer bound to a definite type of ideal beauty, but can wander at will among the thousand accidental graces and half-awkward beauties of human beings."[173] It is also significant that Cox, after identifying della Robbia and his contemporaries with certain "feminine" qualities, including "the charm of the 'intimate,'" quaintness, sincerity, and naivete, praised their "masculine" aspects: "With what wide-open, truth-seeing eyes they looked at the universe, and with what manly simplicity and frankness they recorded what they saw!"[174]

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[170] Kenyon Cox, "Sculptors of the Early Italian Renaissance," *Century Magazine* 29 (November 1884), 64.
[171] Ibid., 64-5.
[172] Ibid., 63-4.
[173] Ibid., 64, 65-6.
[174] Ibid., 66.

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Though Lecomte's review did not specifically mention Renaissance bas relief sculpture, his discussion of Cassatt's *"'Sainte Famille' modernes"* similarly located her pictures between the human and the ideal. While her women may resemble old master Virgins, they are "purely human"; and though human, there is nevertheless a sense of monumental seriousness about them. "We are also quite removed from the cuteness of kittens playing with wool, with which the school of the pretty favors childhood at times. These scenes have a beautiful human simplicity," he wrote.[175] Unlike the della Robbia Madonna described by Wedmore, "so nonchalante [*sic*] yet affable to all the world,"[176] Cassatt's mothers, in Lecomte's view, are grave, tenderly severe, and completely absorbed in and by their children.

Lecomte also took pains here to distance Cassatt's *"'Sainte Famille' modernes"* from any trace of the mysticism or hysteria brought to the fore by Rambaud in his 1890 *L'Art dans les deux mondes* article on her work. These women have foreheads like "Primitive" Virgins, but their thoughts touch upon "nothing of the supernatural." They may imagine [*songe*] their duties and the future, but experience none of the ecstasy so frequently invoked in relation to the female body in this period, whether of a religious, mystical, hysterical, or sexual sort (or in any of their possible intersections, for that matter). To the contrary, Lecomte described Cassatt's "Modern Madonnas" in a manner that most closely resembles the typical Frenchwoman as defined by Betham-Edwards: the *épouse* assimilated by the *mère*, the woman who exists solely for her children, with "no other concern than maternal caresses."

Lecomte merged the symbolic and formal aspects of his reading, declaring, "An intimate, necessary line unites these beings; they live for one another. Their facial

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[175] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261-2: "Nous sommes fort loin aussi des gentilesses de petits chats jouant parmi les laines, dont parfois l'école du joli gratifie l'enfance. Ces scènes ont une belle simplicité humaine."

[176] Wedmore, "The Impressionists," 75.

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expressions are interdependent."[177] He then claimed, "It is a tenderness that has its source in the flesh, an alliance that is animal [*bestiale*] above all, that completes, while ennobling, moral affection,"[178] reiterating a long-held belief that women remained more like animals than men because of their putative inferior intelligence and their greater involvement in the life of the body, as childbearers and those primarily responsible for attending to the physical needs of the family. This belief had been given new life in the late nineteenth-century by various figures who drew upon dubious interpretations of Darwin to assert that women were less "evolved."

Putting aside Lecomte's explanation for the bond between the figures, his observation that the mother and child in Cassatt's works are inextricably linked through a physical interaction that is paralleled by the artist's formal means is accurate. The compositions comprise two types, one in which the two figures fit together like pieces of a puzzle [Figs. 103, 105], and the other built around a circular series of contacts [Figs. 104, 106]. Lecomte, a friend of Fénéon, and like him, also associated with Neo-Impressionism and anarchism, was not interested in a religious interpretation of Cassatt's figures, but in his reading these images lend themselves to a symbolic interpretation nonetheless. To Lecomte, the mother here is not so much *mère* as *Mère*. Though the figures are clearly meant to represent contemporary women, Cassatt's limited palette, simplified forms, and abstracted backgrounds have the effect of dampening the modern life references; while the gestures and poses seem true-to-life, the tightly conceived compositions knitting together the figures as well as their serious facial expressions and shared gazes endow them with a timeless gravity. And though these children were certainly not the products of Virgin birth, the physical connection between mother and child in his view obviated the need for an adult male in this "family," returning the mother to a near-virginal state of chastity.

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[177] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261.

[178] Ibid.: "C'est une tendresse qui a sa source dans la chair, une alliance tout d'abord bestiale qui complète, en l'ennoblissant, l'affection morale."

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A comparison of the oils exhibited in 1891 to the first mother and child picture known to have been created by Cassatt, *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, 1880 [Fig. 56] (an image also related to an old master Virgin and Child precedent), helps to elucidate the greater symbolic quality of the later works. While the figures in the earlier picture dominate the composition, we are drawn even closer in *The Child's Caress* [Fig. 104] and especially *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103].[179] The mother's head is quite small in the Impressionist picture and her features are mostly hidden as she turns toward the child. In contrast, the faces in the later paintings are more visible; in each picture, a broad expanse of cheek and forehead serves as a resting point for the eye. The child's head in the later works is extremely round and chubby, the mothers' chins are fleshy, and the skin tones are quite reddened, adding to their tactility. Yet, against the convincing heft of the fleshy portions of the figures, a predominance of cool tones and a controlled facture manipulating chalky, impasto-like areas of paint lessen the sense of fully-rounded modeling in the remaining areas of the pictures, even in some sections of skin.

The right hand of the mother in *The Child's Caress*, in particular, is strangely flat, the paint having been pulled in a straight line from the top to the bottom of the form. Dark lines underneath this hand and between the child's fingers create a sense of slight depth, much in the manner of a bas relief [Fig. 109]; this is in contrast to the dark lines in *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*, which are employed to suggest energy and motion when outlining limbs, or seem unmotivated except as evidence of the artist's touch. And whereas the 1880 painting is clearly intended to represent a contemporary interior, the settings of the later pictures are more ambiguous. The background of *The Quiet Time*

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[179] It should be noted in discussing the two oils exhibited in 1891 that *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103] was destroyed more than 50 years ago and is known only through an old photograph that likely exaggerates certain qualities, such as flatness, and that the colors are not known to have been described. Any consideration of the work's formal qualities thus requires a good deal of speculation. I am assuming the work was quite similar in color and handling to *The Child's Caress* [Fig. 104], since critics linked the two works quite closely, and opposed them to the pastels in color and handling in reviews of the 1891 exhibition.

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appears to represent a landscape, but an extremely abstracted one, its forms strangely reminiscent of Paul Sérusier's famous 1888 painting, *The Talisman* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), a key image in the history of abstraction. The background of *The Child's Caress* is similarly indeterminate: are the figures set against a fruit tree, a tapestry or wallpaper depicting a fruit tree, or something else? In any case, the settings are far less obviously contemporary than those seen in Cassatt's Impressionist pictures, and the figures are placed against something more akin to the landscape and tapestry backdrops in old master images of the Madonna and Child.

Lecomte, though highly approving of the paintings, did not find their formal aspects to be completely satisfactory, observing that they were "a little heavy and muted perhaps"; nonetheless, he concluded, they "magnificently represent this sensation of human gravity."[180] Meanwhile, he felt that the pastels, while less sober and ceremonial, still resonated with a virginal virtue by means of their formal aspects:

> With greater happiness, perhaps, the pastels return the mischievous grace of infancy, the light tendernesses; they also neatly evoke a temperament of beautiful placidity. But what graceful and supple freshness! The gestures are alert, the tones shine with purity. The beautiful, milky skin, reddened with health and play, moves freely, in broad folds. The faintness of the shadows, the nimbleness of the contours lighten this mobility even more. The pretty gentleness of the children and the maternal beauty are here quite nimbly rendered.[181]

Lecomte's account of the pastels immediately brings to mind *Baby's First Caress* [Fig. 106], with its expanse of bare pink baby flesh and white-clad mother, and his words again

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[180] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 262: "un peu lourdes et sourdes peut-être"; "donnent magnifiquement cette sensation de gravité humaine."

[181] Ibid., 262: "Les pastels restituent, avec plus d'allégresses peut-êtres, les grâces mutines de l'enfance, les calineries légères; ils evoquent aussi nettement ce caractère de belle placidité. Mais que de fraîcheur gracieuse et de souplesse! Les gestes sont alertes, les tons éclatantes purs. Les belles chairs laiteuses, que roussent la santé et le jeu, se meuvent librement, avec des plis gras. La légèreté des ombres, la prestesse des contours allègent encore cette mobilité. Les jolies gentilesses des enfants et la jolie maternelle sont ainsi fort prestement rendues."

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echo those of Lady Eastlake when she lauded Raphael for his ability to express "the divine in the natural. . . . He knew that a beautiful and healthy baby, unlike most men and women, needs no idealising."[182] Of course, Raphael's children were certainly idealized, and Cassatt's figures have gone through a similar transformation, for while not "divine," neither are they completely "natural." At the same time, Lecomte prefigured the main symbolic thrust perceived by Cassatt's critics after the turn of the century, when she became known as the painter of "health and sanity" through her maternal imagery.[183]

Once more, a comparison with an early mother and child pastel is telling of Cassatt's shift in aesthetic priorities since the Impressionist years. Though she continued to use a choppy pastel stroke in *Baby's First Caress*, the facture is far more controlled than in *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3].[184] In general, pastel is used in the later work for a wider variety of effects, from the smooth flesh tones of the child's torso to the nearly diaphanous quality of the woman's gown. The palette, built around white and light pinks and blues, and the chalky pastel surface recall Florentine frescoes more than the sometimes strident hues of Cassatt's Impressionist pictures. The plain blue-gray background, in combination with a greater area of white and pink, gives the scene an air of serenity. The faces are not pressed together as in *A Goodnight Hug*, in all contradiction of the customary rules of Marian imagery, which stress the complete legibility of the figures'

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[182] [Lady Eastlake], "The Life and Works of Raphael," 192.

[183] A particularly cogent example of this type of criticism is Elisabeth Luther Cary's "Painting Health and Sanity," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* 58 (February 1914), 152-8, in which the critic situates the symbolic importance of Cassatt's imagery within the contemporary "religion of humanity" in which "the old relation of mother and child [is] still the most important one in life" (153). Sarah Burns, in *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), outlines the genesis and importance of this type of criticism in American art, not only as a means to assert a moral message in opposition to the "degeneration" criticized by Max Nordau in his 1893 book of the same name, but also as a way for American artists and critics to distinguish their production from the "decadent" European tradition.

[184] For more information on *Baby's First Caress*, see Pamela A. Ivinski, "Mary Stevenson Cassatt: *A Caress*," *New Britain Museum of American Art, Highlights of the Collections: Volume I* (Munich, New York, London: New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT, in association with Prestel, 1999), 48-9.

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faces. Yet the emotional connection between the figures in *Baby's First Caress* is nearly as intense as that seen in *A Goodnight Hug*. Although the faces do not touch as in the Impressionist picture, their mutual gaze is embodied in the contact of hand and face.

The composition of *Baby's First Caress*, too, is perhaps the most "Raphaelesque" that we have seen in Cassatt's work through 1891. A comparison to the figures as sketched out in a preparatory drawing [Fig. 110] shows how Cassatt widened the mother's body and extended her skirt to more fully encompass the child's body and to strengthen the triangularity of their bodies. His left shin, which bends diagonally away from his torso in the drawing, has been straightened to help create the vertical axis that organizes a composition formed from the small triangle of his corpus fitted within the larger triangle of hers. This axis also serves to emphasize their gestures: his hand cupping her chin at top, and her hand cradling his foot at bottom. The boy's right leg has been pulled in so that his body rests more securely on the mother's lap, and the change in foot position also allows for a glimpse of the child's genitals, which, although rare in Cassatt's work, evinces little of the exhibitionism we saw earlier in Renoir's nursing painting [Fig. 89] while echoing the "sexuality of Christ" in old master pictures.

Though perhaps the most obviously "modern" of Cassatt's 1891 "Modern Madonna" images, *Hélène of Septeuil* [Fig. 105] also mediates between contemporary and old master compositional strategies and concepts of display. Hélène's mother or nurse (the latter seems quite possible here, given her plain dress or coat, as opposed to the child's elaborate outfit) appears to be lifting the girl, perhaps before or after a walk in the park or a social visit. Her gesture, however, also serves to present this sad-faced child in a *chapeau* that self-consciously recalls a halo for the admiration or adoration of the viewer.

Cassatt's pastel technique in *Hélène of Septeuil* also alternates between old master tradition and modern innovation. While the smudged texture of the softly-modeled faces and hair exploits the long-held belief in the consonance between pastel's soft effects and the depiction of female flesh, the bodies are even flatter and less substantial than a bas

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relief. We have seen Cassatt treat figures in a similar manner in *Mathilde Holding a Baby Who Reaches to Right* [Fig. 68], but the effect is exaggerated here by the simplified, more planar pose, and the drawing of the child's plaid coat as a screen, located parallel to the picture plane, and situated over an even scratchier, more unfinished pastel layer. The woman's dress, in a dark and nearly unmodulated brown, has substance only in the sleeve. This extreme flatness, in combination with a new understanding of linearity, likely derived from Cassatt's contemporaneous interest in Japanese prints as well as from Renaissance bas reliefs, gives the composition a taut energy not evident in the other three 1891 pictures. The use of nipped-in curves, for example—starting at the spot where the child's shoulder meets her hat at upper right, moving counterclockwise around the brim to the point where it meets the woman's hair, around the curve of the woman's head until it meets her shoulder, and around the curve of her back to the narrowest point of her waist—creates a series of visual rhymes that emphasize the decorative abstraction that had come to the fore in the color prints. Lecomte's conclusion regarding the oils and pastels implies that he found Cassatt's abstraction—emotional and formal—to have been important in the success of these works. "This very elevated art," he asserted, "has its source in a strongly just vision and in very delicate emotions, exempt from mannerism or convention. The least excess, in this genre, would be intolerable. Mlle. Cassatt guards against it scrupulously."[185]

Félix Fénéon did not explicitly describe Cassatt's 1891 paintings and pastels as representing "modern 'Holy Families,'" but his comments on these pictures touch upon similar issues as those raised by Lecomte regarding their symbolism and formal aspects:

> By [Cassatt]: A child in the arms of its mother. The two heads lean together, or else, the baby [in English in original], its arms outstretched, caresses the mouth of its

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[185] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 262: "Cet art très haut a sa source dans un vision fort juste et dans des émotions très délicates, hors du manière ou du conventionnel. La moindre excessivité, en ce genre, serait intolérable. Mlle Cassatt s'en garde scrupuleusement."

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> mama; and we are not standing before a petulant scene, cutely droll or too sentimental, we are not in front of the capricious whim of a precarious tenderness; the figures remain normal, and a feeling of permanent maternity is softly emitted by the group. If the two paintings and two pastels of Miss Cassatt that illustrate this unique theme have in their conception an equal nobility, the execution of the pastels is one hundred times more seductive than that of the paintings; it is supple and active, it perfectly figures this nude body of the child, these fabrics in lilac, Scotch plaid, white with flowers; in the paintings it tarnishes the faces with mournful shadows, freezes and immobilizes the countryside setting.[186]

Like Lecomte, Fénéon explained that Cassatt's images of mothers and children are not anecdotal or cute; instead, they are "normal," yet they evince "a permanent maternity," existing between the transitory and the eternal. Fénéon, however, went further than Lecomte in distinguishing between the formal qualities of the pastels and oils, preferring the "supple and active" linearity of the pastels to the more static oils.

A comparison between this commentary and a passage from Fénéon's 1890 biographical article on Signac—a section often quoted as a pithy recapitulation of his definition of Neo-Impressionism—demonstrates the degree to which the critic viewed her work as fulfilling many of his Symbolist principles. Signac, Fénéon proclaimed, created "exemplary specimens of a highly developed decorative art, which sacrifices anecdote to arabesque, nomenclature to synthesis, fugitive to permanent, and in its celebrations and its

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[186] Fénéon, "Cassatt, Pissarro," 1728: "De celle-ci [Cassatt]: Un enfant dans le bras de sa mère. Les deux têtes s'accotent ou bien le baby, les bras tendu, caresse la bouche de la maman: et l'on n'est pas devant une scène pétulante, drôlette ou trop sentimentale, devant le fortuit caprice d'une tendresse précaire; les personnages se gardent normaux, et du groupe le sentiment d'une permanente maternité doucement se dégage. Si les deux peintures et les deux pastels dont miss Cassatt illustre cet unique thème ont, dans leur conception, une égale noblesse, l'exécution des pastels, cent fois plus que celle des peintures, est séduisante: elle est souple et active, elle figure à souhait ce corps nu d'enfant, ces étoffes lilas, écossaise, blanche à fleurs; l'autre salit d'ombres mornes les visages, glace et immobilise le décor champêtre."

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magic, confers on Nature—weary at last of its precarious reality—an authentic Reality."[187] His description of Cassatt's oils and pastels conforms to this definition: they are not anecdotal nor fugitive; rather, they are permanent, and by extension, they confer upon Nature "an authentic Reality." Between Lecomte and Fénéon, then, the paintings and pastels exhibited by Cassatt in 1891 were understood as consistent with the newest aesthetic principles regarding the Symbolist aim, as described by Gustave Kahn, "to objectify the subjective."[188]

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Lecomte viewed Cassatt's 1890–91 paintings as successfully assimilating old master precedents into "Modern 'Holy Families'" and her color prints as combining the decorative aesthetic of Japanese art with an "acute modernism," intimating that the artist possessed a broad fluency in symbolic aesthetic languages not normally accorded to the female artist. Moreover, he interpreted some of the gestures in the paintings and pastels in terms of the child's acquisition of language. At the same time, however, Lecomte associated the female figures in Cassatt's images with an animal-like maternity, in keeping with an evolutionary-based argument that was commonly employed in this era as another means for convincing women that motherhood was their natural and only acceptable role. By considering these works with regard to issues of gesture and language, we will be able

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[187] Félix Fénéon, "Signac," *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui* 8 (May 1890), reprinted in Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, vol. 1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), 177: "exemplaires spécimens d'un art à grand développement décoratif, qui sacrifie l'anecdote à l'arabesque, la nomenclature à la synthèse, le fugace au permanent, et, dans les fêtes et les prestiges, confère à la Nature, que lassait à la fin sa réalité précaire, une authentique Réalité"; quoted and trans. in Halperin, *Félix Fénéon*, 137.

[188] Lecomte would make this point even more clear when he revised his review of Cassatt's 1891 exhibition for inclusion in the volume *L'Art impressioniste d'après la collection privée de M. Durand-Ruel* (Paris: Typographie Charmerot et Renouard, 1892). Lecomte opened his discussion of Cassatt with the claim (171): "It is the amplification of the Idea, beyond living reality, that elevates the very distinguished art of Miss Mary Cassatt. From the momentary and the fortuitous she has extracted the most characteristic aspects of things. Under the pretext of painting mamas and babies united in various entwinings, she has achieved the representation of motherly Love." ("C'est à l'ampleur de l'Idée que s'élève aussi, par delà les réalités vivantes, l'art si distingué de Miss Mary Cassatt. Elle a extrait du momentané et du fortuit des choses les caractéristiques aspects. Sous prétexte de peindre des mamans et des bébés unis dans des enlacements divers, elle est parvenue à représenter l'Amour maternel.")

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to see more clearly how they challenged the "natural" alignment of women with primitive, femininized forms of communication rather than purportedly masculine symbolic and artistic languages.

Lecomte, after remarking that the figures in Cassatt's "*'Sainte Famille' modernes*" were inextricably linked through both their expressive movements and the artist's line, had added that the figures' intimacy was "an alliance that is animal above all, that completes, while ennobling, moral affection."[189] As I mentioned earlier, the ancient belief that women remained more animal-like than men had received new support at the end of the century from those who employed evolutionary theory to support the argument that all women are best suited for motherhood and should not aspire to anything different. Even William James, when discussing maternal instinct in his classic *Principles of Psychology*, felt he need not add to the debate, merely quoting a passage from G. H. Schneider's 1882 book, *The Human Will, From the Standpoint of New Evolutionary Theory ("Darwinism").* Schneider claimed that until the wife became a mother,

> she had only thought of her own well-being, of the satisfaction of her vanity. . . . everything that went on about her was only noticed so far as it had personal reference to herself. . . . Now, however, the centre of the world is no longer herself, but her child. . . . She, who formerly could not bear the slightest carelessness of dress, and touched everything with gloves, allows herself to be soiled by the infant, and does not shrink from seizing its clouts with her naked hands. . . . Every limb of the still hideous little being appears to her beautiful, every movement fills her with delight. She has, in one word, transferred her entire egoism to the child, and lives only in it.[190]

Motherhood in this view is a return to an unidifferentiated and less civilized state, in which the formerly fastidious woman now takes pleasure in handling the child's dirty diapers.

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[189] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 261.

[190] G. H. Schneider, *Der menschliche wille, vom standpunkte der neueren entwickelungstheorien (des "Darwinismus")* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler, 1882), quoted and trans. in William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 439.

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Schneider, who had also written on "animal will," then brought the question of maternal instinct back to the level of animals:

> Thus, at least, it is in all unspoiled, naturally-bred mothers, who, alas! seems to be growing rarer; and thus it is with all higher animal-mothers. The maternal joys of a cat, for example, are not to be disguised. With an expression of infinite comfort she stretches out her fore-legs to offer her teats to her children, and moves her tail with delight when the little hungry mouths tug and suck. . . . [The human mother] does not herself know why she is so happy, and why the look of the child and the care of it are so agreeable. . . . Few mothers, in caring for their child, think of the proper purpose of maternal love for the preservation of the species. Such a thought may arise in the father's mind; seldom that of the mother. The latter feels only . . . that it is an everlasting delight to hold the being which she has brought forth protectingly in her arms, to dress it, to wash it, to rock it to sleep, or to still its hunger."[191]

The relation of woman to animal was also taken up in 1890 by Grant Allen and Lester Ward in *The Forum* with regard to instinct and intuition. Allen agreed with Herbert Spencer that "woman's intuition is a variety of instinct; and instinct is the common endowment of all animals possessing nervous systems at all," but he argued against Spencer's claim that woman's intuition is "perforce low because women share it with the lower animals."[192] To the contrary, he claimed, in terms resembling Lecomte's, "it is rather a noble common endowment that man, as male, has largely lost through the gradual evolution, training, and discipline of his logical faculties."[193] Allen further posited that because intuition is a function of emotion—as is art—male genius in art owes to "a certain undercurrent of the best feminine characteristics," not only for "the Raphaels, the Shelleys,

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[191] Ibid., 439-40. Schneider was also the author of *Der thierische Wille* (Leipzig: A. Abel, 1880).
[192] Grant Allen, "Woman's Intution," *Forum* 9 (May 1890), 336-7.
[193] Ibid., 337.

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and the Mendelssohns, but also even of the Newtons, the Gladstones, and the Edisons," who have in them "something of the womanly, though not of the womanish."[194]

Lester Ward, a sociologist who inspired Charlotte Perkins Gilman, took issue with the claim that a feminine type of intuition is a factor in artistic genius. Woman's intuition, he wrote, "is essentially subjective and egoistic. It has self, or what is scarcely distinct from self, as its sole object."[195] Genius, in contrast, "is the precise opposite of all this. It is purely objective and impersonal; it ignores self and despises the common things of life; it denies and shuts out the will, and concentrates the whole being upon the purely ideal and the purely abstract."[196] Furthermore, women "of real genius have very little intuitive power," and more women could develop genius if educated.[197] He concluded, "Women must either be kept within the narrow inclosure [*sic*] in which that habit of thought was developed . . . that is, in a condition akin to the perpetual childhood (*enfance continue*) proposed by Comte; or else, if she is let out into broader fields, she must be furnished with something besides registered experiences of an indefinite past ancestry as a basis for this mental reflex which we call intuition."[198]

In France, Charles Hacks treated questions of maternal instinct and the animal-like nature of women in *Le Geste, Tout dire sans parler* (1892). Hacks contended that women are "anatomically and socially" prone to false gesture until they become mothers. Then, it is "Goodbye corsets, goodbye armor, goodbye bustles of all types. In place of woman is the true woman who fills the role to which she was destined by her sex and the laws of humanity."[199] The humanity of the "true woman," however, partakes equally of the animal

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[194] Ibid., 339-40. As Patricia Mathews explains in *Passionate Discontent*, male Symbolists also valued intuition, but felt that woman's intuition was "squandered and deformed by their feminine shortcomings and fragilities" (6).

[195] Lester Ward, "Genius and Woman's Intuition," *The Forum* 9 (June 1890), 404.

[196] Ibid., 405.

[197] Ibid., 406.

[198] Ibid., 408.

[199] Charles Hacks, *Le Geste, Tout dire sans parler* (Paris: Librairie Marpon et Flammarion, 1892), 70: "Adieu corsets, adieu cuirasses, adieu buses de toutes espèces. Place à la femme, à la vraie femme qui remplit le rôle auquel la destinent son sexe et la loi de l'humanité." Hacks is better known as "Dr.

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world, for in her "the brooding hen is revealed, sheltering her chicks, she defends them."[200] Gesture is now profoundly modified, completely defined by maternal labors:

> the woman will become nurse, rocker, carrier, walker, dresser, washer; her gestures will only be addressed to the child who from the first moments will come to live between her arms as if in a nest. From here the fingers of the mother will turn the child, placate it, fix its hair, amuse it, make it smile . . . the hand will offer the breast, the bottle, the spoon, arrange and brush sprouting hairs, search the mouth for the appearance of the first tooth. . . . The arm of the mother is everything; it is cradle, it is support, it is table, it is game; the child lives inside and around it, and it will always be around him.[201]

In Hacks's scheme, the mother exists primarily as a womb outside the womb to protect the more important male child until he is sufficiently individuated through exercise of the perceptual faculties. Particularly important in this regard is prehension. Building upon Dr. Louis Robinson's comparative study of infants and monkeys in the 1891 article "Darwinism in the Nursery," Hacks used Robinson's finding—that children given a bar to grasp at birth do not oppose their thumbs to the other fingers—as a pretext to "mention in passing" that this simian non-opposition is also found in women.[202] (Robinson had

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Bataille," the pseudonym under which he co-published, with Léo Taxil, *Le Diable au XIXe siècle* (1893-94), a work alleging fantastic tales of Satanism, inspired by the success of Huysmans's 1891 *Là-Bas*. Sidlauskas, in "Contesting Femininity: Vuillard's Family Pictures," and in *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), discusses *Le Geste* with great insight.

[200] Hacks, *Le Geste*, 70: "la poule se révèle, abritant ses poussins, les défendant. . . . "

[201] Ibid., 70-1: "la femme devient nourrice, berceuse, porteuse, promeneuse, habilleuse, laveuse; le geste ne s'adressera plus qu'à l'enfant dont le premier âge va se passer à vivre entre ses bras comme dans un nid. Là les doigts de la mère le tourneront, le placeront, le coifferont, l'amuseront, lui feront risette. . . . la main tendra le sein, le biberon, la cuillère, arrangera la coiffe, lustrera les cheveux naissants, cherchera à surprendre dans la bouche l'apparition de la première dent. . . . Le bras de la mère est tout, il est berceau, il est support, il est table; il est joujou, l'enfant vit dans, autour et à cause de lui et toujours il se tendra vers lui."

[202] Ibid., 46: "Disons en passant que cette non-opposition se rencontre aussi chez la femme"; Dr. Louis Robinson, "Darwinism in the Nursery," *Nineteenth Century* 30 (November 1891), 831-42. Two other interesting articles of the period treating hands and prehension include "A History of Hands," *Cornhill Magazine* 24 (February 1895), 187-96; and Charles Féré's "La main, la préhension et le toucher," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 41 (June 1896), 621-36.

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experimented with more than 60 infants, half less than an hour old, finding that all but two could support their body weight for at least ten seconds while hanging from a bar.) The male child's first gesture, however, is the reflex of prehension; like Hippolyte Taine's child, "he will try to take and draw to him all that he will find," especially the nurse's breast.[203] By age seven, he regularly opposes the thumb and has internalized gestures that assert his unique being, while the female child participates in the reproduction of mothering, imitating her mother's motions and "already giving her doll lessons in gesture."[204]

At the same time that Robinson and others were studying the reflex actions of infants in order to discern the human debt to, and evolutionary distance from, primate ancestors, other researchers approached the same question from the perspective of language and its acquisition by children. One popular theory, that of onomatopoeia, held that children learn to speak by imitating sounds and associating them with an object. As the Reverend Frederic W. Farrar explained in his important volume, *Chapters on Language*, "all lies in the discovery, by a child, that a rude ideal imitation of the bark of a dog may serve as a sign or mark for the dog itself."[205] Farrar acknowledged that this lesson might be learned with the assistance of female caregivers, stating, "every nurse and every mother is guided by the swift, beautiful, and unerring beneficence of instinct to follow the very same process which the great mother, Nature, adopted when man was her infant child;—or let us say, in language more reverent, and not less true, that such a process is in instinctive unconscious accordance with the great method of the Creator."[206]

Another renowned linguist, Max Müller, dismissed onomatopoeia as the "bow-wow theory." He also maintained, as reported by E. P. Evans in an 1892 article, that philosophers rather than linguists were best suited to the study of language, for the

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[203] Hacks, *Le Geste*, 47: "il essayera de prendre et d'attirer à lui tout ce qui se trouvera. . . ." On Taine, see my Chapter Four.
[204] Ibid., 55: "donne déjà des leçons de gestes à sa poupée. . . ."
[205] Rev. Frederic W. Farrar, *Chapters on Language* (1860), 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873), 17.
[206] Ibid.

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philosopher goes beyond animal cries and human interjections and believes he "discovers in the line which separates rational from emotional language, conceptual from intuitional knowledge,—in the roots of language he discovers the true barrier between Man and Beast."[207] Evans opposed this idea, claiming, "Doubtless the emotional stage precedes the intellectual or rational stage in the growth of language, but the former mode of expression does not cease when the latter begins, nor is it possible to draw a fixed and fast line of demarcation between them," before predicting that science would soon confirm that no absolute differences exist between animals and humans.[208]

Unlike Evans, however, most students of gesture and language in the 1890s continued to promote the view that animal intelligence could be clearly demarcated from human intelligence, and that women, as possessors of an emotional, intuitional language, were more closely aligned with animals than with men. In 1891, similar opinions seem to have been on the minds of some of Cassatt's critics, such as Lecomte, who positioned Cassatt's mothering figures as animal yet noble. Like Hacks, he emphasized the figures' complete absorption in each other, and in particular, the ways in which the mother's body, as Hacks described it, is "everything" to the child. Lecomte wrote of Cassatt's 1890–91 works:

> a woman, her robe a bit undone as if to be quickly ready for nursing, walks down the paths of a garden with her *baby*, pressing him to her breast with large maternal hands, skillful and good. She cannot yet talk to him, but it is of him that she is thinking. She is conscious of her responsibilities at the same time that she has a grave pride in her motherhood. He nestles, the child; all is pink with fresh life in this embrace that is the whole world for him. He has a quietude, a perfect serenity. Or else, amused by the living toy that is his mother, he presses, with gentle awkwardness, his chubby

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[207] E. P. Evans, "Speech as a Barrier Between Man and Beast," *Atlantic Monthly* 68 (September 1891), 300.
[208] Ibid.

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> hand upon her lips that murmur and let sounds pass through. Here is what interests him: he wants to sound and feel it out. Except for his mother, he ignores everything.[209]

The Quiet Time [Fig. 103] is the work Lecomte described as depicting the woman on a garden path who nurses her child, while *The Child's Caress* [Fig. 104] and *Baby's First Caress* [Fig. 106] each represent a child who holds a hand to the mother's lips. (*Hélène of Septeuil* [Fig. 105] is absent from the passage; it may have appeared too modern or not sufficiently intimate for him to specify as one of these "*'Saintes familles' modernes.*")

In recent Cassatt literature, the hand-to-mouth caressing motion remarked upon by Lecomte has been related to the ancient "chin chuck" gesture, which originated in Greece and Egypt, where it denoted affection, erotic persuasion, or supplication.[210] In late antiquity, it came to signify the union of love and the human soul, as in representations of Cupid and Psyche [Fig. 111]. Even in the sacred art of Romanesque period, as in depictions of Herod and Salomé, the gesture retained an erotic dimension. During the Renaissance, the "chin-chuck" connoted St. Augustine's idea of the Christ as the Infant Spouse and a more generally humanizing tendency in the representation of divine figures. The amatory yet sacred use to which the gesture was traditionally put in Marian imagery is thus consistent with Lecomte's reading of Cassatt's work and the idea of the *épouse* become *mère*, who exchanges her adult sexuality for her relationship with the child.

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[209] Lecomte, "A Coté des Peintres-Graveurs," 262: "une femme, la robe en peu dégrafée comme pour de subits allaitements, promène, dans les allées d'un jardin, son *baby* que ses larges mains maternelles, adroites et bonnes, serrent contre son sein. Elle ne peut encore lui parler, mais c'est à lui qu'elle songe. Elle est consciente de ses responsibilités en même temps qu'elle a une fierté grave de sa maternité. Il se blottit, l'enfant; tout rose de vie fraîche, dans cette étreinte qui est pour lui tout le monde. Il a une quiétude, une sérénité parfaites. Ou bien, amusé par le jouet vivant qu'est sa mère, il plaque, avec des gentilles maladresses, sa main potelée sur ces lèvres qui remuent et laissent passer des sons. Cela l'interesse: il veut tâter. Hormis sa mère, il ignore tout."

[210] On the history of the "chin chuck" gesture, see Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 3-7, 110-8. For a recent discussion of Cassatt's use of the "chin chuck" gesture, see Pollock, *Mary Cassatt, Painter of Modern Women*, 198-202. My interpretation of the gesture moves in a parallel direction to Pollock's, in that we both understand it in relation to the child's individuation. Her interpretation, however, relies more heavily upon current psychological theory, while mine looks to place the work within psychological views during the period of the work's production, especially with regard to the acquisition of language.

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At the same time, this type of motion also brings to mind *fin-de-siècle* ideas relating gesture to the acquisition of language. In an 1893 article on "The Language of Childhood" Frederick Tracy followed the transformation of the syllable *ma*, which was "in the majority of cases, the first articulation" of the infant:

> At first this is pure spontaneity. The child lies contentedly in his cradle, motor energy overflows, the lips move, gently opening and closing, while the breath is expired, and this sound is produced, *mamamama*. As yet it has no meaning; it is a purely automatic utterance. But by and by the same sound is called forth by certain sensations, one of which is very probably the sight of the mother, or of some other person. The word as yet has no definite meaning, but is merely a sort of vague demonstrative ejaculation, a pure reflex. Later it becomes the expression of certain bodily needs and conditions, and now the hungry child utters this sound as the expression of the need of his natural nourishment. By this means, the word becomes firmly associated with the mother, first probably with the breast only, but afterwards with her person in general, and so the final step in the transition is made, and the word *mama* now passes out of the semi-conscious, instinctive stage into the ideational. It becomes firmly associated with the mother, and with her only, it is used with a conscious purpose of communicating to her the child's wishes and ideas and, finally, in her absence, it is used in such a way as to show that her image is firmly stamped on his mind, and retained in his memory.[211]

Interpreted in the context of this process, one can imagine the children in Cassatt's works as using the "chin chuck" gesture in order to make the association physically concrete: what he or she wants to "sound" and "feel" out with the hand is the concept of *mama*. Lecomte's choice of verb here, *tâter*, reinforces this reading, for it signifies both "to sound out" and "to palpate."

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[211] F[rederick] Tracy, "The Language of Childhood," *American Journal of Psychology* 6 (October 1893), 134.

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While Tracy did not specifically discuss the sense of touch in relation to the acquisition of language, F. B. Dresslar's 1894 analysis of the importance of tactile sensation in the development of the sense of self is also useful in the consideration of Cassatt's pictures. Dresslar stated, "the skin is the boundary between the ego and the non-ego . . . all that is within is subject, and without is object."[212] Comprehension of this boundary arises out of "double cutaneous sensation." For example, if a child "takes its foot in its hand there are two wholly different sets of sensations presented simultaneously, and because of their unlikeliness there must come a feeling, or consciousness of otherness, which in no wise could come through any set of single impressions."[213] This appears to be the moment depicted between Cassatt's *Nursing* [Fig. 83] and *Maternité* [Fig. 87]: in the print, the mother/nurse holds the child's foot, while in the pastel, the child touches him- or herself. As the infant begins to associate the breast with *ma*, a sign communicative of and representing a solution to hunger, he or she also starts to differentiate between another's touch and the sensation of touching oneself. By the time of *The Child's Caress* [Fig. 104] and *Baby's First Caress* [Fig. 106], the child is old enough to pronounce *ma* intentionally as he or she seeks to physically "stamp" on the mind the memory of the mother's presence through tactile contact.[214]

In the 1880s, Paolo Mantegazza considered this type of gesture, explaining, "The true organ of caress is the hand. . . . It is not without reason that *caro* (dear) and *caress* have the same etymology. The hand which caresses seeks the hand or, in the tenderer

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[212] F. B. Dresslar, "Studies in the Psychology of Touch," *American Journal of Psychology* 6 (June 1894), 316-7.

[213] Ibid., 318.

[214] The gesture also makes me think of Helen Keller, who in 1887 first began to learn language when Anne Sullivan spelled "water" into her palm, and who began to learn to speak in 1890. It is also interesting to note that when Keller attended the 1893 Columbian Exposition (at which Cassatt's "Modern Woman" mural was exhibited), the psychologist Joseph Jastrow tested her perceptions at the Anthropological Building, and she was allowed to touch the displays throughout the fair. On this subject, see Joseph Jastrow, "Psychological Notes on Helen Kellar [*sic*]," *Psychological Review* 1 (July 1894), 356-62. Keller was an occasional visitor to the home of Cassatt's closest friend, Louisine Havemeyer.

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movements, the face of the loved one."[215] He observed that a degree of reciprocity is achieved through this kind of motion: "In a caress one gives and receives at the same time. The hand which distributes love, as by a magnetic effusion, receives it in turn from the skin of the loved one."[216] Because the child's hand touches the mother's lips as well as the chin in *The Child's Caress* and *Baby's First Caress*, the caressing aspect of the motion is doubled, for the mother may kiss the hand, and actively rather than passively return its gesture of love. This motion also enables the exchange of information regarding speech: the child pronounces *mama* while touching *mama* at the same time that the mother pronounces *mama* for him or her to simultaneously hear and feel.

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, most psychological theories, beginning with Freud and continuing until recent feminist revisions, have understood the acquisition of language to be a situation in which the father brings the word to the child, splitting the mother/child dyad that had previously communicated using an embodied, pre-verbal language of gesture. The father, bearer of "civilization" in the form of symbolic rather than natural language, enables the child to enter into society. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, this concept had not yet been fully formulated, and most psychologists emphasized the mother's part in the acquisition of language as an important—and safely instinctual—function. Alfred Fouillée, for instance, believed the male "element" demonstrated a "general tendency toward the active, roaming, and exterior life" and the female "element" a "state of relative immobility, a character of concentration and integration" in which one can recognize the "character of intimacy, of interiority, of union, that distinguishes the mother and makes of her the creator of the nest, the home."[217] Yet

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[215] Mantegazza, *Physiognomy and Expression*, 140.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Alfred Fouillée, "La Psychologie des sexes et ses fondements physiologiques," *Revue des deux mondes* 119 (September 1893), 403: "tendance générale à la vie active, voyageuse et extérieure"; "état d'immobilité relative, le caractère de concentration et d'intégration"; "ce caractère d'intimité, d'intériorité, d'union, qui distingue la mère et qui fait d'elle la créatrice du nid, du foyer." Fouillée here is summarizing ideas from Armand Sabatier, *Recueil des mémoires sur la morphologie des éléments sexuels et sur la nature de la sexualité* (Montpellier: C. Coulet, 1886).

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he did not see the need for the father at the early stages of language. To the contrary, he declared, "it is not solely practical cares that only the mother can give: she alone is also best suited to the first intellectual and moral education of the child. Her speech, her example are the best teaching for an age which is dominated by the imitative instinct."[218] This is not because the mother remains, as Schopenhauer had claimed, like an infant all her life, but because "only mothers are capable of completely forgetting themselves" in providing this education; "their devotion is to them not a 'second nature' but their first."[219]

James Sully, in an 1884 article on "Baby Linguistics," believed that mothers saw their role as the teachers of language as a means for maintaining closeness to the child, at the moment when the accomplishment of walking has begun to take the child away:

> Locomotion separates the child from [the mother] and renders him, in a measure, independent of her, and while proud to see the new powers unfold, she has her pleasure dashed by a presentiment of the rupture of that close and tender relation which grows out of the helplessness of infancy. Language, on the other hand, binds together mother and child by new bonds. The eagerness of a sympathetic mother to learn every want of the child makes her long for the day when the ample channels of speech will be opened. Thus both her pride and her instinct to retain her child in close personal union with herself lead her to hail the moment when the powers of speech first distinctly manifest themselves.[220]

While the scientific value of Sully's observation is somewhat doubtful, the acquisition of both speech and locomotion are indeed significant aspects of the child's individuation, involving a drama of intimacy and separation. An image like Cassatt's drypoint *Mother*

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[218] Ibid., 413: "ce ne sont pas seulement les soins matériels que seule la mère peut donner: seule aussi elle est apte à la première éducation intellectuelle et morale de l'enfant. Sa parole, son exemple sont le meilleur des enseignemens pour un âge où domine l'instinct imitateur."

[219] Ibid.: "les mères seules sont capables de s'oublier elles-mêmes: le dévoûment est pour elles non pas une 'second nature,' mais la première."

[220] James Sully, "Baby Linguistics," *English Illustrated Magazine* 2 (November 1884), 110.

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Marie Dressing Her Baby After Its Bath [Fig. 112] seems to speak to this moment: the child keeps the mother in close touch but at the same time at arm's length.

Gustave Geffroy's discussion of Cassatt's 1891 exhibition also brought to the fore the child's experimentation with movement, facial expression, and language. He briefly praised the color prints for their "newness of vision, an adaptation of their processes to modern spectacles" before moving on to the paintings, which he saw as depicting

> in a group precise and sweet at the same time . . . portraits of women and children, of a clear observation, a beautiful science of movements. She has seen exactly, in very bright gardens, pink babys [*sic*]; playing or scowling, trying out gestures, and she has also seen well the freckled faces of women, with hard, rural foreheads and neat, serious, and impassive faces, the nurses of children from the village, and correct German governesses.[221]

Geffroy emphasized the non-idealizing features of Cassatt's work, describing the "freckled" faces and "hard, rural foreheads" of her female figures, though to some degree he did characterize her method as distilling something eternal from the ephemeral, as in her "beautiful science of movements."

Geffroy's discussion also raises another interesting issue regarding language acquisition at the end of the nineteenth century: the role of the nurse or governess. In the early 1880s, Mrs. Sherwood reported, "It is very much the fashion now even for people of wealth to have a polyglot family of servants—a German nurse and a French governess, an English maid and a Spanish waiter—thinking that their children will pick up a dozen

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[221] Gustave Geffroy, "Pastellistes et peintres-graveurs 28 avril 1891," reprinted in *La Vie Artistique* vol. 1 (Paris: E. Dentu, 1892): "une nouveauté de vision, une adaptation de ces procédes à des spectacles modernes" (316); "d'un ensemble précis et doux à la fois . . . portraits de femmes et d'enfants, d'une observation nette, d'un belle science de mouvements. Elle a vu exactement, dans des jardins très clairs, des babys roses; joueurs ou renfrognés, essayant des gestes, et elle a bien vu aussi des femmes aux visages tachés de rasseurs, de fronts durs de rurales, des visages nets, sérieux, impassibles, de bonnes d'enfants villageoises, de gouvernantes allemandes correctes" (316-7).

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languages with their playthings."[222] "Th. Bentzon" (Marie-Thérèse Blanc) similarly noted in her 1896 article, "About French Children": "Now we have the foreign nursemaid, who takes the child when it is just beginning to lisp, and before it knows how to speak its own language well. At present an English or German nursemaid is to be found in every well-to-do family."[223]

Octave Uzanne, not surprisingly, had a caustic view of the children's nurse in 1894. The nurse, he wrote, is usually German or English, and she is generally treated with some respect. But she may not actually deserve that respect, for "It is amusing to see her, in the public gardens, displaying the greatest affection for her little charges, joining in their games, that is, if Madame is present, but cross, haughty, and ready with slaps if she is alone with the 'little brats.' Her favourite occupation is to make eyes at the passers-by."[224] If Cassatt intended to represent the nurses or governess in some of her pictures, hers is clearly a more sympathetic portrait than Uzanne's; her women, with "neat, serious, and impassive faces" are more concerned with their young charges than with "making eyes" at young men. They perform their duties with enough solemnity that, even if not biologically related to their young charges, they could be described by some critics as representing an ideal type of mother.

This solemnity derives not merely from the facial expressions and poses of Cassatt's female figures, but also from the more abstract formal elements in the pictures—the simplification of forms, the restrained facture, the muted palette—in other words, the artist's visual language. As Natasha Staller demonstrates, artists and writers of the Symbolist movement took a great interest in language during a period that also saw a wide range of concern with such issues, from the theorists and scientists I have already

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[222] [Mary (Mrs. John) Sherwood], *Amenities of the Home* (1881) (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1884), 13.

[223] Th. Bentzon [Marie-Thérèse Blanc], "About French Children," *Century Magazine* 52 (October 1896), 809.

[224] Octave Uzanne, *The Modern Parisienne* (1894) (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 55-6.

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cited to those concerned with the development of Esperanto or secret codes for military use.[225] It was also at this moment that Ferdinand de Saussure and his teacher, Michel Bréal, modernized linguistics by arguing that the relation between sign and meaning is not inherent but purely arbitrary, and that meaning moreover depends upon context. The Symbolists sought to overturn conventional means of expression, the "natural" languages they believed to be bankrupt of meaning, while also attempting to rediscover "primitive" forms of communication (such as "*l'arabesque pure*") that would be universally comprehensible throughout the ages—but only to those "initiated" into the "mysteries" of art.[226]

Though Staller does not discuss these languages in terms of gender, she does describe the ultimate aim of these artists as that of enabling themselves to act in a stereotypically masculine manner, to be "colossally powerful—the magician—able to reshape, redefine, reinvent anything *at will*."[227] Scholars such as Patricia Mathews have shown that the Symbolist conception of communication generally precluded the participation of women. Those who dared to traffic in the same languages often risked complete ostracization, as was the case with Camille Claudel, who was eventually characterized by Rodin and his circle as insane.[228] Rather, the Symbolists preferred to utilize the female body as a conduit for their messages. As Staller explains, Denis's famous dictum on painting was intended to suggest that various subjects—"a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote"—were "somehow interchangeable and ultimately negligible."[229]

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[225] Natasha Staller, "Babel: Hermetic Languages, Universal Languages, and Anti-Languages in Fin de Siècle Parisian Culture," *Art Bulletin* 76 (June 1994), 336-7.
[226] Ibid., 337, 346.
[227] Ibid., 354.
[228] See Patricia Mathews, *Creative Discontent,* chapter 4: "The Gender of Creativity: Women, Pathology, and Camille Claudel."
[229] Staller, "Babel: Hermetic Languages, Universal Languages, and Anti-Languages," 337.

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Rambaud, however, when he presented Cassatt as a Virgin-like figure with life-giving powers, placed her within the general realm of these initiates into the "mysteries" of art, and critics such as Lecomte and Fénéon, while not elevating her to the same level as a Signac or Seurat, nevertheless recognized her fluency in the artistic languages of her period, whether "Post-Impressionist," "Primitive," "Japanese," or "Arabic." That she could move with ease between these various means of communication while addressing questions of language and gesture in the subject matter of some of her pictures challenges the absolute distinctions between "women's intuition" and artistic genius made by Lester Ward. Cassatt's fluency also calls into question the fantasy of the calligraphic line as one of pure demarcation, the dream that writing or drawing might finally enable one to discover, as Müller claimed, "the line which separates rational from emotional language, conceptional from intuitional knowledge . . . the true barrier between man and beast"[230]—or male and female, for that matter.

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Considered in total, then, the two oil paintings, two pastels, and ten color prints exhibited by Cassatt in 1891 supported a remarkable range of interpretations, from Geffroy's naturalistic yet not utterly realistic "beautiful science of movements" to Lecomte's idealizing and art-historically relevant "*'Sainte famille' modernes*" to Fénéon's uncanny "arabesques." Drawn from two widely different artistic traditions—old master Madonna and Child imagery and eroticized Japanese prints—but based in a careful observation of everyday behavior that at times parallels or even rivals the findings of contemporary psychology, the resulting compositions appear to various degrees both spontaneous and eternal, natural and symbolic, old master (or Japanese) and modern. The sophistication of the imagery demonstrates that Cassatt's artistic strategies were anything but naive or unconscious, as some critics suggested at the time.

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[230] Evans, "Speech as a Barrier Between Man and Beast," 300.

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Cassatt's use of the "chin-chuck" gesture in her paintings and pastels epitomizes her working process at the moment, for it is not precisely a "chin-chuck" but something more complicated: she took an unrehearsed action that over centuries became symbolic and returned to it a degree of ingenuousness. The color prints, too, speak to—and challenge—the simultaneously natural and abstract aspect of the arabesque brought to the fore by Riegl and Schlegel. According to Riegl's research, the arabesque, originally modeled from an organic model (the acanthus leaf), metamorphosed into an evocation of the written word before being returned again to a more natural, acanthus-like shape, but one that in its final state is purely non-referential. It is thus both what Schlegel termed a *Naturprodukt* and a *Kunstprodukt*.[231] Cassatt's 1891 color prints, incorporating the incisive, realist-oriented line of her 1889–90 drypoints with decorative devices associated with Japanese and Arabic ornament and the flat colors of Japanese prints, move between naturalistic representation, writing, and non-figurality without ultimately erasing or abandoning the female body, even in works that evoke the "utter self-forgetfulness" encouraged in the mother.

III.

Though Cassatt received the occasional mention of critics writing in the *New York Times*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Art Amateur*, among others, she was still relatively unknown in her home country upon receiving an important commission to paint a mural for the 1893 Columbian Exposition, to be held in Chicago. When offered the project in 1892, she wrote to Louisine Havemeyer, "at first I was horrified, but gradually I began to think it would be great fun to do . . . and as the bare idea of such a thing put Degas in a rage and he did not spare every criticism he could think of, I got my spirit up and said I would not give up the idea for anything."[232] Degas and Pissarro agreed that the

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[231] Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, 34.

[232] From a fragment of a letter from Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Bachivillers, 1892, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 229 n. 2.

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"decorative picture is an absurdity, a picture complete in itself is not a decoration,"[233] and Cassatt reported, "You ought to hear Degas on the subject of a woman's undertaking to do such a thing, he has handed me over to distruction [*sic*]."[234] The mural [Figs. 113, 114] is far too complex a topic to treat fully here, but I would like to consider a few aspects of its symbolism and context in order to more fully comprehend a number of related works completed by the artist in the same period, works that both parallel and diverge from concurrent Nabi experiments in *décoration*.[235]

The mural assignment, to create a fourteen-by-fifty-eight-foot image of "Modern Woman" to be hung in the Woman's Building as a pendant to Mary Fairchild Macmonnies's "Primitive Woman," provided Cassatt with her first opportunity to explore the principles of *décoration* involving large-scale public works rather than those associated with the private interior and graphic arts. At this moment the central figure in grand style decorative painting was Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, who had recently completed a number of important murals, including the 1889 *Sorbonne* (Grand Ampithéâtre de la Sorbonne, Paris), and the 1890 *Inter artes et naturam (Between Arts and Nature)* (Musée des beaux-arts, Rouen) [see Fig. 115]. Puvis not only reinvigorated the French mural tradition and its "idealism," and supplied a new approach to decorative

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[233] Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 2 October 1892, in *Camille Pissarro: Letters to His Son Lucien*, trans. and ed. John Rewald (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1981), 259. In this letter Pissarro is reporting on a conversation he had with Degas regarding "Miss Cassatt's decoration."
[234] Mary Cassattt to Camille Pissarro, Bachivillers, 17 June 1892, trans. in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 229.
[235] The most recent important discussions of the mural include Sally Webster, "Mary Cassatt's Allegory of Modern Woman," *Helicon Nine* 1 (Fall/Winter 1979), 39-47; Frances K. Pohl, "Historical Reality or Utopian Ideal? The Woman's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (1982), 289-311; Carolyn Kinder Carr and Sally Webster, "Mary Cassatt and Mary Fairchild MacMonnies: The Search for Their 1893 Murals," *American Art* 8 (Winter 1994), 53-69; and Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 87-97. On Nabi *décoration*, see Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, and Elizabeth Prelinger, "The Art of the Nabis: From Symbolism to Modernism," in *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, ed. Patricia Eckert Boyer (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, co-published with The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1988), especially pp.107-19.

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painting as a means of expression for those artists dedicated to modernist form, such as the Nabis, but also managed to please critics from both sides of the political spectrum.[236]

Cassatt, given free rein to elaborate her own concept of "Modern Woman," decided to create a three-part image, with a central panel depicting "Young women plucking the fruits of knowledge or science," which enabled her to "place my figures out of doors & allowed of brilliancy of color" as she described it in an 1892 letter.[237] For the side panels, she chose "young girls pursuing fame," which seemed to her "very modern & besides will give me an opportunity for some figures in clinging draperies," and "Arts, Music (nothing of St. Cecelia) Dancing & all treated in the most modern way."[238] Her choice to represent "Modern Woman" in connection with knowledge, science, and the arts in an outdoor setting, as well as her selection of certain Puvis-like poses for her figures, suggests that his Rouen project, which looked at the relation between the arts and nature, as well as the Sorbonne mural, which thematized the pursuit of knowledge (including the arts and sciences), played a prominent part in her thinking.

In some ways, however, Cassatt's assignment was more difficult that any given to Puvis, for to portray "Modern Woman" by means of allegory is something of a paradox, if we understand "modern" to signify something new (and, in the case of Cassatt's "Modern Woman," actively seeking change), and if we expect allegory to represent an abstract concept or an eternal truth. And though Puvis challenged the traditional notion of allegory as "an image pointing transparently beyond itself to a transcendent truth guaranteed by God," opening it up to Symbolist suggestiveness and a play of meanings,[239] the concept of "Modern Woman"—as one of the most widely debated questions of the late nineteenth century—would seem to defy definition and representation.

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[236] For a recent introduction to Puvis and the decorative tradition in relation to the Nabis, see Nicholas Watkins, "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic," in Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, 1-18. On Puvis's murals, see Shaw, *Dream States, Puvis de Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France*.

[237] Mary Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Bachivillers, October 11, [1892], 238.

[238] Ibid.

[239] Shaw, *Dream States*, 127-8.

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Mariana van Rensselaer, who reported on Cassatt's uncompleted mural for the *New York World* in late 1892, remarked upon the difficulty of the subject, describing it as "the problem how to portray modern woman in a monumental decoration where, while the nature of the theme prescribes 'realism,' a baldly naturalistic portrayal of actual industrial or domestic scenes would be pictorially out of place."[240] Cassatt, she wrote, solved the problem by representing "groups of young women and children in their marvels of Parisian gowns" (Cassatt had dresses made for her models by the best couturiers, including Worth), "imitating the First Mother and eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge." On the surface, "Modern Woman" as conceived by Cassatt and Van Rensselaer would seem to involve a balance between traditional religious symbolism and a Baudelairian effort "to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history" (though by appealing to the "honest" rather than the "fallen" women favored by Baudelaire).[241] Yet the meaning surrounding the "Garden of Eden" story was no more settled at this moment than the concept of "Modern Woman." While artists such as Gauguin and Rodin continued to employ the figure of Eve in her conventional role as the seduced and seducing woman responsible for the Fall of Man, "Tree of Knowledge" symbolism was also frequently utilized in this period with regard to the "woman question," and women's access to knowledge, education, and the vote in particular.

Charles Worcester Clark, for instance, in an 1890 article on "Woman Suffrage, Pro and Con," looked to both the biblical story and evolutionary theory, explaining, "The miserable masculine biped, after six thousand years of tyrannizing over his better half, now willfully monopolizes the ballot as a last desperate means of continuing his degenerate

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[240] Mariana G. Van Rensselaer, "Current Questions of Art," *New York World* (15 December 1892), 24. This writer did not actually visit Cassatt in France to view the mural, but relied upon a report from Sara Hallowell, Secretary to the Director of Fine Arts for the Exposition.

[241] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964), 12. Van Rensselaer wrote an article, "At the Fair," *The Century Magazine* 46 (May 1893), 5-13, instructing "conscientious" visitors to the exposition to reject the pose of the *flâneur*, who "does not crave knowledge . . . but delights in impressions" (11), and to adopt instead a viewing plan that would allow for a maximum of instruction.

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ways, in spite of the eagerness of progressive woman to lift him again to the heights of virtue; and certainly it is not an unreasonable proposition that if an apple in woman's hand caused man's fall, a ballot in the same hand might work his restoration."[242] George Romanes, who believed that women had smaller brains than men and were thereby less capable of originality, felt there was no harm in allowing women to pursue the social and legal changes that might enable them to foster their creativity, opining, "the days are passed when any enlightened man ought seriously to suppose that in now again reaching forth her hand to eat of the tree of knowledge woman is preparing for the human race a second fall. . . . I say, give her the apple, and see what comes of it."[243] Mrs. Amelia Barr worried that if "young women are to be allowed to strip the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, then it is high time some system of education was invented which will put old heads on young shoulders," while in 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton began to publish a "Woman's Bible" with commentary restating the "Garden of Eden" story in terms favorable to Eve for seeking to educate herself.[244]

For all its usefulness as a symbol for dealing with issues of "Modern Woman," Cassatt had another reason to look to "The Tree of Knowledge" when creating her mural, one relating to questions of science and modern art. In the same 1892 letter in which she described her three-paneled program to Bertha Palmer, Cassatt also made reference to a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article by William J. Stillman. The critic, she wrote,

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[242] Charles Worcester Clark, "Woman Suffrage, Pro and Con," *Atlantic Monthly* 65 (March 1890), 310. Mariana van Rensselaer, who appreciated Cassatt's mural program of the "Tree of Knowledge" in 1892, also published articles in the *World* opposing woman suffrage in this same era, collected in the book, *Should We Ask for the Suffrage?* (New York: Thomas Powell, Stationer and Printer, 1894).

[243] George J. Romanes, "Mental Differences Between Men and Women," *Nineteenth Century* 21 (May 1887), 672.

[244] Mrs. Amelia E. Barr, "Good and Bad Mothers," *North American Review* 156 (April 1893), 415. Sally Webster discussed the relation of Cassatt's mural to Stanton's "Woman's Bible" in "The 'Ultra' Feminism of Mary Cassatt: Murals for the 1893 Woman's Building," a lecture first delivered at the College Art Association's annual meeting in 1992.

The figure of Eve was also invoked for feminist purposes in France at this time by Maria Deraismes, in *Ève dans l'humanité* (1891), reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes de Maria Deraismes* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1895), and Jules Bois, *L'Ève Nouvelle* (Paris: Léon Chailley, 1896).

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> declares his belief that in the evolution of the race painting is no longer needed, the architects evidently are of that opinion. Painting was never intended to be put out of sight. This idea however has not troubled me too much, for I have passed a most enjoyable summer of hard work. If painting is no longer needed, it seems a pity that some of us are born into the world with such a passion for line and color. Better painters than I am have been put out of sight. . . .[245]

In "The Revival of Art" Stillman accused contemporary painting and sculpture (as opposed to poetry, music, and dance) of succumbing to materialism through the practice of realism.[246] The "naturalistic representation" of the "impressionist" school, he belived, was "science, and not, strictly speaking, art at all," and he argued:

> The evolution of the individual follows the general law; and that, in all art, is that invention precedes imitation. Pure decoration with arbitrary forms, generally geometrical, precedes the representation of natural objects. This passion for decoration and the harmonious arrangement of forms, sounds, colors, or movements is the essential element of all art. The love of nature is a distinct and completely subordinate element. Without the recognition of this law, the development of a true and progressive art, the foundation of a school, is impossible.[247]

Asking whether "the revival of art is of any importance to humanity," he admitted to "the possibility of [art's] utter inutility to the spiritual or intellectual evolution of the race; of its having finished its work as an agent in that evolution, and having, in general, a purely historical value."[248]

A revival, Stillman felt, could not be accomplished by going back "to the childlike simplicity of all archaic art, with its dominant unsophisticated rendering of the central idea, and its slow normal and evolutionary attainment of perfection. We know too much of the

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[245] Mary Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Bachivillers, October 11 [1892], 238.
[246] William J. Stillman, "The Revival of Art," *The Atlantic Monthly* 70 (August 1892), 252.
[247] Ibid., 252, 256.
[248] Ibid., 257.

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fruit of the tree of knowledge to accept it in its greenness. Science has already too much forereached on art for the latter to begin again. . . ."[249] He believed there would be no call for the revival of art except for portraiture, because "the leading motive in the majority is vanity, and the highest virtue domestic affection. For the awakening of the highest artistic faculties we have neither the desire nor the ability. We understand vaguely what is like nature, and we confound the representation of nature with art."[250]

Cassatt, having responded to the challenge of Degas's belief in the wrongheadedness of her mural, both as a decoration and as an unsuitable project for a woman, was likewise clearly provoked by Stillman's words, for she was an artist closely associated with naturalism and the representation of domestic affection. In taking on the commission, she may have also had one more issue in mind, regarding the relation of women and decoration as it was concurrently being reshaped in France. In the 1890s a movement to revive French design traditions (particularly the rococo) that had been gathering steam since the early 1880s took on a new emphasis stressing the potential contribution of aristocratic women to handicrafts, in part as a means of occupying those who might be tempted to break out of conventional roles into more "masculine" aspects of the arts.[251] The group behind this movement, the *Union centrale des arts décoratifs* (whose members included many of Cassatt's critical supporters and patrons, among them Henry Havard, Roger-Marx, Charles Ephrussi, and Antonin Proust), planned a series of exhibitions in the 1890s promoting the use of organic forms that equated women with nature as they also attempted to establish an "Arts of Woman" separate from the arts of men and contiguous with the private interior. This effort encouraging women to create arts for the home while serving as organicized ornaments themselves is embodied in a

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[249] Ibid., 253.

[250] Ibid., 260.

[251] See Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, especially chapter 11, "Art Nouveau: Organicizing and Feminizing the Crafts in the Central Union of the Decorative Arts." Silverman's book has not only been extremely useful in providing a context for my thoughts, but has served as a model for historical scholarship linking feminism, politics, psychology, and the arts.

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cover design adopted for the *Union centrale*'s journal, the *Revue des arts décoratifs*, after 1895 [Fig. 116]. While the original cover had featured a rococo frame enclosing the title information, this new design transformed the device into an arch surrounding a beautiful young woman perched on the branches of a fruit tree.[252]

Another important aspect of the decorative arts revival was its imbrication within a republican program of "familial feminism" which was supported by many well-known French society women and philanthropists, who for the most part accepted the sexual division of labor in the family while seeking to improve women's access to some financial and educational opportunities.[253] Cassatt was in many ways sympathetic to this program, having chosen the mother and child theme as one of the main subjects of her art. Furthermore, by dressing her "Modern Women" in gowns by Worth (whose designs would be extolled in the *Revue des arts décoratifs* in 1896),[254] Cassatt situated her figures to a certain extent within the aristocratic milieu of the "familial feminists." As William C. Brownell (who was an early admirer of Cassatt's work) explained in an 1889 article on "French Traits—Women," "To be the ornament of a society . . . to be perpetually and universally charming, to contribute powerfully to the general aims of her environment, never to lose her character as a woman in any of the phases or functions of womanly existence, even in wifehood or maternity—this central motive of the Frenchwoman's existence is cordially approved by the Frenchman. . . . It is for this reason that she devotes so much attention to dress. . . ."[255] Brownell believed that the situation of American

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[252] Ibid., 193-4.

[253] "Familial feminism," a term coined by Karen Offen in "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984), 648-76, is discussed by Silverman in *Art Nouveau*, especially pp. 65, 74, 196-9.

[254] See Gaston Worth, "Comme se fait la mode, causerie d'un couturier," *Revue des arts décoratifs* 16 (1896), 120-6. An editorial footnote at the beginning of the article expresses disapproval of Worth's "greatly disappointing theories about the aptitude for artistic initiative of the weaker sex" (120 n. 1: "théories fort décevantes sur les aptitudes d'initative artistique du sexe faible"), among them, the idea that women are motivated purely by jealousy of other women rather than taste when choosing *couture*.

[255] W[illiam] C. Brownell, "French Traits—Women," *Scribner's Magazine* 5 (January 1889), 76. For Brownell's thoughts on Cassatt's works, see W. C. Brownell, "The Younger Painters of America. III.," *Scribner's Magazine* 22 (July 1881), 333-4.

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women could be improved if American men allowed them to be more like Frenchwomen, who were not, once married, expected to be "virgins in word, thought, and aspiration."[256] He concluded, "The position of woman in France at the present time is certainly one of the results of modern civilization working upon, socially speaking, the most highly developed people of a race which 'invented the muses and chivalry and the Madonna'—and of that race the people which has produced by far the greatest number of eminent women."[257]

Cassatt reported in her October 1892 letter to Mrs. Palmer that while her subject in the mural was not "The Modern Woman as glorified by Worth," as one New York paper had written, it was one of femininity: "An American friend asked me in rather a huffy tone the other day 'Then this is woman apart from her relations to man?' I told him it was. Men I have no doubt, are painted in all their vigour on the walls of the other buildings; to us the sweetness of childhood, the charm of womanhood, if I have not conveyed some sense of that charm, in one word if I have not been absolutely feminine, then I have failed."[258] But at the same time, by the very act of accepting the mural commission, Cassatt signaled her refusal to comply with the contemporaneous attempt to limit women to the small-scale handicraft traditions encouraged by the *Union centrale* as most suited to the feminine temperament and least disruptive of maternal duties. At this moment, too, the Nabis had begun to move *décoration* away from its grand public form as practiced by Puvis into the private interior through their *panneaux décoratifs* (decorative panels). While Cassatt's work of the period has much in common with their efforts, she could not refuse an invitation to promote her alternate views, which held that women were capable of the kinds of large-scale statements that had previously only been allowed to men, and that such statements could take as their subject "modern woman" rather than

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256 Brownell, "French Traits—Women," 78.

257 Ibid., 87. Brownell also discussed the *vieille fille* in relation to the "Tree of Knowledge" in this article, noting that eventually she "tacitly suffers her already cynically disposed *milieu* to infer that she does not really merit the ridicule she would inevitably receive upon the supposition of her total unfamiliarity, even by reputation, with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (83).

258 Mary Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Bachivillers, October 11 [1892], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 238.

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using women's bodies in the guise of the idealized female figures or as decorative objects. Her "Modern Woman" may be placed within nature (a "domesticated" version of nature, to be sure, for it is an orchard populated with beautifully dressed women as well as dogs, turkeys, and geese), but she is not presented as merely a decorative element within her organic surroundings, like the figure on the *Revue des arts décoratifs* cover. Nor does she simply perch among the branches in the orchard as an object for admiration; rather, she actively climbs the ladder to pluck the fruits of knowledge and science.

Cassatt's choice to include women and young girls within her mural's three panels while depicting babies only within its decorative borders—women functioning apart from, but always framed by, infants—could also be understood as communicating an equivocal attitude toward "familial feminism" and its organicizing decorative tenets. The artist created the border "to reduce the huge space as much as possible. . . . to enable me to paint a picture in each of the spaces left where the figures would be rather under life size," as she wrote to MacMonnies, adding, "You will perceive that I went to the East for the foundation of the idea. . . . The border is the only attempt I have made at decoration pure and simple."[259] On the one hand, this scheme of figures within an ornamenal border could be read as supporting "familial feminism" by showing women who remain contented within the boundaries of maternity and the decorative craft traditions associated with the feminized interior. On the other, it could be read as suggesting the impossibility of the "Modern Woman" escaping from that frame, much in the manner of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story, "The Yellow Wall-paper."

The "Modern Woman" mural and its "Tree of Knowledge" theme, then, allowed Cassatt to respond to a number of challenges regarding acceptable roles for women, in and outside of art, as well as the relation of her Impressionist-derived aesthetic to newer theories of *décoration*. American critics, however, most of them unfamiliar with

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[259] Mary Cassatt to Mary Fairchild MacMonnies, Bachivillers, [December 1892], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 243-4.

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Symbolist innovations, generally found the mural to be unsuccessful both as an allegory of "Modern Woman" and as a decorative scheme. Only Lucy Monroe, writing in *The Critic*, gave a thoroughly positive review, finding the work to be "admirably decorative."[260]

The more prevalent critical view was expressed by Florence Fenwick Miller, who wrote in the *Art Journal* that "Mural decorations are not within the competence of every good artist; but the singular failure of these frescoes can hardly be accounted for on any reasonable theory."[261] Miller objected to both the color ("garish and primitive") and the theme, for it showed "Modern Woman"

> engaged in no more characteristic an occupation than gathering apples off trees. Now, we are all too sadly aware that Eve herself gathered apples, and there is nothing whatever modern about this group of young women. . . . One of the side panels displays the "Modern Woman" doing a skirt dance; one girl is seated upon the ground and plays a banjo, while another young woman holds her accordion-plaited heliotrope skirt quite up to her nose, her head languishing on one side, and the high kick evidently just about to be given. Eve, perhaps, did not dance a skirt dance, but her early successors, the degraded women in the Orient, as certainly were required to perform some such evolutions for the diversion of their masters; and the development of modern woman has every tendency opposed to such displays. But the third panel is the most curious. There we see an objectionable female nude figure soaring in the sky without wings. . . . far below her are three hideous girls, running and vainly reaching up after the flying phantom, and one gathers the idea that this is "Modern Woman" in the useless pursuit of fame.[262]

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[260] Lucy Monroe, "Chicago Letter," *Critic* 19 (15 April 1893), 241. The other mainly positive review of the mural was published not by an art critic but by the novelist Marietta Holley in her extremely popular "Samantha" series of books, as told by "Josiah Allen's Wife"; see *Samantha at the World's Fair* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1893), 260-1.

[261] Florence Fenwick Miller, "Art in the Woman's Section of the Chicago Exhibition," *Art Journal* 55 (August 1893), supp. xiii.

[262] Ibid.

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Miller's comments bring to mind the ornament-inspired "delirium of the dance" and ecstatic dervishes discussed by Blanc, and she concluded, "Miss Cassatt is evidently a joker, and has been 'taking a rise' out of the enthusiastic ladies who have employed her."[263]

In fact, Mrs. Palmer, the most important of the "enthusiastic ladies" who had employed Cassatt, had already written to the artist with her approval of the mural, stating, "It is simple, strong, and sincere, so modern and yet so primitive, so purely decorative in quality, and with still the possibility of having an allegory extracted if one wants to look for that sort of thing." Nonetheless, she preferred to focus upon its formal aspects rather than allegorical meaning, for she added, "It does seem a pity to torture such a lovely piece of decoration with any attempt at forcing a stilted meaning into it."[264] Frances E. Willard, another of the "Lady Managers" instrumental in the organization of the Woman's Building exhibits, found the mural's decorative aspects to be disturbing, writing, "Miss Cassatt's painting is of the extremest expressionist school, with its vivid hues so strangely mingled. The controling [*sic*] tints are an intense green, an equally intense blue, and a deep purple; and the flat effect is pronouncedly Japanese."[265] Nontheless, Willard stated (perhaps because she might be held responsible for the commission), the mural "has, however, a singularly finished appearance and much merit from an artistic point of view."[266]

Henry Fuller went so far as to read evidence of Cassatt's personality through her color, claiming in the *Chicago Record* that "Miss Cassatt does not address the eye at all—she assaults it. Mrs. Macmonnies' tone is light and silvery, while the impudent greens and brutal blues of Miss Cassatt seem to indicate an aggressive personality with which compromise and cooperation would be impossible. Indeed, Miss Cassatt has a reputation

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263 Ibid.
264 Bertha Palmer to Mary Cassatt, Chicago, December 15, 1892, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 242.
265 Frances E. Willard, "Woman's Department of the World's Fair," in William E. Cameron, *The World's Fair* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Willey & Co., 1893), 454.
266 Ibid., 455.

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for being strong and daring; she works with the men in Paris on their own ground. . . ."[267] To Fuller, Cassatt herself was somewhat too modern and masculine a woman.

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In late November 1893, shortly after the closing of the Columbian Exposition, where "Modern Woman" had been on view since April, Cassatt sold a group of three paintings and one pastel to Durand-Ruel, some of them quite closely related to the theme of the mural: *The Bath* [Fig. 66], *The Family* [Fig. 117], *In the Garden* [Fig. 118], and *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple* [Fig. 119]. These four works, in addition to a color print done at approximately the same moment, *Gathering Fruit* [Fig. 120], all share an interest in decorative qualities such as flattened forms, the contrast of pattern-on-pattern, and arabesque shapes. But even at her most decorative, Cassatt always retained an allegiance to the clearly discernible female form.

Compare Cassatt's *Bath* [Fig. 66], for instance, to Edouard Vuillard's *The Dressmaking Studio I* [Fig. 65]. With respect to their interest in pattern, the two works are uncannily similar, from the geometric shapes of the floor coverings to the stripes of the gowns to the flowery spots on the walls, but in terms of the figures, the images could not be more different. One could say (in a manner paralelling Segard's discussion of the "large blue poufs" in *The Blue Room*) that the real subjects in Vuillard's painting are the textiles themselves, which seem stiff enough to stand up without the figures inside them. In contrast, the patterns around Cassatt's figures emphasize the embodiedness of the woman and child, setting off the smooth, bright flesh of the girl in particular.

Gathering Fruit [Fig. 120], too, is also quite similar to a Nabi work, Maurice Denis's *The Ladder in Foliage* (or, to use its original title, *Poetic Arabesques for the Decoration of a Ceiling*) [Fig. 121]. Denis's picture, though a large-scale painting,

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[267] Henry B. Fuller, *Chicago Record* (1893); quoted in Jeanne Madeleine Weimann, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy, 1981), 315. Weimann's book is an extremely interesting (though minimally footnoted) account of the organization and reception of the entire Woman's Building.

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employs a reduced color scheme that derives from his interest in the simplifications inherent to the graphic arts, as seen in Cassatt's print. His use of linear pattern is also more reminiscent of the printmaker's line than the painter's brushstroke, an effect that is emphasized by the extravagant volutes formed by the hems of the swirling dresses. But although Denis's figures are portrayed in a golden light that sets them apart from the organic background, the insistent linearity of their dresses and the rhyming arabesques of their coiffures suggest that they are also at one with the ornamental landscape, interchangeable to a great extent with the abstract patches of sky visible through breaks in the leaves. Their insubstantiality is intensified by the angle that causes us to view the figures from below, so they seem to hover, bringing to mind biblical figures and themes including angels and the Assumption of the Virgin.[268] The figures in Cassatt's *Gathering Fruit*, on the other hand, are both flatter and more substantial. Though Cassatt's print also features elaborate gowns, these dresses exhibit a tension between the etched lines describing their pleats and folds and the aquatint patterns that are laid squarely over those lines without curving to follow the contours of the dress. The resulting decorative effect is more interesting than Denis's conventionally pretty arabesques because it is less resolved: the gowns are simultaneously flat and volumetric, descriptive and ornamental. And though Cassatt's figures are set in a walled garden, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, perhaps, they do not float, and they are not otherworldly or angelic in the same manner as Denis's.

Whereas the figures in the print *Gathering Fruit* are solidly human, much like the figures in the 1891 series of color prints, Cassatt did create paintings in this period that looked back to traditional religious imagery in the manner of her "*'Sainte Famille' modernes.*" *The Family* [Fig. 117] is by far the most "Raphaelesque" of all Cassatt's compositions, bringing to mind specific works of the Italian master such as the *Garvagh*

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[268] Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, 82.

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Madonna [see Fig. 122]. Like Raphael, Cassatt has constructed a scene of careful geometry, going so far as to center the carnation within a frame created not only by the children's arms (as in Raphael's picture) but by the mother's arm as well. In a similar manner, the curves of the arches behind Raphael's figures have been transformed into the sweeping bends of the wicker chair back at left and the garden path at right. Perhaps no work in Cassatt's oeuvre is more monumental, and it features one of the most palpable babies she would ever create. Yet, the convincingly rounded child sits atop a comparatively flat gown, and the background, though employing the path to suggest a dramatic recession into space, is thinly painted and artificial in effect. Moreover, Cassatt's figures are drawn straight from the "Modern Woman" mural, and by replacing St. John the Baptist with a young girl, the artist has reworked the religious symbolism of the old master picture in a manner that suggests a modern feminism at odds with the original sacred intent of this "Holy Family" scene.

In some ways, *The Family* is quite similar to images done by Pierre Bonnard at the same time, for he too explored domestic subject matter in the early 1890s.[269] His *Les trois ages (Maternité)* [Fig. 123] also makes reference to another type of "Holy Family" image: those pictures including the Virgin's mother, St. Anne. Still, a more flat figural work can hardly be imagined, and the blocky pattern of the mother's dress has far greater presence than any of the figures (as does the artist's conspicuous inscription of signature and date, for that matter). Cassatt did begin to approach this same level of decorative abstraction in her pastel, *In the Garden* [Fig. 118]. In no other work of hers is the tension between flat and round so much the subject of the image. The mother wears one of the enormous-sleeved gowns coming into fashion in the mid-1890s, but the insistent diagonal stroke with which it is drawn and the patches of paper visible beneath the pigment contradict its

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[269] On this aspect of Bonnard's *oeuvre*, see Helen Giambruni, "Domestic Scenes," in Colta Ives, et al., *Pierre Bonnard: The Graphic Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 39-92. Giambruni suggests that Bonnard saw Cassatt's works on view in 1891, which "may have spurred him on to see how far he could push Japanist abstraction in treating similar subjects" (45-6).

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volume. The blues of the sleeve set off the shining yellows of the gown as well as the child's white dress. The pastel arabesques and squiggles representing flowered patterns further compress the bodies. The faces, however, though scratchily drawn, retain some roundedness, which is both echoed by and contrasted against the strange circular forms behind the figures. (Are they flowers? Fruits?) *In the Garden* also has an analogue in Bonnard's work of the period: *Mother and Child* [Fig. 124]. As flat as Cassatt's work may be, she did not diminish the figural presence in the same way that Bonnard did through his handling and composition, which reduce the mother's face to a smear and the child's head and body to protean patches of white and flesh-toned paint.

When William Walton reviewed *In the Garden* and the final painting from this group, *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple* [Fig. 119], which were shown at Durand-Ruel's New York gallery in 1895, he brought the tension between Cassatt's decorative technical means and her concern for legible embodiedness to the fore. "The advancing and receding planes are sometimes carefully attended to and sometimes neglected in these works, as the painter thought them important in her scheme or not," he observed, "but the solidity of the figure is always taken care of; and the roundness, generally."[270] In addition, he found "no hampering by definite rules about 'finish.'" In the case of *In the Garden*, "the large, dark-red flowers in the background, which perhaps, keep their places, and perhaps do not, are all but dominated by the brilliant spots of orange, green, and yellow in the mother's dress."[271] As for *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple*, "the sturdy naked body of the baby is very delicately relieved against the nurse's pink dress, of almost similar value and color. The heavily laden boughs come down very solidly over their heads, and the stretch of grassy lawn behind them is painted almost flat—this painter believing that we see much less aërial perspective than we think we do."[272]

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[270] William Walton, "Miss Mary Cassatt," *Scribner's Magazine* 19 (March 1896), 360.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid., 361.

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At the same time, Walton found the psychological presence of Cassatt's figures compelling: "The mystery, real and fictitious, of these small, naked infants counts for even more in the obsession of the painter than the thorny technical problem of presenting their bodies—and she seems to render it even more truly. That later prophet Nordau, in his character as general scold, could never say of her infants as he does of those of Miss Kate Greenaway, that they are the disordered products of an unfortunately diverted love of children."[273] Walton then described two of Cassatt's infant sitters of the period, one of them the child seen in these two works, "with scant yellowish hair" and "very effective dark eyes": "For both of them she renders most sympathetically that imposing air of infancy, that putting-on of strangeness and unutterable knowledge, which no consciousness on our part of its unreliability deprives of its power over us."[274] Of her adult sitters, he continued, "there is the same search for character and truthfulness, with even less regard for that mere prettiness of expression that was once thought so requisite in similar subjects."[275]

As I discussed in Chapter Four, Cassatt began to explore decorative principles long before the Nabis, in works from the late 1870s and early 1880s that involve wallpaper and textile patterns (i.e. *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3], *The Blue Room* [Fig. 6], and *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* [Fig. 56]). Her 1890–91 series of ten color prints and this last group of images done in relation to the "Modern Woman" project demonstrate that Cassatt also created a number of pictures that productively explore the relation of figure to pattern or ground concurrently with, but in a different manner than, works by these male artists that are now considered to be touchstones in the early history of abstraction. Cassatt, I have argued, never dissolved her figures into their environments to

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[273] Ibid., 355-6.
[274] Ibid., 356.
[275] Ibid.

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the same degree as her male counterparts because she had a different type of investment in the representation of the female body.

In works like *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple*, Cassatt continued to experiment with decorative flatness, simplification of form, and expressive color without compromising the presence of her figures, without weaving them seamlessly into the natural landscape as if they were merely ornamental devices; she also made reference to art historical forebears without exactly replicating the messages of feminine chastity and self-erasure so often associated with such sources. In *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple*, the maternal body is formidable, dominating the landscape even while forming part of it. And unlike most critics, Cassatt was capable of invoking the pleasures and dangers of the maternal body, addressing its solidity and comfort without suggesting that the mother's arms must always feel tethering or smothering (though sometimes she alluded to this aspect of maternity, too). Here, as in those images exhibiting the so-called "chin chuck" gesture in particular, she acknowledged the mother as the prompt to individuation, introducing the "apple" of knowledge or helping the child to sound out its first attempts at speech. In other words, she continued to represent the uncanny double aspect of the mother, whose body once served as the original *Heim* for the child, and who must also encourage him or her to leave behind the Edenic aspects of this relationship, in works mediating between the traditional, idealizing symbolism of the Madonna and Child, and the modernist, abstracting qualities of the decorative aesthetic.

Of course, the very features of mediation or compromise that can be appreciated in the early twenty-first century as preserving a degree of integrity for the long idealized or denigrated female image are the same aspects that caused Cassatt to be written out of masculinist, abstraction-dominated histories of art early in the twentieth century.[276]

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[276] Sidlauskas has convincingly argued that the art of Vuillard and Denis has been valued primarily for the manner in which it suppressed female sexuality (and at times, female gender) in favor of formal abstraction. She further maintains that we can recuperate in some of Vuillard's works a certain resistance to this objectification, a resistance that challenges a once-dominant trajectory of modernism. See

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Cassatt's formal innovation can now be recognized, in order that she may be written into a more comprehensive theory of modernism, one that acknowledges the role of gender in the writing of such theory. By looking back to old master tradition without depicting her women solely as Virgins or angels, by potraying them as playing a part in the child's acquisition of knowledge and language without suggesting that this was a strictly animal-like, instinctual, evolutionary duty, Cassatt responded to the debates of her day with an imagery that may not have satisfied the program of formalist abstraction as it would develop from this very moment. Her work, rather, represents a compromise and a tension between the dominant aesthetic trends of her day and her own need to keep women from being absorbed into the decorative environment in her art.

* * *

Whatever Cassatt's role in the histories of modernism, the pictures discussed in this chapter also had a significant effect on her actual life. In 1894, Léonce Bénédite attempted to acquire *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103] for the Musée de Luxembourg, which housed the French state's collection of works by living artists. (Cassatt explained, "It was the only painting that pleased them, they found it free of 'sentimentality.'")[277] Unfortunately, the artist had already sold the work to Durand-Ruel, and the museum purchased works from artists alone. The dealer refused to sell the work back to Cassatt, the impasse was not overcome, and the artist was not be represented in the Luxembourg collection until 1897, when she donated the recently completed pastel, *Little Anne. Sucking Her Finger*.[278] Nevertheless, she was greatly honored by the request, to be acknowledged as a museum-worthy artist alongside her Impressionist peers.

"Contesting Femininity," 111. Giambruni, in "Domestic Scenes," points out that Bonnard, because he moved away from "the near-abstract patterning of his work in the early nineties toward a looser, more atmospheric style reminiscent of his Impressionist predecessors and more tied to the look of things" was viewed as having a "lack of Symbolist conviction" (39-40) Thus he, like Cassatt, does not play into the trajectory of formalist modernism in the same way as Vuillard or Denis.

[277] Mary Cassatt to Paul Durand-Ruel, [February 10, 1894] (original in French), trans. in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 255.

[278] BrCR 277. This work is now in the collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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But more importantly, the money she made from sales at this time, particularly from the color prints, allowed her to buy the Château de Beaufresne, in Mesnil-Théribus, outside Paris, which would remain her primary home for the rest of her life. The American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton had given a speech in 1892 in which she declared of women, "To throw obstacles in the way of a complete education is like putting out the eyes; to deny the rights of property is like cutting off the hands. To refuse political equality is to rob the ostracized of all self-respect, of credit in the market place, of recompense in the world of work, of a voice in choosing those who make and administer the law, a choice in the jury before whom they are tried, and in the judge who decides their punishment."[279] Cassatt had pursued an art education against all odds and expectations for women in the first years of her career. Now, she would begin to sell enough work, created with her own hands, to allow her to ensure her "self-respect," "recompense in the world of work," and finally, the ability to buy property. (Only by staying unmarried, however, was she able to enjoy the "rights of property" in France.) In the years to come, she would increasingly devote her time and energy not only to the representation of women but also to further securing their rights to education, property, and the vote. She did so not only through her example as a successful artist and property owner, but through her activism, becoming involved in education for girls and women in both France and the U.S., and supporting woman suffrage alongside Louisine Havemeyer, organizing an exhibition of her own works along with those of Degas and various old masters to benefit the cause in 1915. The "double retreat" of Impressionism into the museum and the interior in her case would have some positive benefit for the public and private rights of women.

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[279] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self," address before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage, 20 February 1892, reprinted in *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections from the Classic Work of Stanton, Anthony, Gage, and Harper* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 326.

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MARY CASSATT, THE MATERNAL BODY, AND MODERN CONNOISSEURSHIP

by

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CHAPTER SIX — *"NO ATTEMPT AT ANECDOTE, NO ASSAULT ON SENTIMENT": CASSATT'S MOTHER AND CHILD IMAGES, 1893–1910, AND MODERN CONNOISSEURSHIP*

In 1891 Mary Cassatt benefited from her first solo exhibition, which showcased her latest works and reestablished her place within the avant garde, as she bridged the Impressionism for which she had initially gained renown and the newest Symbolist trends that had since come to the fore. In 1893—twenty-five years after her first Salon acceptance—Galeries Durand-Ruel in Paris organized the first "retrospective" exhibition of Cassatt's oeuvre, and then her first one-person exhibition of original works in the United States, held in New York in 1895. While most critics were impressed by the artist's 1891 show, the 1893 and 1895 exhibitions drew a wider range of opinions, particularly with regard to questions of her artistic origins, influences, sources, and of course, her gender. And despite the fact that more than half the pictures on view in both shows treated subjects other than the mother/child theme, Cassatt was positioned by Durand-Ruel and understood by critics principally as an artist treating maternal subject matter.

At this same time, Madonna and Child imagery was coming under new scrutiny, not only as a subject of veneration within the Catholic Revival occurring in France and as an iconographic element in Symbolist art but also as a topic of study within the rapidly growing literature of art history and connoisseurship. Most significant in this respect are Bernard Berenson's widely read books on the Italian painters of the Renaissance, published beginning in 1894. Other important volumes specifically treating Marian symbolism included the 1895 reissue of Anna Jameson's *Legends of the Madonna* (1852) as well as a new study, *The Madonna in Art* (1897), by Jameson's American disciple Estelle Hurll. Old master depictions of the Virgin and Child were increasingly being made available to artists, critics, and the general public during the 1890s through both art

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historical and popular sources. Many of these publications were produced in response to a public demand for images being fostered by advances in photographic technology, while others were more closely related to the booming secondary art market, in which Cassatt played a significant role as an adviser to the Havemeyers.

At the same moment, however, Berenson's writings in particular set the stage for the rejection of maternal imagery and its associated emotional content as viable subject matter for modernist artists. Indeed, it is significant that his concept of "tactile values"—the two-dimensional simulation of three-dimensional space that reminds the viewer of the sense of touch—was first articulated in 1896 when he originated the now canonical comparison between the Uffizi *Maestà* panels by Cimabue and Giotto [Figs. 1, 2].[1] The image of the Madonna and Child, which by the late nineteenth century was more valued as a vehicle for the artist's skill in the depiction of emotion than as an aid to worship, became in Berenson's hands most important as an instrument for "mak[ing] us realize forms better than we do in life."[2] This founding moment in the development of Formalism and its emphasis on unembodied values of touch and movement therefore occurred in tandem with the repudiation of the significance previously accorded to the emotionally expressive and embodied gestures and glances long celebrated in Western art in the figures of the Madonna and Child—and in Cassatt's images of mother and child.

This chapter is divided into four sections that move between Cassatt's maternal imagery and its reception from 1893 through 1914 and the emergence of formalism as it stemmed from Berenson's work, which concerned not only a specialist audience but was extensively discussed in the popular press. The first section examines the response to Cassatt's 1893 and 1895 retrospective exhibitions and the manner in which critics sought

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[1] Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896), reprinted in *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, vol. 2 (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 1968), 5-6. Hayden B. J. Maginnis discusses the novelty of Berenson's selection of this particular painting by Giotto to embody his theory of tactile values in *Painting in the Age of Giotto: A Historical Reevaluation* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 84-5.

[2] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 16-7.

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to comprehend Cassatt's role within what could now be seen as Impressionism's place in the history of art. The second section analyzes "tactile values" in the context of 1890s ideas about the sense of touch, in order to consider how Berenson's privileging of an "ideated" rather than embodied tactility attempts but cannot succeed at the repression of the uncanny female/maternal body. The third part of the chapter juxtaposes "tactile values" as Berenson applied them to Madonnas by Cimabue, Giotto, and Raphael with a group of mother and child pictures created by Cassatt in the late 1890s, to see where his theories and her practice diverged, despite their common ground in the same stock of images from art's history. The fourth and final part of Chapter Six looks at the popularization of psychology and the growth of eugenics at the same moment that the primary interest in Cassatt among critics and patrons shifted to the United States. There she was increasingly understood to be, as Elisabeth Luther Cary would claim in 1914, the painter of mothers and children who epitomized a "health and sanity" that were inextricably linked to the artist's American origins and the plain features of her models.[3]

I.

Cassatt's first retrospective exhibition, which opened at Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, in November 1893, comprised 17 oil paintings, 14 pastels, and 67 prints. However, it was not a true "retrospective" in the sense that it did not include any of her Salon-era pictures, most of which were already in the collections of Cassatt family members living in the United States. The earliest example of the artist's work on view was one of her inaugural Impressionist pictures, the c. 1877–78 *A Woman in Black at the Opera* [Fig. 31]. In total, not quite two-thirds of the original works dated to the Impressionist era, eight of them actually having been shown in the Impressionist exhibitions. The remainder were more recently completed, including a number of images related to the "Modern Woman" mural, among them *The Family*, *In the Garden*, and *Nude Baby Reaching for an*

[3] Cary, "Painting Health and Sanity," 152-8.

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Apple [Figs. 117-119]. The newest works were the pastels *L'Enfant à l'Orange* (now known as *Portrait of Miss Margaret Milligan Sloane (No. 1)*) [Fig. 125] and *Contemplation* (private collection), an image of a pensive woman holding a fan.[4]

Although neither of these new pictures showed Cassatt to be focusing exclusively on maternal subject matter, André Mellerio's catalogue preface explicitly defined her as an artist specializing in this theme, opening with the declaration, "The source of inspiration for Miss Cassatt is—Woman and Child."[5] He then explained, "That which Miss Cassatt has sought in woman is less her delicate grace, that fragile flower of fleeting voluptuousness, than the austere but ennobling aspect of maternity. And here appears the distinctive trait of the eminently practical and entirely energetic race to which this artist belongs,"[6] thus introducing the matter of Cassatt's national origin, which reemerged as an important matter to critics, after having been little considered since her early Impressionist years. By this time the Impressionist movement had become recognized as a discrete historical phenomenon and was increasingly being analyzed as such, while the growth of scientific connoisseurship fueled interest in organizing artists and schools (not to mention connoisseurs and critics) according to geographical origin. At issue, too, were broader questions of nationalism, particularly with regard to European concerns about declining birth rates and the preservation of national traditions and characteristics, in addition to "national treasures" of art. (Cassatt's expulsion from the Peintres-Graveurs after they took

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[4] Cassatt regularly began to take on portrait commissions at this moment. Typically, she would make a number of works after each subject in the course of the commission, turning over one version to the patron, while keeping the other versions and sketches to sell. Miss Sloane was a relative of the artist.

Contemplation is BrCR 250; it is now known as *Clarissa Turned Right, with Her Hand to Her Ear.* Lent by G. Murat to the 1893 exhibition, this work would come to be owned by Roger-Marx.

[5] André Mellerio, "Miss Cassatt," *Exposition Mary Cassatt* (Paris: Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1893), 3: "La source d'inspiration de Miss Cassatt, c'est—la Femme et l'Enfant." Portions of this preface were reprinted in English in 1895 as "Exposition Mary Cassatt. Gallery Durand-Ruel, Paris. November-December, MDCCCXCIII," trans. Eleanor B. Caldwell, *Modern Art* 3 (November 1895), 4-5.

[6] Mellerio, "Miss Cassatt," 3: "Ce que Miss Cassatt a recherché dans la femme, c'est moins la grâce délicate, fleur fragile de volupté fugitive, que le côté austère, mais ennoblissant, de la maternité. Et là apparait le trait distinctif de la race éminemment pratique et toute d'énergie à laquelle appartient l'artiste."

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on a nationalistic agenda in 1891 is evidence of these concerns among contemporary artists.)

In addition to establishing Cassatt's American origin, Mellerio defined the artist in terms of her gender, but not in the deprecating manner of most male critics. Instead, he emphasized her self-reflexive sophistication and achievement: "Miss Cassatt knows [*connaît*] and understands the woman of the world—because she is one herself. She expresses and renders her with a rare happiness and perfect justness because she is also by her very nature an artist. Miss Cassatt has the self-respect of a woman of the world, a refined education, a regard for her dignity, and a character of lofty pride which commands esteem."[7] Moreover, he agreed with an opinion he ascribed to Degas, who had "recognized and appreciated in her a truly virile artistic personality."[8]

Nonetheless, Cassatt's artistic "virility" and status as a "woman of the world" did not preclude her interest in the mother and child, for, as Mellerio declared, "Above all things, we would say, she is attracted by maternity. She has not chosen its conventional and easily melodramatic aspects, any more than she has exaggerated its purely material details. Her native distinction never abandons her."[9] Like Lecomte in 1891, Mellerio described Cassatt's images of infancy and maternity as exhibiting a "holy animality":

> She has seized the instinctive gestures of the life still lisping, opening its naive and astonished pupils to the day. Glimmers of intelligence, precursors of the future, pass through these eyes with a brilliant shine that existence has not yet tarnished. . . . In its grace, still entirely animal, in its innocent immodesty, amid irrational attractions, this being is already pierced by a higher order. In like manner, the humble occupations to

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[7] Ibid., 4: "Miss Cassatt connaît et comprend la femme du monde,—parce qu'elle l'est elle-même. Elle l'exprime et la rend avec un rare bonheur et une parfaite justesse, parce que c'est aussi une nature d'artiste. Elle a de la femme du monde le respect de soi-même, l'éducation raffinée, ce souci de sa dignité et ce caractère d'une fierté haute, qui commandent l'estime."

[8] Ibid.: "eut reconnu et apprécié en elle une personnalité d'art vraiment virile."

[9] Ibid., 4-5: "Surtout, disions-nous, elle s'est attachée à la maternité. Elle n'en a pris les côtés conventionnels et facilement mélodramatiques, pas plus qu'elle n'en a exagéré les détails purement matériels. Sa distinction native ne l'abandonne jamais."

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which mothers give themselves up take on dignity from a feeling of duty that makes them seem necessary, I might almost say sacred.[10]

Mellerio then linked Cassatt's Impressionist-derived "painting of light" with the discourse of the recently founded field of eugenics as well as *fin-de-siècle* ideas about the relative youth and purity of America—the pinnacle of heredity—in opposition to the degeneracy of Europe:

> The children, like the mothers, sparkle with fresh health. One feels a young race, retaining its vigor through a rational education and maintaining the equilibrium of the human body through the legitimate exercise of its forces. These beings of open allure, breathing freedom in the calm of their physiognomy, derive the magic of their complexion from the air and the light. The air and the light—aren't these also what constitutes the attraction and the power of Miss Cassatt's note of art![11]

But at the same time, the artist was seen as combining the contingent and the enduring; according to Mellerio, Cassatt "has known how to draw admirable profit from the colors and lines of modern costume. This is her secret and her merit—like that of the masters—to have conserved the solid depth of humanity, the eternal thread of all artistic work, embroidering with it the thousand nuances of an epoch, a race, a milieu."[12] In his final paragraph, he concluded, "In all sincerity one must say that, with the exception of

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[10] Ibid., 5: "Elle a saisi les gestes instinctifs de la vie encore bégayante, ouvrant au jour ses prunelles naïves, étonnées. Des lueurs d'intelligence, précurseurs de l'avenir, passent dans ces yeux d'un poli brillant que l'existence n'a pas encore terni. . . . Dans sa grâce encore toute animale, dans son impudeur d'innocence, au milieu d'allures irraisonnées, perce déjà l'être d'ordre supérieur. De même, les humbles occupations, auxquelles les mères se livrent, prennent une dignité au sentiment du devoir qui les fait paraître nécessaires, je dirai presque sacrées."

[11] Ibid., 6: "Les enfants comme les mères brillent d'une santé fraîche. On sent une race jeune, entretenant sa vigueur par une éducation raisonnée, maintenant l'équilibre du corps humain par l'exercice légitime de ses forces. Ces êtres aux allures ouvertes, respirant la franchise dans le calme de la physionomie, empruntent la magie de leur teint à l'air et à la lumière. L'air et la lumière,—n'est-ce pas aussi ce qui fait l'attrait et la puissance de la note d'art chez Miss Cassatt!"

[12] Ibid., 7: "a su tirer un admirable profit des teintes et des lignes du costume moderne. C'est son secret et son mérite,—comme celui des maîtres,—d'avoir conservé le fonds solide d'humanité, trame éternelle de toute oeuvre artistique, en y brodant les mille nuances d'une époque, d'une race, d'un milieu."

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Whistler, Miss Cassatt is perhaps the only artist of an elevated, personal, and distinguished talent that America actually possesses."[13]

Léon Roger-Milès expressed a similar point of view, also focusing on Cassatt as a painter of children in a brief critical mention in *Le Siècle*: "Miss Cassatt paints the child with the feeling of a woman, or better, of a mother, and I know that this or that picture is, from this standpoint, work of incomparable mastery."[14] In *L'Ermitage* Kalophile Eremite handled the question of her gender somewhat differently, ultimately echoing Yveling Rambaud's 1890 *L'Art dans les deux mondes* article in declaring that "Miss M. Cassatt has a robust execution and sober palette; truly, and coming from my pen this is a compliment: she paints like a man. . . . Like Manet and Degas, her masters, she has engaged herself with exterior realties, with the notation of individuals, but she has translated them in her own way. And female artists whom one could call personal are rare."[15]

Raoul Sertat in *La Revue* also linked Cassatt to Degas, explaining that her "good luck permitted her to take from [his] teaching all the benefits without being alienated by his personality, and thus she was able to form, through force of work, the vigorous and tender oeuvre"[16] on display. As for her subject matter, he wrote,

> she chose childhood, and it could not have been more proper to her nature, to her sex. As she pursued it, in order to penetrate it, it seems that she gave all her heart with the rest, and never have the feelings of love that gravitate around little ones been better

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[13] Ibid., 8: "Il faut le dire, en toute sincérité, Miss Cassatt est peut-être, à côté de Whistler, la seule artiste d'une talent élevé, personnel et distingué, que possède actuellement l'Amérique."

[14] L[éon] Roger-Milès, "Beaux-Arts," *Le Siècle* 58 (11 December 1893), 3: "Miss Cassatt peint l'enfant, avec un sentiment de femme ou, mieux, de mère, et je sais telle oeuvre d'elle où elle est, sous ce rapport, d'une incomparable maîtrise."

[15] Kalophile Ermite, "Les Arts," *L'Ermitage* 4 (December 1893), 373: "Miss M. Cassatt a l'exécution robuste et la palette sobre, vraiment, et sous ma plume c'est un éloge, elle peint comme un homme. . . . Comme Manet et Degas, ses maîtres, elle s'attache aux réalités extérieures, à la notation des individus, mais elle les traduit d'une façon sienne. Or ils sont rares les artistes féminins qu'on puisse dire personnels."

[16] Raoul Sertat, "Expositions diverses," *La Revue* (1 February 1894), 37: "bonne chance lui permit de tirer de cet enseignement tout le bénéfice sans qu'elle aliénât pour cela sa personnalité, et ainsi se constitua, à force de travail, l'oeuvre vigoureux et tendre. . . ."

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> expressed than in these paintings, these drypoints. . . . The child and mother here are really the heroes of our painter, they cannot be called by any other name; and with a rather sharp line she has marked them with their essential character so that they take on the power and the continuity of absolute types: with a look and a gesture, they are of all times and of all countries. And, at the same moment, what exquisite details, possessed with life and rendered so naturally![17]

Like Mellerio and some of the Symbolist critics discussed in the previous chapter, Sertat commended Cassatt for mediating between the contingent and the eternal, the individual and the universal, in her maternal imagery.

The critics who attended to the full range of subject matter in Cassatt's exhibition, however, were less convinced by the high praise of Mellerio's preface. Raymond Bouyer, referring to early pictures such as *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* [Fig. 46] and *Five O'Clock Tea* [Fig. 52] as well as the more recent mother and child images, stated, "This is the work of an artist; yet, the question of principles aside, the modern art of life might better give different results! It is well observed, more accented than charming, happily studied with an exact clarity, in the drypoints, and the pastels that are superior to the paintings, well characterized at times, but with little rhythm or harmony, and what insufficient plasticity!"[18]

Alfred de Lostalot, who when reviewing Cassatt's contributions to the 1889 *Peintres-Graveurs* exhibition had suggested that she found her inspiration in "primitive"

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[17] Ibid.: "a choisi l'enfance, et il n'en était pas de plus convenable à sa nature, à son sexe. A le poursuivre, à le pénétrer il semble qu'elle ait donné tout son coeur avec le reste, et jamais les sentiments d'amour qui gravitent autour des petits ne furent mieux exprimés que dans ces toiles, ces eaux-fortes. . . . L'enfant et la mère, voilà bien les héros de notre peintre; ils n'ont point d'autres noms que ceux-là, et d'un trait si net elle a marqué chez eux le caractère essentiel qu'ils revêtent, la force et la continuité des types absolus: par le regard et par le geste, ils sont de tous les temps et de tous les pays. Et, au même moment, que de détails exquis, saisis sur le vif et rendus au naturel!"

[18] Raymond Bouyer, "Notes d'art," *L'Ermitage* 5 (January 1894), 67-8: "C'est d'une artiste; mais, question de principe à part, l'art moderne de la vie pourrait donner bien d'autres résultats! De l'observation, de l'accent plutôt que du charme, des recherches heureuses d'éclairage exact, des pointes sèches et des pastels supérieurs aux toiles, du caractèrisme parfois, mais peu de rythme ou d'harmonie; et que d'insuffisances plastiques!"

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sources "unconsciously, without a doubt,"[19] took interest in her sources in 1893 as well. This time, though, he was more concerned with the influence of her contemporaries, as were most critics who discussed the show. He felt that she had been "strongly impressed" by Manet and Pissarro, and especially Renoir and Degas; yet, her originality "is in no way diminished by the comparison."[20] From Degas she had learned "the art of accentuating the drawing, underlining it in the right places, and passing over in silence all that could dilute the effect and weaken the expression of the artist's plastic thought," and in Renoir's work, "she studied the colorist's craft," though "she has not yet made up her mind on this subject."[21] Her handling he found less dependent upon influences, for her paintings, "by their variety of aspect and in their differences in facture—sometimes thick and heavily impastoed, sometimes fluid and vanishing into light layers—testify to a complete absence of preconceptions: this is the sure sign of a sincere talent, searching and devoted to the constant observation of nature."[22]

De Lostalot preferred the drypoints, finding them to be "little poems, of grace and an exquisite emotion, in which she tirelessly repeats her eternal subject: maternity. A few lines barely emphasized with shading—no more than this is needed to express the child's naive miming and the mother's enveloping gestures and infinite caresses."[23] The color prints, on the other hand, were less pleasing: "The edges of the drawings seem to us too sharp; there is a lack of proportion between the contours and the colors they embrace,"

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[19] de Lostalot, "Expositions Diverses, Peintres-Graveurs," 235.

[20] Alfred de Lostalot, "Exposition des oeuvres de Miss Mary Cassatt," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (9 December 1893), 299: "vivement impressionnée"; "n'est d'ailleurs pas atteinte par ce rapprochement."

[21] Ibid.: "l'art d'accentuer le dessin, de le souligner aux bons endroits, et de passer sous silence tout ce qui pourrait diluer l'effet et affaiblier l'expression de la pensée plastique de l'artiste"; "elle a étudié le métier du coloriste"; "elle n'est pas encore fixée à ce sujet."

[22] Ibid.: "par leur variété d'aspect et par leurs différences de facture, tantôt grasses et fortement empâtées, tantôt fluides et fondues en couches légères, témoignent d'une absence complète de parti pris: c'est la marque certaine d'un talent sincère, chercheur et voué à l'observation constante de la nature."

[23] Ibid.: "petits poèmes, d'une grâce et d'une émotion exquises, où elle répète sans se lasser son éternal sujet: la maternité. Quelques traits à peine rehaussés d'ombre, il ne lui en faut pas davantage pour exprimer la naïve mimique de l'enfant, les gestes enveloppants, les infinies caresses de la mère."

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and in the end, "we do not believe that an artist whose aesthetic sentiment finds its principal expressive resources in drawing can ever come to be completely assimilated to the techniques of an art in which the charm of color plays the principal role."[24] (Eremite too had noted, "in her drawings, she appears to need to assimilate the Japonisme."[25])

The question of assimilation was foremost on the mind of *Le Rappel*'s critic, who linked the issue with Cassatt's nationality, stating, "Miss Cassatt is American and, like her compatriots who work at art, her talent is above all one of assimilation—but that is not to say of imitation. She seeks the protection of M. Degas, MM. Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, etc.; they are not strangers. That is to say, she is up to her neck in Impressionist impasto. And she makes out well enough."[26] Cassatt's images appeared to this critic to be "generally mothers, painted in their interiors, adorned with the cares of maternity," and he listed a number of works as those in which "the influence—one could almost say the hand—of M. Degas allows itself to be frankly detected,"[27] among them *The Cup of Tea* [Fig. 64], *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103], *Baby's First Caress* [Fig. 106], *In the Garden* [Fig. 118], *Portrait of Miss Margaret Milligan Sloane* [Fig. 125], and another work related to the "Modern Woman" mural, *Young Women Picking Fruit* [Fig. 126]. Of the rest of the works on exhibition, this critic wrote in closing that Cassatt "only flirts with our Impressionists; her taste for the Japanese is also quite accentuated. And here it succeeds for her: among the 30 or so pictures on exhibit, I see that 24 of them have been sold."[28]

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[24] Ibid.: "Les arêtes du dessin nous semblent trop coupantes; il y a un défaut de proportion entre le contour et les colorations qu'il embrasse"; "nous ne croyons pas qu'une artiste dont le sentiment esthétique trouve ses principales ressources d'expression dans le dessin, parvienne à s'assimiler complètement la technique d'un art où le charme des colorations joue le rôle principal."

[25] Eremite, "Les Arts," 373: "en ses dessins, elle parait devoir s'assimiler le Japonisme."

[26] "Les On-Dit," *Le Rappel* (12 December 1893): "Miss Cassatt est américaine et, comme ses compatriotes que l'art travaille, son talent est surtout fait d'assimilation—pour ne pas dire l'imitation. Elle se recommande de M. Degas, MM. Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, etc., ne lui sont pas non plus étrangers. C'est dire qu'elle est entrée jusqu'au cou dans la pâte impressioniste. Et elle s'y debrouille assez bien."

[27] Ibid.: "généralement des mamans, peints dans leur intérieur, adornées aux soins de la maternité"; "l'influence—on dirait presque la main—de M. Degas se laisse franchement surprendre."

[28] Ibid.: "ne flirte pas qu'avec nos impressionistes; son goût par les Japonais est aussi très accentué. Et ça lui réussit: sur un trentaire de tableaux exposés, j'ai vu qu'il y en avait vingt-quatre de vendus." In the

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Charles Morice, in the *Mercure de France*, took a more cynical view of Cassatt's success at assimilation and sales, using her exhibition as a pretext to raise broader issues of avant-garde art. "Where is the time of beautiful struggle," he asked, "when Manet, Monet, Degas were heckled, persecuted? It is in their name now—and in spite of them, and against them—that an art as independent as theirs, an art that will rise even higher, Idealist Art, is persecuted and heckled. But weren't these two arts meant to get along, both aiming at and controlling nature?"[29] Nevertheless, wrote Morice, the Impressionist school, which "fought so much as late as yesterday, today wants the profits of its victory, and, not in the person of its initiators, but in that of its disciples, it makes concessions, rejects the intransigences."[30] Morice felt this was the case with Cassatt's exhibition, for this "American of high taste chooses her models well, and her models are Impressionists, but in the end 'she likes too many paths' and makes Salon Impressionism, Impressionism to sell well. It is certainly not without qualities; I say, she chooses her models marvelously. . . . However, in the last analysis, who is she, Mme [*sic*] Mary Cassatt?"[31]

The review that appeared in *L'Art Français* also took as its main theme the question of Cassatt's influences. "As a painter, her skill at assimilation seems to me to be a bit abused by the flatterers of Miss Cassatt," this critic wrote," and Mellerio's opinion that she was one of America's two great painters seemed "excessive" because "not a single

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printed catalogue, 21 of the 31 paintings and pastels on view are listed as having been lent by dealers or collectors.

[29] Charles Morice, "Salons et Salonnets," *Mercure de France* 10 (January 1894), 66: "Où est le temps de belles luttes où Manet, Monet, Degas étaient bafoués, persécutés? C'est en leur nom maintenant—et malgré eux, et contre eux—qu'on persécute et qu'on bafoue un art aussi indépendant que le leur et qui montera plus haut, l'Art Idéaliste. N'étaient-ils donc pas faits, ces deux arts, pour s'entendre, tous deux visant et gouvernant la nature?"

[30] Ibid.: "hier encore tant combattue veut aujourd'hui les profits de sa victoire, et, non pas dans la personne de ses initiateurs, mais dans celle de leurs disciples, elle fait des concessions, réprouve les intransigeances."

[31] Ibid.: "Américaine de haut goût choisit bien ses modèles, et ses modèles sont impressionistes; mais enfin, 'elle aime en trop d'endroits' et fait de l'impressionisme de salon, de l'impressionisme de bonne vente. Non certes qu'elle soit sans qualités; je vous dis qu'elle choisit ses modèles à merveille. . . . Pourtant, au bout du compte, qui est-ce, Mme Mary Cassatt?" [pendentives in original].

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painting, not a single pastel by Miss Cassatt . . . is exempt from some influence."[32] As an example the critic offered *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* [Fig. 46], whose "figure is of a daring comprehension" yet makes one "think of Manet or Degas."[33] The central figure in another picture, *The Bath* [Fig. 66], was described as evoking "with her lilac skin, and in the depiction with its notorious insufficiency of form, a memory of M. [Léon] Frédéric,"[34] the Belgian painter who favored subjects redolent of fecundity such as the 1890 *Source of Life* [Fig. 127]. "Another visibly reflects the manner of M. Renoir," continued the critic, who also found "unconscious analogies" with Jules Bastien-Lepage and "this or that master; it would be useless to name them in the same way that it was useless to tell us that the artist had successively taken the advice of MM. Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Degas."[35] This critic preferred her prints above all, in which she "indulges herself, immerses herself in her work, affirms herself as an artist and woman."[36]

Another critic to discuss Cassatt's 1893 retrospective was Gustave Geffroy, who took the opportunity to combine his earlier writings on the artist into a longer essay. "Surrounded by the paintings, pastels, and prints of Mary Cassatt," he began, "one will experience these sensations: a very elegant taste in things, a sustained effort, a stubbornness at fixing form, a woman's art influenced by the masters of the Impressionist group, and also displaying an original grace and will."[37] He then turned to her personal history, setting it within the lack of artistic history in the United States. The dearth of

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32 "Les Expositions," *L'Art Français* (12 September 1893), n.p.: "Comme peintre, son habileté d'assimilation me semble avoir un peu abusé les thuriféraires de Miss Cassatt"; "excessive"; "pas une seule des peintures, pas un seul des pastels de Miss Cassatt . . . est exempt d'une influence quelconque."

33 Ibid.: "figure est d'une compréhension hardie . . . fait penser à Manet ou à Degas."

34 Ibid.: "avec ses chairs lilacées et en dépit de l'insuffisance notoire de la forme, le souvenir de M. Frédéric."

35 Ibid.: "Telle autre reflète visiblement la manière de M. Renoir"; "inconscientes analogies avec Bastien-Lepage . . . tel ou tel maître qu'il serait inutile de nommer, de même qu'il était inutile de nous dire que l'artiste avait pris successivement les avis de MM. Monet, Renoir, Pissaro [*sic*] et Degas."

36 Ibid.: "Miss Cassatt se livre, s'intéresse à son oeuvre, s'affirme artiste et femme."

37 Gustave Geffroy, "Mary Cassatt," *La Vie Artistique*, vol. 3 (Paris: E. Dentu, 1894), 275: "Au milieu des tableaux, pastels et gravures, de Mary Cassatt, on trouvera cette sensation: un goût très élégant des choses, une application soutenue, une opinâtreté à fixer la forme, un art de femme influencé par les maîtres du groupe impressioniste, et aussi une grâce et une volonté originales."

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training and models available to young American artists was understood by Geffroy to have its benefits, for the European student, after passing through the École des beaux arts, must "undo the education that has falsified his individuality."[38] The foreign student runs a different risk, if he or she "goes for the latest fashion, assimilates its processes, is amazed by the facility with which he can execute . . . pretty, brilliant, and adroit painting—and becomes hollow. Many Americans are thus."[39] Cassatt, though, "does not follow fashion, the approved genres, the successes . . . the willful woman has truly learned to paint."[40]

Geffroy praised the same pictures that he had so much appreciated in the Impressionist exhibitions, including *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61] and *Girl Arranging Her Hair* [Fig. 75]. He also repeated (with minor changes) his approving description of the works shown in her 1891 exhibition, finding in these maternal images the "essence" of Cassatt's art, which he valued above the somber and mysterious works of an artist such as Eugène Carrière, explaining, "She searches for exterior aspects, beautiful health, a physiological tranquillity of being. Moreover, it is also an expression that doesn't require the flaws and anguishes of the maternal spirit, the faces in mournful silence, the loving embraces of the moment and the timidities of the future."[41] Geffroy found nothing in the 1893 exhibition to change his 1886 perception that the artist should be recognized as a "distinguished and knowing [*savante*] artist"[42]; he simply updated his opinion with a nod to the increasingly popular discourse of eugenics.

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[38] Ibid., 277: "se défaire de l'éducation qui a faussé son individualité."

[39] Ibid.: "va à la dernière mode, il s'assimile les procédés, il étonne par la facilité avec laquelle il exécute . . . une peinture jolie, brillante, adroite,—et creuse. Beaucoup d'Américains sont ainsi. . . ."

[40] Ibid., 277-8: "n'est pas allée à la mode, au genre applaudi, au succès . . . la femme volontaire a vraiment appris à peindre."

[41] Ibid., 280: "Elle cherche ses aspects extérieurs, cette belle santé, cette tranquilité physiologique de l'être. C'est aussi une expression d'ailleurs, et il n'y a pas à demander ici les tresaillements et les angoisses de l'esprit maternel, les visages au douloureaux silence, les étraintes amoureuses de l'instant et peureuses de l'avenir."

[42] Geffroy, "Salon de 1886: VIII. Hors du Salon: Les Impressionnistes," reprinted in Berson, ed., *The New Painting*, vol. 1, 1996, 451.

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Taken in sum, the response to Cassatt's 1893 retrospective at Durand-Ruel, Paris, was disappointing. Outside of a few brief positive mentions and Geffroy's reworking of his earlier laudatory writings, most critics found her work to be too dependent upon the techniques of her Impressionist contemporaries—too facile in its assimilation of influences—or in the case of her employment of Japanese devices, not sufficiently assimilated. In contrast, American writers discussing the exhibition that opened at Durand-Ruel's New York gallery in April of 1895 were more inclined to see Cassatt as having adequately distinguished her technique and style from those of her contemporaries, suggesting that matters of national pride may have inflected the response to her work on both sides of the ocean. And though her style was seen as being rather derivative of the work of any number of male colleagues, her "natural" suitability as a woman to the painting of mother and child imagery was celebrated as one of the strongest aspects of her work.

The 1895 Durand-Ruel, New York, exhibition can be properly described as a retrospective, for it featured pictures ranging from the 1873 Salon picture, *Torero and Young Girl* [Fig. 18], to the artist's latest pastels, including *Young Thomas and His Mother* [Fig. 128], among its 36 paintings and pastels and 27 prints.[43] The paintings and pastels were divided evenly between those available for sale and a "loan collection" comprising pictures owned for the most part by members of the extended Cassatt family. The show better represented the artist's portrait work than the 1893 exhibition and even included a number of images of men, such as those in the *Portrait of the Artist's Father (Robert Simpson Cassatt)* (private collection), *Woman and Child Driving* (Philadelphia

[43] The most recent oil portrait on view in the 1895 exhibition was *Portrait of Mrs. Clement B. Newbold* (private collection), BrCR 289. Mrs. Newbold purchased *Young Thomas and His Mother* [Fig. 128] and eventually donated it to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, in 1904.

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Museum of Art, Pennsylvania), and *The Boating Party (Near Antibes)* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).[44]

In a short notice, a *New York Times* critic continued the American tradition of understanding her work in terms of its more stereotypically "male" qualities, a tendency dating to the reception of her first Salon pictures. "[S]he is to-day the strongest and most personal of American women painting," wrote the *Times* critic before specifying, "Her work is masculine, vigorous, and full of a powerful personality."[45] With regard to sources, "though there may be seen a strong influence of Manet and others, there is, notwithstanding, much originality of treatment." As for her nationality, the *Times* critic wrote, "She has identified herself with the new movement in Paris, and is essentially French in all her predilections," but at the same time added, "we claim the right to regard her as a true American representative."

Critics in the U.S. were also more inclined than the French to view her works in terms of a forthright individuality, which they saw as more an American than a gendered quality. For example, a longer *New York Times* review elaborated that although it is "curiously interesting to observe the unmistakable sympathy that Miss Cassatt has for the work of Manet, Degas, and others of their school, and to perceive how forcibly they have appealed to her," she has "gone at her pictures in her own way, obtained her results in quite a different manner, and has in no wise imitated them."[46] Singled out as most compelling among the works on view was *A Woman in Black at the Opera* [Fig. 31], a painting "full of power and of the unctiousness [*sic*] of luscious, rich color." *Reading "Le Figaro"* [Fig. 27], *Mrs. Cassatt Reading to Her Grandchildren* [Fig. 60], *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61], and *The Cup of Tea* [Fig. 64] were among

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[44] *Portrait of the Artist's Father (Robert Simpson Cassatt)* is BrCR 49; *Woman and Child Driving* is BrCR 69; and *The Boating Party (Near Antibes)* is BrCR 230.

[45] "In the World of Art," *New York Times* (21 April 1895), 18. [The newspaper articles cited in this chapter generally tend to be printed in their entirety on a single page. When this is the case, I have footnoted the first quotation only; all quotations to follow should be assumed to occur on the same page.]

[46] "Pictures by Mary Cassatt," *New York Times* (18 April 1895), 4.

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those found to be "quiet, refined, and brushed in with great freedom." *Torero and Young Girl*, though, while "suggestive of Manet," was "extremely low in key and not agreeable in color."

The *New York Times* critic, after noting that the "mother and child seem to have had a peculiar fascination for this artist," took issue with her recent technique:

> In her earlier studies there seems to be a greater harmony of color and a softer envelopment of atmosphere, which is lacking in the more recent work. These last are frequently hard, crude, and have a tendency toward the brutal. Inharmonious masses of uncomplimentary color are brought side by side and shock the eye. A rude strength, at times out of keeping with the subject, is noticeable, and takes away in a measure from the charm of femininity.

Young Women Picking Fruit [Fig. 126] was cited as emblematic of this problem, for "though the canvas contains many fine qualities of textures, of drawing, and of arrangement of light, it is difficult not to regret the absence of a certain purity of flesh tones, of [a] more feminine quality of grace, of beauty, and of what may be called daintiness, all of which could have been added without the loss either of dignity, strength, or force."

The *Times* critic believed Cassatt's work to be uneven, especially in the maternal imagery, though all the mother and child pictures were "painted with a faithfulness that gives evidence of a great study, intimate knowledge, and loving interest in the subject." To demonstrate this inconsistency, the critic compared *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple* [Fig. 119], "which is hard and unsympathetic," to *Agatha and Her Child* [Fig. 73], "which is quite the reverse, the difference is apparent and it is difficult to realize the same touch in both." In addition, the latest pastels, among them *Young Thomas and His Mother* [Fig. 128] and *Mother Looking Down at Thomas* [Fig. 129], were "marked by a quality of hardness and a lack of purity of color," faults that were absent from *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103], "a delightful study of child life."

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Mother Looking Down at Thomas does appear somewhat "hard" in contrast to *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple*, as well as *Agatha and Her Child*, which is characterized by an all-over soft-focus (though not completely blended) application of pastel. In comparison to the figures in the later work, those in *Agatha and Her Child* appear flatter and are not sharply distinguished from a pink background that repeats their flesh tones and the color of the child's dress. The mother and particularly the child in the *Thomas* picture are more convincingly rounded and set apart from the dark background; they seem more smooth and sculptural (an effect intensified by the ivory tones of the boy's body) and might even be described as classically conceived, as opposed to the figures in the Impressionist pastel.

The darker tones and more somber mood of *Mother Looking Down at Thomas*, as compared to the rosy prettiness of *Agatha and Her Child*, also likely led the *New York Times* critic to find the newest pastels to be "marked by a quality of hardness." This writer may have detected a note of academicism making its way back into Cassatt's work. In this vein it is interesting to compare *Mother Looking Down at Thomas* to an image by an artist whose works were frequently seen as "cold," "hard," and academic in this period: William Bouguereau. In some ways Cassatt's picture has more in common with a painting like *The Bouquet* [Fig. 130], 1896, than with her own Impressionist productions. In Cassatt's pastels, the roundness of the bodies, the smooth texture of the child's skin, the shiny hair, and the dark background suggest that the artist was concerned with retaining the solidity and solemnity she had been employing since her "*'Saintes familles' modernes*" of the early 1890s, at least for the moment. But without the flat forms or saturated colors frequently seen in those pictures, the effect is somewhat conservative and academic, at least in comparison to her earlier aesthetic innovations.

Still, though *Mother Looking Down at Thomas* appears more conventional than other works Cassatt had only recently completed (the images relating to the mural, for instance), she managed to avoid the clichés of Bouguereau's formula. In both pictures, the

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child is positioned as an object of desire, but without an overt appeal to the spectator, for glances are directed downward or to the side, and the reduced palette produces a sober mood. While Bouguereau's girl is coyly positioned to seduce the viewer, with her long neck and softly hunched shoulders, wide eyes and full rosy lips, revealing chemise, and spray of wildflowers, Cassatt's picture speaks to the intensity of the mother's desire for the child without any dependence upon conventionally sweet or saccharine devices. The mother's lips, pressed against the child's bare shoulders, acknowledge the delicious appeal of baby flesh to the mother, even as the child remains absorbed in his own play. William Walton, reviewing the 1895 exhibition for *Scribner's*, cited this picture as one in which Cassatt displayed "that aversion to the appearance of being sentimental so characteristic of the artist of the day."[47] He then described the related pastel, *Young Thomas and His Mother* [Fig. 128], shown in 1895 as *Maternal Solicitude*, as the only picture in which Cassatt "ventured to give the real title of her work—the wonderful, infinitely motherly yearning over the queer, little unresponsive being of which she knows so little."[48]

Questions of academic tradition versus "impressionistic" handling in Cassatt's work were also raised by the *New-York Daily Tribune*'s critic in 1895. After declaring that Cassatt's talent "awakens the liveliest regret" that she "has so long preferred to remain an alien to her country and its picture exhibitions," this critic looked to her influences, noting that "she has much been in sympathy" with Manet and Degas, yet "has never emulated with slavishness the method of either master, but has put their ideas at the service of her own and of a peculiarly forcible individuality"[49]—this last quality being identified as a specifically American trait. Manet's influence was detected "in the frequent flatness of her tints and the directness of her style," while "Degas might be discerned in the style of her drypoints and in her suggestions of Japanese art," but "on the whole" she was more "a

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[47] Walton, "Miss Mary Cassatt," 355.
[48] Ibid. It is not known whether Cassatt or Durand-Ruel gave these titles to Cassatt's pictures, but their similarity to titles given to works by Bouguereau suggests that the dealer had a hand in naming them.
[49] "The Chronicle of the Arts," *New-York Daily Tribune* (21 April 1895), 25.

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colleague, a comrade, than a downright pupil." Renoir, too, was seen behind the technique of works including *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* [Fig. 61] and *Portrait of Miss Margaret Milligan Sloane (No. 1)* [Fig. 125], in which "the masses are handled with that indecisive fusing of them into the background which [he] first made a principle in impressionistic studies of the figure."

The *Tribune* critic found works such as *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103] more typical, for in these pictures "the contours are as keenly realized, the heads detached from the backgrounds with as much solidity as the most exacting academician could desire." But at the same time, the critic observed,

> Miss Cassatt is working at the very antipodes of academic tradition. She has a vigorous, sharp, we might almost say crisp, outline, and in some of her works—in . . . "Jeune Femme Cueillant un Fruit," for example [Fig. 126]—there is a positively classic purity of drawing. But her spirit is essentially modern; she has that peculiar atmosphere of to-day that has been familiar chiefly since Manet's rise, and she retains that charm, as in her case it must be called, even when, as in . . . "Dans la Loge" [Fig. 31], she has something of the mellowness and depth of an old master.

This critic appears to be responding to a schism in some of her works of the early 1890s, which oscillate between a return to Raphaelesque form and a modernist flatness that was more commonly associated by somewhat retardataire American critics with Manet and "modern life" subject matter than with more recent innovations by artists such as the Symbolists. But in sum, the *New-York Daily Tribune* critic found in Cassatt's work an acceptable mix of male and female traits, claiming, "It is not often that one meets with such authoritative drawing, with so firm and powerful a hand. The femininity of this painter comes out in the tenderness of her infantile portraits, but in all the other relations of her art she quite eliminates the question of sex. She is, then, an accomplished painter, and that is all that is necessary for her to be."

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Montague Marks, writing in *The Art Amateur*, likewise believed that Cassatt, "though she has been deeply influenced by Manet and Degas, has developed a highly personal manner of her own."[50] In contrast to the *Art Français* critic who objected to Mellerio's designation of Cassatt and Whistler as America's best artists, Marks felt more comfortable with the comparison, at least in terms of her color prints, which he called "next to Whistler's paintings . . . the most distinguished work visibly affected by Japanese art." Presciently, he added, "We do not hesitate to say that these prints will be reckoned among the most artistic of the century."

Marks then turned to some of Cassatt's more recent oils, especially *Young Women Picking Fruit* [Fig. 126] and *The Bath* [Fig. 66], in which he perceived "a very flat modelling, bright color, and a firm, precise outline" producing "an effect now Japanese, now more closely approaching the manner of the Italian pre-Raphaelite painters." He did not pursue this analogy much further, only noting that in *The Bath*, "the mother's striped wrapper, pink, green, and white, is painted as frankly as it would be by Botticelli, but there is no sense of crudity in the tones." But although Marks had no more to say on the subject, the comparison he made would be expanded through a consideration of outline and the interest in pattern and decoration shared by Cassatt, Japanese printmakers of the eighteenth century, and Botticelli above all other early Renaissance painters.

Vernon Lee (who became a friend of Cassatt's by 1891) linked the Italian pre-Raphaelites, Arabic as well as Japanese artists, and Arts and Crafts theories of decoration in just this manner in an 1887 article, using terms simultaneously being employed by the French to discuss *décoration*. In a passage that presages Berenson's concept of "life-enhancement" (an idea closely associated with his tactile values, and derived in part from Nietzsche's "vitalism"), Lee commented that the actual Italian landscape brought about

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[50] Montague Marks, "My Note Book: Exhibitions," *Art Amateur* 32 (May 1895), 158.

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> the remembrance of certain early Renaissance pictures; the rusty green stencilled grass and flowers of Botticelli, the faded tapestry work of Angelico; making, as it were, the greenness greener, the freshness fresher, of that of real grass and those real trees. And not by the force of contrast, but rather by the sense that as all this appears to me green and fresh in the present, so likewise did it appear to those men of four centuries ago; the fact of their having seen and felt making me, all the more, see and feel.[51]

Furthermore, Lee wrote, "This is one of the peculiarities of rudimentary art—of the art of the early Renaissance was well as that of Persia and Japan . . . that, not knowing very well its own aims, it fills its imperfect work with suggestions of all manner of things which it loves, and tries to gain in general pleasurableness what it loses in actual achievement; and lays hold of us, like fragments of verse, by suggestiveness, quite as much as by pictorial realization."[52] This "school of intellectual decoration" is further characterized by "arabesques formed, not of lines and of colors, but of associations and suggestions,"[53] though of course, it does partake in arabesques formed of lines and colors as well.

Lee identified Botticelli as "one of those who most persistently introduce delightful items into their works; elaborately embroidered veils, scarves, and gold fringes"; he then

> works them all into his strange arabesque, half intellectual, half physical. Thus the screen of roses behind certain of his Madonnas, forming an exquisite Morris pattern with the greenish-blue sky interlaced; and those beautiful, carefully drawn branches of spruce firs and cypress, lace-lake in his Primavera; above all, that fan-like growth of myrtles, delicately cut out against the evening sky, which not merely print themselves as shapes upon the mind, but seem to fill it with a scent of poetry.[54]

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[51] Vernon Lee, "The Imaginative Art of the Renaissance," reprinted from *Contemporary Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 173 (21 May 1887), 491. Berenson went further than Lee in suggesting that "life-enhancement" takes place when a painting of an object makes one "feel" the object with more intensity than one would "feel" the actual object.

[52] Ibid., 491-2.

[53] Ibid., 492.

[54] Ibid., 493.

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This description of the *Allegory of Spring* [Fig. 131] could apply in spirit to Cassatt's *Young Women Picking Fruit* or *Nude Baby Reaching for an Apple*, works painted not long after the artist created the images most closely associated by her French critics with *décoration* and the arabesque—the ten color prints—in addition to the "Modern Woman" mural, in which she emulated "one of those admirable old tapestries brilliant yet soft,"[55] and whose decorative border was described by one American writer as "adapted from the Persian, and Italianized by the insertion of pretty medallions of babies and female heads."[56] Cassatt, then, continued to be associated by critics of the time with a "primitive" aesthetic shared by Arabic, Japanese, and early Italian Renaissance artists.

Lee, who was influenced by the aestheticism of Walter Pater in her early writings (among them this article), discussed Botticelli's ornamental qualities in a paragraph worth quoting at length:

> This search for elegance and grace, for the refined and unhackneyed, is frequently baffled by the ugliness of Botticelli's models, and still more by Botticelli's very deficient knowledge of anatomy and habit of good form. But, when not baffled, this desire is extraordinarily assisted by those very defects. This great decorator, who uses the human form as so much pattern element, mere lines and curves like those of a Raffaelesque [*sic*] arabesque, obtains with his imperfect, anatomically defective, and at all events ill-fashioned figures, a far-fetched and poignant grace impossible to a man dealing with more perfect elements. For grace and distinction, which are qualities of movement rather than of form, do not strike us very much in a figure which is originally well made. The momentary charm of movement is lost in the permanent charm of form; the creature could not be otherwise than delightful, made as it is; and we thus miss the sense of selection and deliberate arrangement, the sense of beauty as

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[55] Mary Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Bachivillers, October 11 [1892], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 238.

[56] "Women's Work in the Fine Arts," *Art Amateur* 29 (June 1893), 10. This critic, however, believed that the mural failed to conform to the laws of large-scale decoration, while adding, "The central subject is, taken separately and as a picture, not a decoration, a very beautiful piece of work."

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> movement, that is, as grace. Whereas, in the case of defective form, any grace that may be obtained affects us *per se*. It need not have been there; indeed it was unlikely to be there; and hence it obtains the value and charm of the unexpected, the rare, the far-fetched.[57]

For Lee, the imperfections of Botticelli's figures draw attention to the artist's art, for we recognize his skill in transforming ugly models into beautiful forms. The "element of poetry" in these works "is the grace of a woman not beautiful, but well dressed and moving well; the exquisiteness of a song sung delicately by an insufficient or defective voice; a fascination almost spiritual, since it seems to promise a sensitiveness to beauty, a careful avoidance of ugliness, a desire for something more delicate, a reverse of all things gross and accidental, a possibility of perfection."[58]

The creation of grace and charm from unattractive models was also a familiar refrain in Cassatt criticism at this time. For instance, in 1893 Alfred Trumble opined, "There is a curious charm about her pictures, in despite of her deliberate adherence to the ugly, for she follows the craze of the day that no longer paints ugly as well as pretty models, but scorns beauty and seeks out uncomeliness. The charm can, I imagine, be traced to the fact that she is really a very gifted woman, doing what she does in a fashion which only a gifted painter could."[59] In the U.S., this line of criticism was most frequently associated with the artist's realism, as suggested by Trumble, who continued, "Of her choice of material and treatment, one can but repeat Couture's famous axiom: 'Art is a matter of truth,' and adapt our taste accordingly."

Cassatt herself, in a 1911 letter, discussed hands painted by Botticelli to justify her aesthetic in terms related to realism (and Morellian connoisseurship) rather than Lee's concern for decoration:

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[57] Lee, "The Imaginative Art of the Renaissance," 493.
[58] Ibid., 494.
[59] Alfred Trumble, "De Omnibus Rebus," *Collector* 5 (15 December 1893), 55.

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> So you think my models unworthy of their clothes? You find their types coarse. I know that is an American newspaper criticism, everyone has their criterion of beauty. I confess I love health & strength. What would you say to the Botticelli Madonna in the Louvre. The peasant girl & her child clothed in beautiful shifts & wrapped in soft veils. Yet as Degas pointed out to me Botticelli stretched his love of truth to the point of painting her hands with the fingernails worn down with field work![60]

But regardless of the concern for realism expressed by Cassatt here, we have also seen that she demonstrated a strong affinity for the decorative aesthetic of Japanese, Arabic, and early Italian Renaissance artists by the 1890s. Montague Marks, by raising the issue of her relation to Botticelli in his review of the 1895 retrospective, alluded to a line of thinking close to the aesthetic theory concurrently being formulated by Lee, who would influence Berenson as he began to formulate his concept of "tactile values."[61]

Even more than Marks, William Walton sought to place Cassatt's oeuvre within the continuum of old master art history in his discussion of her 1895 exhibition in *Scribner's*—the longest, most comprehensive, and well-illustrated analysis of the artist's work to date. Walton approached her art from the vantage point of the connoisseur, suggesting that while anyone could appreciate her pictures, aesthetically knowledgeable viewers would draw the most from them:

> Miss Cassatt's works, oils, pastels, and dry points, seemed to have so much a style of their own as to at once attract attention—even among those more conventional or more timid who preferred milder methods of painting pictures. So many things are required in the successful practice of this art, that the translation of impalpable

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[60] Mary Cassatt to Theodate Pope, Mesnil-Beaufresne, February 19 [1911], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 306.

[61] On the relationship between Lee and Berenson, who first met by 1892 (and possibly in 1891), see René Wellek, "Vernon Lee, Bernard Berenson and Aesthetics," in *Friendship's Garland: Essays Presented to Mario Praz*, ed. Vittorio Gabrieli, vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1966), 233-51. As Wellek demonstrates, there would eventually be a good deal of animosity between the two critics regarding questions of precedence and plagiarism.

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> qualities by tangible and material applications assumes all sorts of interest to different appreciations, and this little exhibition, somewhat peculiar in this respect, while appealing most strongly to the visitor with a certain amount of information, was yet interesting to everyone.[62]

After discussing her earlier "urban and somewhat conventional themes," Walton claimed that Cassatt had gone beyond the realist aims of Impressionism, finding in her newer works "something much more than mere good painting," which was "very frequently, the mystery of mother love and the pulchritude of the Baby."[63] Like so many other critics, he saw her maternal imagery as both naturalistic and symbolic, for "seldom indeed has that inefficient but most valuable of potentates been more carefully studied and faithfully rendered, in many of his various moods, and in his relations with the mother that bore him or the nurse that tends him. In this little exhibition alone might be seen a dozen variations on that old, old group of the Madonna—posing only as 'Mother and Child,' or 'The Young Mother,' or 'Nurse and Child'. . . ."[64]

Here Walton speaks not only to the art historical precedents for Cassatt's maternal imagery but also to the growing culture of "baby worship" in the U.S. at the turn of the century, and to the idea that "Baby Is King."[65] As industrialization intensified the sexual division of labor, the mother was expected to control the domestic realm. Her main responsibility—and the figure through whom she achieved power—was "that pink little thing" whose cradle was "the throne of a tyrant."[66] I have observed earlier that certain of Cassatt's compositions pose the mother so that her body functions like a throne upon

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[62] Walton, "Miss Mary Cassatt," 354.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 354-5.
[65] Josephine Gear discusses this issue in relation to the popularity of baby photographs in "'Baby Is King': Photographic Images in Small-Town America," in *The Preserve of Childhood, Adult Artifice and Construction: Images of Late-Nineteenth Century American Childhood* (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1985), 1-13. The phrase "Baby Is King" derives from a poem published in *Our Baby* (New York: American Tract Society, 1872).
[66] "Baby Is King," quoted in Gear, "'Baby is King': Photographic Images in Small-Town America," 10.

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which the baby is displayed and within which he or she is embraced. This effect is especially pronounced in *Mother Looking Down at Thomas* [Fig. 129], one of the works singled out by Walton for special praise. Though it is not likely that Cassatt patterned this pastel after any specific old master precedent, in palette and mood it resembles Giotto's sumptuous *Ognissanti* altarpiece [Fig. 2] more than the pastel-toned Madonnas of the Italian pre-Raphaelites that had influenced her earlier imagery. The luminous orange and yellow of the mother's gown recall the gilding of the throne and background of Giotto's panel and are made all the more radiant by being set against a backdrop of deep amethyst. The pose of the child, who rests upon the mother's volumnious lap, is also quite similar. But unlike Giotto's Madonna, whose body is nearly centered in the composition, Cassatt's woman has been shifted to the left so that the infant "potentate" rests squarely in the middle of the scene. With his carefully delineated features—in contrast to the mother's face, which is reduced to a bit of cheek, forehead, and nose—the child commands the viewer's attention.

Walton also considered the issue of Cassatt's ugly models, but placed it within the context of symbolic allusion rather than realism. "The probabilities are," he claimed, "that by avoiding the conventional and the pretty the painter has evolved a better and more artistic situation—the suggestion perhaps of the upspringing of all these tender, youthful, feminine longings and aspirations, and half-formed ideas in some soul more worthy of our interest than the usual one. A sort of variation of Hegel's theory of the beautiful—'the presence of the idea in limited phenomenon.'"[67] As an example of this "replacing of the pretty by something better" Walton considered *The Family* [Fig. 117], which he saw as "suggesting the old renderings of the mystic marriage of Saint Catherine, and, like them, apparently meaning much more than it says. The baby's head is quite dignified and noble, and quite baby-like; and the settling of his fat, little shapeless body, creased by the

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[67] Walton, "Miss Mary Cassatt," 356.

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mother's fingers in the mother's lap is excellently given. The thoughtfulness behind the good painting gives all these pictures their human interest."[68]

From this Walton turned to the "unsolvable problem of painting flesh," which he observed was beginning to concern even those Americans becoming interested in pictures for the first time, and despite their general opinion that the body is "ugly, meaty, and indecent, to be covered up on all occasions and not mentioned outside the bath-room."[69] After briefly reviewing the methods of a number of old masters, including Titian, Rembrandt, and Rubens, Walton described Cassatt's technique in terms foreshadowing Berenson's "tactile values":

> Miss Cassatt's selections and compromises, among the various methods of flesh-painting known, constitute one of the most interesting features of her work. She cannot reconcile herself to the painting of a beautiful, smooth, hard substance like tinted ivory, and she is not satisfied with the coarsely hatched structure of many of her contemporaries, which at least suggests the depth of the fleshly integument, if not the finish. By wise and vigorous painting, with the full strength of her palette and a careful observance of the local variations, she secures the intrinsic quality of her fleshly tones—so that you can well imagine that her rendering would feel under your fingers much as the naked body does in life—and she is much aided in securing this desirable effect by a free use of that hard outline which the impressionists so generally disregard.[70]

Walton found that even Cassatt's prints achieved a degree of volumetric "truthfulness," through the skillful employment of outline, with which "an almost flat rendering of the baby's torse [*sic*] is made at once to seem both pulpy and solid by the strong folds of the

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[68] Ibid. Walton referred to the picture he discussed here as "The Caress." Given his description, however, it seems more likely that he was referring to *The Family*, which is illustrated in the article on page 357, rather than *Baby's First Caress* [Fig. 106], which was exhibited under the title "The Caress."
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 358-9.

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lower part of his body when seated on his mother's arm, or the creases and dimples which her fingers make in his sides."[71]

Walton then examined the matter of Cassatt's facture as it related to flesh, remarking that:

> In her painting, to supplement this rendering of the structure, she contrives, by a certain care in blending and finishing, to invest it with more of that smooth and pleasant outer surface than do generally the practitioners of the newer schools; but her main care is, evidently, to make sure of the pulpy and kneadable quality rather than of that pinkness and whiteness and exquisite smooth coolness which make a baby's or a young girl's cheek such a delight to the touch. There is much to be said on both sides of this question—the delight of the eye is to be considered by the artist, and it may be doubted whether such flesh as sailors and laborers wear, and many painters paint, would ever have led civilized man to the invention of caresses and kisses.[72]

Walton implied that Cassatt had not only found a successful middle point between different technical methods, but also between types of facture generally associated with one or the other gender. Her treatment of the surface of the body is not that of "the brawny pulp of slaughtermen" (as Fuseli had described flesh painted by Rubens, in a phrase quoted by Walton earlier in the article),[73] but neither is it prettified to the point of academic insipidity. And for Walton and Cassatt, in contrast to Berenson and the formalists to follow in his wake, the "delight of the eye" as it related to the "problem of painting flesh" was in no way removed from the question of embodied pleasures but rather was an integral aspect of desire. Theirs was a very different notion of the tactile, in short.

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[71] Ibid., 359.
[72] Ibid., 359-60.
[73] Ibid., 358.

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II.

In the preceding pages I have introduced Berenson's concept of "tactile values" while also quoting from two critics (Lee and Walton) whose writings suggest that debates about the significance of form and embodied versus unembodied types of perception were being addressed by a fairly broad range of scholars in this period. Although tactile values have long since been discredited as an adequate aesthetic model, the idea is worth tracing because it not only influenced writers such as Roger Fry in his development of formalism but also grew out of the same physio-psychological studies that would lead to theories of far broader cultural impact, particularly those of Freud and Lacan. I will also consider the opinions of a few writers who promoted a more sensuous and social approach to the arts, rather than the unembodied and philosophically disinterested aesthetic advanced by Berenson and those he influenced.

By the early 1880s the field of connoisseurship was popularly conceived as a "science," as Giovanni Morelli's ideas above all swept through the museums and the art market. Walter Armstrong explained in 1884, "Within the last thirty years connoisseurship has advanced from a position of a harmless amusement almost to that of an exact science," with the result that "the catalogues of nearly every important gallery in Europe have been re-written."[74] The "chief factors in revolutionising the methods of connoisseurship" according to Armstrong were "the invention of photography, and the increased attention given to drawings,"[75] for drawings were now considered to represent the most spontaneous and authentic expression of the artist's individual "handwriting."

The latest findings of connoisseurship were of interest not only to a specialist audience in the 1880s and 1890s but also to the general public for a number of reasons, many of them related to issues of nationalism. Tales of fakes and forgery drew the most attention, as American collectors moved into the European old master market with

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[74] Walter Armstrong, "On the Authorship of Some Italian Pictures," *Portfolio* 15 (1884), 48.
[75] Ibid., 50.

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plentiful funds but little knowledge about art. In the words of the English critic J. C. Robinson, "Good Americans, 'millionaires, billionaires' from Wall Street or Chicago, when pigs and greenbacks have piled them up stupendous wealth, are to be one and all taken with a taste for art and *bric-à-brac*, and to come in flocks like sheep to the shearers, all yearning for Aladdin lamps, new or old as the case may be."[76] Robinson warned that the American collector will "have to buy his experience as dearly as his Old-World cousins," for "stupendous and unheard-of frauds are brewing in the air for his especial undoing."[77]

With the influx of American buyers into the art market, English and continental writers grew increasingly concerned to stop the flow of works—many of which were now being defined as "national treasures"—out of their countries. National pride also began to suffer, especially in Germany, as connoisseurs called into question the authenticity of long-beloved works in public collections. For instance, in 1871 a congress was convened to compare two similar works said to be by Holbein, one in Dresden and the other in Darmstadt. The Dresden picture, the *Burgomeister Meyer Madonna*, had been revered for centuries, being considered by many the Northern equivalent to the *Sistine Madonna*. The Darmstadt version had emerged publicly only in 1822, causing some scholars to doubt the Dresden attribution. (In 1903 Cassatt would recommend the Darmstadt version to a friend visiting Europe.)[78] Gustav Fechner described the problem in relation to the

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[76] J. C. Robinson, "On Spurious Works of Art," *Nineteenth Century* 30 (November 1891), 681.

[77] Ibid., 681-2. Robinson also discussed the state of connoisseurship in England compared to Europe and the U.S. in two articles, "English Art Connoisseurship and Collecting," *Nineteenth Century* 36 (October 1894), 523-37, and "Art Connoisseurship in England," *Nineteenth Century* 38 (November 1895), 838-49.

[78] Cassatt recommended that Theodate Pope visit the work in Darmstadt, where she would be sure to "feel its charm & that it is an intellectual stimulant"; Mary Cassatt to Ada Pope, Mesnil-Beaufresne, June 30, [1903], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 284. Cassatt had lived with her family in Darmstadt, where her brother attended the renowned technical university, in 1853.

The "Darmstadt Madonna" recently made news with regard to the issue of national treasures when it was announced in 2002 that the current owners, descendents of Prince William of Prussia (who purchased the work in 1822), would be required to sell the painting in order to pay inheritance taxes. The work is protected as a "nonexportable treasure" and will not be allowed to leave Germany. See "Greatest Holbein For Sale," at www.forbes.com/2002/03/27/0327pow.html.

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Dresden picture: "The issue is not the authenticity of *a* masterpiece but possibly *the* masterpiece of German painting and the best-loved painting of the German people."[79]

The Holbein congress determined the Darmstadt *Madonna* to be the original and demoted the Dresden version to the status of a copy by another artist, though public polls showed that Dresden's citizens resisted the verdict. Morelli revisted the controversy in his 1880 *Masters in German Galleries* in order to dramatize the distinction between disinterested connoisseurship and an emotion-based, nationalistic approach to the appreciation of art. Morelli staged an encounter between a connoisseur and a father-daughter pair in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, in front of a *Magdalene* attributed to Correggio. When the father asks the connoisseur if he believes the picture to be the finest in the museum, the connoisseur replies in the negative. The daughter responds,

> Criticism . . . is like fire, that destroys everything it licks with its tongue, not long ago it tried to crumple our glorious "Madonna" by Holbein, to-day it dares to approach another gem of this gallery, the world-renowned "Magdalen" [*sic*] of Correggio. Such things may be done in Russia, where Nihilism is the fashion; but here, in our Germany, where, thank God! there are still so many and such able art-historians and connoisseurs, such venomous and perfidious attempts will go to naught.[80]

One of these art historians and connoisseurs was Morelli's most vociferous critic, Wilhelm Bode, director of the Prussian museums. In an 1891 article in *The Nineteenth Century*, Bode analogized the diffusion of Morelli's method to that of a *folie à deux*, declaring, "An altogether strange epidemic is raging among us now, such as could only find a home in Germany—the Lermolieff [Morelli's pseudonym] mania, I will call it."[81] To

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[79] Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Über die Aechtheitsfrage der Holbein'schen Madonna* (1871), quoted and trans. in Udo Kultermann, *The History of Art History* (New York: Abaris Books, 1993), 147. Kultermann discusses the Dresden Holbein debate on pp. 141-8.

[80] Giovanni Morelli, *Masters in German Galleries. A Critical Essay on the Italian Pictures in the Galleries of Munich–Dresden–Berlin* (1880), trans. Louise M. Richter (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 134.

[81] Wilhelm Bode, "The Berlin Renaissance Museum," *Fortnightly Review* 50 (1 October 1891), 509. Morelli died in 1891, a situation which added to the climate of interest in his work at this time.

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Bode, Morelli was nothing more than a "quack doctor" clearly doing more harm than good, whose system derived merely from his "old and lucky hand at collecting."[82] Furthermore, Bode identified Morelli as a "Romanised Swiss [who] promulgates his theories on Italian art in the crudest manner, and makes fun of us Germans on nearly every page of his books,"[83] insinuating that his rival's rather fluid national background and interests made his method all the more suspect.

In keeping with the general anti-positivist tenor that arose in the 1880s, many writers also remained dubious that art and science could be reconciled in matters of aesthetics. Lady Eastlake, in spite of her general support of Morelli's methods and her claim that "[c]onnoisseurship is a strictly modern science," advised that

> there is no absolute demonstration feasible in settling the parentage of a work of art. There is no experiment by which it can be verified, no sum total by which it can be proved. It is easier with Whateley [*sic*], to show that no such person as Napoleon Buonaparte ever existed, than to prove the picture before us to be really the work of one born just 400 years ago. All eye-witnesses are gone with him—the almost only contemporary writer on the subject is proved to be as often as not a liar—contracts may survive, but who knows that he, and not another, fulfilled them—signatures go for nothing—taste is proverbially a quality on which mankind cannot agree.[84]

Lady Eastlake acknowledged that Vasari and his successors are frequently unreliable, legal and archival evidence is rarely conclusive, and in the end, connoisseurship often rests upon matters of perception and intuitive judgment, which are notoriously subjective.

A writer for the *Edinburgh Review* also framed the question of connoisseurship in terms of parentage and science, stating in a review of the first English edition of *Italian*

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] [Lady Eastlake], "The Life and Works of Raphael," 174, 189. Richard Whately, in his 1819 *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, applied the methods employed by David Hume in his skeptical analysis of Christian miracles to the historical phenomenon of Napoleon to demonstrate that Hume's logic would fail to confirm that the French ruler had ever existed.

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Painters: Critical Studies of Their Works, The Borghese and Doria-Pamfili Galleries in Rome, "Signor Morelli is in fact the father of what must be termed the *analytical* or *scientific* criticism of the arts of design."[85] Describing the system as being "based on a scientific analysis of the picture itself, as minute as that of a naturalist who examines an insect or a plant," this writer complained that Morelli may have disregarded "perhaps a little too much of that intuitive faculty by which the elder *conoscenti* were supposed to trace the hand of a master and assign a given work to its real author or authors."[86] Moreover, art is found in "the spirit, not the letter, which the true artist gives on his canvas," and "could Morelli prove the infallibility of his scientific method, unaided by collateral evidence, he would necessarily at the same time destroy the claim of the men he wishes to serve to being artists at all."[87] To show that the mystery and charm of religious images could exist even without the official imprimatur of the scientific connoisseurs was also a goal of Symbolist critic Paul Bourget. In *Sensations d'Italie* (1891) Bourget sought to demonstrate that works by unknown painters in little-visited churches could possess the same power to move the viewer as the recognized masterpieces of art history.[88]

As various artists, critics, and curators called into question the scientific reliability of and necessity for what was also called "modern connoisseurship," Bernard and Mary Berenson began their efforts to transform Morelli's method into what they would term "psychological criticism."[89] Bernard had written a few articles by this time (including an

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[85] "Morelli's Italian Painters," reprinted from *Edinburgh Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 81 (4 February 1893), 324.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 325.

[88] Rémy G. Saisselin, in *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), describes Bourget's book as a proclamation of "the flaneur's right to enjoy Italy and its works of art even at the risk of wrong attributions" (128).

[89] Mary Berenson, née Mary Smith, first met Berenson in 1888. Though already married to the Irish barrister and politician Francis Costelloe, she and Bernard quickly grew close and she legally separated from her husband in 1892 (he was given custody of their two children). Mary and Bernard did not marry until after Francis's death in 1899. After her marriage to Costelloe but before her marriage to Berenson, Mary published under her maiden name, her married name, and as "Mary Logan" (Logan was her brother's name). For the sake of simplicity I will refer to Mary in the text as "Mary Berenson." For biographical information on the Berensons, see Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a*

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1886 review of essays by Vernon Lee) but only one essay dedicated to art before 1893. Mary had also published on art by the early 1890s, and it is generally accepted that she wrote most of the text for the first book published under Bernard's name, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance*, of 1894, but was prevented from putting her own name on it by her family's fear of scandal, as she was not yet divorced from her first husband.[90] In 1894 she published a methodological essay in *The Nineteenth Century* on "The New and the Old Art Criticism," written in part to respond to those who believed that if "pictures are in themselves quite as beautiful and suggestive, no matter by what name they are called" then "the question of attribution is a trivial or merely pedantic affair."[91] If this were true, nature would suffice to fill this desire for "mere abstract beauty," and we would have no need for art at all. Instead, she argued, we demand from art "the artist's impression of the world, the enlargement of our own experience through his vision, the quickening of our senses through his interpretation."[92] This definition of the "unformulated but imperative need that lies at the bottom of our desire for art"[93] looks back to Vernon Lee's 1887 declaration that the value of certain early Renaissance works of art was found in the artist's ability to make the viewer "all the more, see and feel" the

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Connoisseur (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), and *Mary Berenson: A Self-Portrait from her Letters & Diaries*, ed. Barbara Strachey and Jayne Samuels (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1983).

Though scholars generally state that Bernard was the innovator of the ideas in his books and Mary merely his assistant and popularizer, I find it difficult to make that distinction on the basis of their public writings alone and have chosen to consider the ideas generally attributed to Bernard to be the result of their collaboration, especially because I have often found Mary's writings to offer better explanations of their ideas than Bernard's. Therefore, I do not always make the distinction between their separate ideas but refer to them as belonging to both.

[90] Bernard Berenson, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (1894), reprinted in *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, vol. 1 (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 1968). According to a letter Mary Berenson wrote to her brother, their mother asked the publisher to remove Mary's name from *The Venetian Painters*. Mary consoled herself with the thought that this "was only fair, as the smaller part of the work is mine," meaning her essay as opposed to his list of Venetian paintings, a compilation of his latest "scientific" attributions. Letter from Mary Berenson to Robert Pearsall Smith, Florence, November 24, 1893, in *Mary Berenson: A Self-Portrait from her Letters*, 55.

[91] Mary Whitall Costelloe [later Mary Berenson], "The New and the Old Art Criticism," *Nineteenth Century* 35 (May 1894), 831.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

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world around him or her. At the same time, it looks forward to Bernard Berenson's "tactile values" and "life enhancement."

Mary Berenson then addressed the question of the relation between art and science. "Art is so much of an 'extra' in the lives of most people," she wrote, "that they can hardly bring themselves to think of it seriously, and the idea of using the two words 'art' and 'science' in connection seems like a mere paradox."[94] This is due to the tendency to consider art to be a "product of Genius," because even those who prefer almost nothing in life to remain "inexplicable" and "incalculable" are nonetheless "satisfied to relegate" art to "the region of mysteries and miracles" to the point that they will "attack furiously anyone who tries to chase them out of this, their last corner of fairyland."[95] Ultimately the scientific art critic has two duties: to compile catalogues that will prevent viewers from "wasting their time and strength on inferior material," and to "point out what is most enjoyable in an unfamiliar art, and tell the sightseer what to look for."[96]

The next year, after the publication of Bernard Berenson's second book, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism*, Mary Berenson wrote two far more ambitious methodological essays, introducing what she and Bernard were calling (despite the subtitle of the Lotto volume) "psychological" criticism. In the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, Mary (writing under the name "Mary Logan") outlined the three most common types of critique. The first is "documentary," comprising archival materials, while the second is "comparative," involving the use of unquestionably authentic works as touchstones against which other pictures are compared in order to determine their authenticity and chronological sequence. The third critical method, the "subjective," is divided into two types: that which employs the work as a "pretext for brilliant developments (Ruskin)," and that which "attempts to analyze the complex sensations that the work of art raises in

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[94] Ibid., 834.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 835.

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the spectator (W[alter] Pater)."[97] The innovation of Bernard Berenson's *Lotto*, Mary announced, "is that he seems to furnish the model for the fourth type of critique, that which we will deliberately name *psychological*. The author proposes nothing less than the *psychological reconstruction of the artistic personality of Lotto*."[98]

Using terms borrowed from concurrent psychological and physiological studies of automatic behavior and reflex actions, Mary Berenson described psychological criticism as involving the effort "to search, through the entire career, for the psychological laws of *habitude* and *resistance to habitude*."[99] In an article published in *The Atlantic Monthly* she set forth the two main questions to be answered by this system: "What habits—and from whom acquired—does this picture betray? and What power does it reveal on the part of the artist to react against habits, to observe for himself, interpret the world afresh, and express what has never found expression before?"[100] She explained that this method begins "where Morelli left off, with the much-ridiculed hands and ears and folds of drapery."[101] But in spite of her belief that Morelli had been correct in his evolutionary approach to art, tracing "with the minute care of a Darwin the derivation of one artist from another, the gradual modification of his forms, and the 'survivals' of inheritance," his method "although scientific, was purely empirical, and, so to say, unconscious."[102] Bernard Berenson, in contrast, had succeeded in her estimation in fully justifying this method in scientific terms in *Lorenzo Lotto*, with the result that it could eventually "lead us to those works of art which are really significant" and "tell us whether they mirror or

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[97] Mary Logan [later Mary Berenson], "Lorenzo Lotto," *Gazette des beaux-arts* (1 May 1895), 363: "prétexte à brilliants développements (Ruskin)"; "essayer l'analyse des sensations complexes que l'oeuvre d'art éveille chez le spectateur (W. Pater)."

[98] Ibid.: "c'est qu'il parait fournir le modèle d'un quatrième type de critique, celle que nous nommerions volontiers *psychologique*. L'auteur ne s'est proposé rien de moins que la *reconstruction psychologique de la personnalité artistique de Lotto*."

[99] Ibid.: "rechercher, à travers toute sa carrière, les lois psychologiques de *l'habitude* et de la *résistance à l'habitude*."

[100] Mary Logan [later Mary Berenson], "The New Art Criticism," *Atlantic Monthly* 76 (August 1895), 268-9.

[101] Ibid., 268.

[102] Ibid., 266.

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whether they express its actualities or portray its ideals," as well as "prepare us to get from them all the enjoyment and all the inspiration possible to our temperaments."[103]

Reviewers of *Lorenzo Lotto* were somewhat less convinced by the arguments made by the Berensons. *The Nation* stated that the method "can be accepted only with great caution."[104] *The Atlantic Monthly* maintained that Berenson's revision of Morelli's system "tells us of Lotto . . . what the philologists tell us of Shakespeare and Dante. His facts are interesting, but they hardly alter much the amount or the kind of our enjoyment."[105] This writer observed that Berenson realized the problem and ended his book "in a wholly different vein,—with a plain analysis, from a personal point of view, of the effect that Lotto's work has upon him, and with interesting and enlightening generalizations in regard to Lotto's character and natural trend of mind that have little in common with the wilderness of details that precede."[106] Indeed, Berenson commented of art criticism in the same volume, "do what we will to pump ourselves dry of prejudices and accidental feelings, do what we will to be cautious and judicious, our final impression of works of art remains an equation between them and our own temperament. Every appreciation is, therefore, a confession, and its value depends entirely upon its sincerity."[107]

With their 1896 publications the Berensons turned away from the subjective and emotionally freighted language of the detail that "betrays" and the appreciation that is a "confession." When introducing "tactile values," they buttressed their argument with terms drawn from psychology, which was at this moment, despite its recent "discovery of

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[103] Ibid., 270.
[104] "Modern Connoisseurship," *Nation* 60 (24 January 1895), 77.
[105] "Reconstructive Criticism," *Atlantic Monthly*, 558.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism* (1895), quoted in Mary Ann Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 41-2. Calo's book has been extremely useful to me in the preparation of this chapter, as has David Alan Brown's *Berenson and the Connoisseurship of Italian Painting* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1979).

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the unconscious," far closer to physiology in its concerns than to the Freudian ideas anticipated by Morelli's and their own interest in unconscious gestures and the discovery of hidden or repressed material. Above all, the concept of tactile values reflects concurrent debates regarding spatial vision and its dependence upon information derived from touch. By the last two decades of the nineteenth century these issues were studied by aestheticians as well as scientists, with both groups interested in assessing the validity of Kant's claims about the *a priori* nature of space.[108] In an important 1879 article Paul Janet summarized three situations generally cited by the "empiricists" to refute Kant's followers (the "nativists") and the idea that the ability to perceive space is innate:

> 1. The experiences of those born blind who have had their cataracts operated on, with the result that in the first moments they see all objects on the same plane;
> 2. The errors committed by small children in their first estimations of distance: the child lifts his arms toward a distant person, as if she [*sic*] were near him;
> 3. The illusions of painting, which allow us to see depth and distance when they are not there, as in theater decorations. . . .[109]

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[108] For a more detailed consideration of these debates, see Marjolein Degenaar, *Molyneux's Problem: Three Centuries of Discussion on the Perception of Forms*, trans. Michael J. Collins (Dordrect, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996). Jonathan Crary addresses a number of related issues in *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

[109] Paul Janet, "De la perception visuelle de la distance," *Revue philosophique de la France et l'étranger* 7 (January 1879), 2:

1. Les expériences faites sur les aveugles-nés opérés de la cataracte, expériences d'où il résulterait qu'au premier moment les opérés voient tous les objets sur le même plan;
2. Les erreurs commises par les petits enfants dans leurs premières appréciations sur la distance: l'enfant tend les bras vers une personne éloignée, comme si elle était près de lui;
3. Les illusions de la peinture, qui nous font voir de profondeurs et des distances là où il n'y en a pas, comme dans les décors de théâtre. . . .

Other important articles from the late 1870s through the 1890s on the relation of sight to touch and spatial vision include James Sully, "The Question of Visual Perception in Germany" *Mind* 3 (1878), 1-23, 167-95; Th[éodule] Ribot, "Les Théories allemandes sur l'espace tactile," *Revue philosophique de la France et l'étranger* 6 (August 1878), 130-45; G. Stanley Hall, "The Muscular Perception of Space," *Mind* 3 (October 1878), 433-50; H. P. Bowditch and William F. Southard, "A Comparison of Sight and Touch," *Journal of Physiology* 3 (1880), 232-45; William James, "The Perception of Space," *Mind* 12 (1887), 1-30, 183-211, 321-53, 516-48; Charles Dunan, "L'Espace visuel et l'espace tactile," *Revue philosophique de la France et l'étranger* 25 (1888), 134-69, 354-86, 591-619, reprinted in *Essais de philosophie, Cours de philosophie* (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1902); E. Victor Bigelow, "Genesis of Spatial Sensation," *New*

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The study of spatial perception therefore brought together those concerned with matters of vision, touch, child psychology, and art.

One of the most influential texts discussing these questions from the point of view of aesthetics was *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (1893), by the German sculptor Adolf Hildebrand. Like so many theorists of the era, Hildebrand drew upon the findings of science to argue against an empirical or realist approach to art. The painter's main purpose, he explained, is to give "on a plane a visual impression of a three-dimensional form," taking into consideration perception resulting from "kinaesthetic" movements as well as perception which takes place with the eye at rest.[110] The artist is distinguished by a "clear comprehension of these values of form as opposed to mere knowledge of the actual form," actual form being "a sum of isolated sensations having significance only for scientific consideration."[111] Though Hildebrand nodded to contemporary psychology by claiming that "general perceptual form" is "developed unconsciously," he also invoked Platonic aesthetics by declaring that this general form "must be distinguished from any particular memory image, since the former contains the essential, the latter largely fortuitous elements. Art consists of giving shape to these ideas of spatial values, thus taking what may have been in Nature insignificant and fortuitous, and rendering it expressive and inevitable."[112]

According to Hildebrand, "spatial values" are perceived even by those uneducated about art, and supersede the importance of subject matter: "Although the layman, with his interest in the subject, seeks out and pays most attention to the *things* which are represented in the picture, he nevertheless succumbs unconsciously to the effect which

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Englander and Yale Review 55 (September 1891), 243-56; George M. Stratton, "Some Preliminary Experiments on Vision without Inversion of the Retinal Image," *The Psychological Review* 3 (November 1896), 611-7, 4 (July 1897), 341-60, 4 (September 1897), 463-81; and George M. Stratton, "The Spatial Harmony of Sight and Touch," *Mind* 24 (October 1899), 492-505.

[110] Adolf Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (1893/1907), trans. and rev. Max Meyer and Robert Morris Ogden (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1945), 34.

[111] Ibid., 42.

[112] Ibid., 42-3.

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makes the whole spatially alive and unified. This internal consistency of a work of art he feels without being able to explain it. Interest and imagination are stimulated and the attention held by the apparent reality of the impression."[113] Nonetheless, the "reality of the impression" has little to do with realism, in which the "necessary artistic metamorphosis of functional into spatial values has not taken place; the artist has given thought to the truth of his gestures as expressions only."[114] As a result, "Much that to-day stands for modernity and originality actually signifies no more than an absence of the artistic reconstruction of reality."[115] Hildebrand concluded that "spatial values" could only be achieved by following "the universal laws of Art," with the ultimate "mission" of art being "to reestablish and make felt the sound and natural relations between our thought and sense activities."[116]

The influence of Hildebrand's theories upon Bernard Berenson is evident from the opening pages of *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896). "Now, painting is an art," wrote Berenson,

> which aims at giving an abiding impression of artistic reality with only two dimensions. The painter must, therefore, do consciously what we all do unconsciously—construct his third dimension. And he can accomplish his task only as we accomplish ours, by giving tactile values to retinal impressions. His first business, therefore, is to rouse the tactile sense, for I must have the illusion of being able to touch a figure, I must have the illusion of varying muscular sensations inside my palm and fingers corresponding to the various projections of this figure, before I shall take it for granted as real, and let it affect me lastingly.[117]

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[113] Ibid., 52-3.
[114] Ibid., 112.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 122-3.
[117] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 2.

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Berenson simplified Hildebrand's formula, transforming the vague "spatial values" into the more specific "tactile values," which pair more clearly with "retinal impressions."

Mary Berenson, discussing *The Florentine Painters* in a concurrently published article in *The Atlantic Monthly* on "The Philosophy of Enjoyment of Art," went farther than Hildebrand in the teleological delimitation of painting:

> Setting aside those elements . . . which it has in common with literature,—that is to say, all the elements of association with sentiment, the suggestions of pleasant scenes, attractive types, and the emotional states induced by these,—setting aside all, in fine, that we call "poetic" in a picture, as not being the *specific* elements of enjoyment capable of being afforded by painting, and by nothing else, [Bernard Berenson] proceeds to analyze the elements which are peculiar to the art of painting; judging that these, and these alone, must be the sources of our specifically artistic pleasure.[118]

Mary Berenson's conclusion—that the only important elements in art are its purely formal aspects and the unembodied sensations that they produce in the viewer—strikes with the force of the uncanny, for it is simultaneously strange and familiar: it creates "at first hearing, a decided shock; yet when we examine it, it is so simple, so severely logical, so true to our most intimate sensations, that we feel as if we had always known it."[119]

Bernard Berenson's explanation of the effect of tactile values also makes use of the language of the uncanny, in the tension between the real and the illusionistic, the living and the life-like, in representation. The first artist to discover tactile values, in his scheme, was Giotto, whose paintings "have not only as much power of appealing to the tactile imagination as is possessed by the objects represented—human figures in particular—but actually more; with the necessary result that to his contemporaries they conveyed a *keener* sense of reality, of life-likeness than the objects themselves!"[120] This life-likeness,

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[118] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson], "The Philosophy of Enjoyment of Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 77 (June 1896), 845.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 3.

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however, has nothing to do with the narrative and emotional drama for which Giotto had been long celebrated.[121] To the contrary, "great though he was as a poet, enthralling as a story-teller, splendid and majestic as a composer, he was in these qualities superior in degree only, to many of the masters who painted in various parts of Europe during the thousand years that intervened between the decline of antique, and the birth, in his own person, of modern painting."[122] In fact, it is in spite of these qualities that Berenson praised Giotto. It is only because his figures "stimulate our sense of touch while they present themselves to our eyes" that we can "take their existence for granted," and it is not until we can do this that the work "can begin to give us pleasure that is genuinely artistic, as separated from the interest we feel in symbols."[123]

Mary Berenson took up this point regarding figures as forms rather than as symbols in her *Atlantic Monthly* article, explaining,

> To us, a person is rather a cause of transitive emotion, a social factor, than a form; and thus it is with everything we see. We are content with the mere recognition of properties in so far as they practically concern us. The visual world has come to be, to most people, only a set of symbols, signifying emotion, action, cause and effect, or what-not. But painting, whose peculiar task, we remember, is to be concerned with the visible qualities of form and movement, recalls to our consciousness the ancient means by which the race and every individual learned to realize the outer universe; reminds us that things are not merely symbols of dynamic forces, but objects to be dwelt on in and for themselves.[124]

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[121] William J. Stillman, for example, summed up Giotto's work in the Arena Chapel as being characterized by "imagination, pictorial invention, knowledge of human nature, dramatic power, and knowledge of the resources of his art unapproached before his time." See W[illiam] J. Stillman, "Giotto," *Century Magazine* 37 (January 1889), 326.

[122] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 2-3.

[123] Ibid., 3.

[124] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson], "The Philosophy of Enjoyment of Art," 847.

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By concentrating on the manner in which an image stimulates in the mind an idea of its tangibility and movements, the viewer becomes totally engaged in artistic perception, to the point that everything ancillary to the formal aspects of representation—narrative, emotion, iconography, symbolism—is necessarily excluded.

It must be stressed, however, that the Berensons elevated not the actual, embodied sense of touch as a vehicle for this type of perception but an "ideated" sensation, "purified" of its carnal origins. This emphasis on the ethereal rather than the corporeal aspects of art grew out of the agnostic aestheticism developing in Boston philosophical circles in the 1890s, derived in great part from Walter Pater's writings.[125] An "ideated" sense of touch served a particular purpose for the Berensons, allowing for the continued existence of and appreciation for figure painting within their teleological schema, because to them the nude was not only "the best vehicle for all that in art which is directly life-confirming and life-enhancing, but it is itself the most significant object in the human world."[126] But as a writer in the *Cornhill Magazine* had noted in 1878, the insistence that each art must satisfy a need that is most appropriate to its primary mode of perception and materials when applied to painting runs the risk (borne out in Greenberg's aesthetics) of leading to abstraction. The *Cornhill* writer dismissed this possibility by claiming, the "eye desires clear and well-defined objects: it is the organ of perception *par excellence*, and it could never be long satisfied with misty 'nocturnes' or with a dreamy, symbolic type of art."[127] The Berensons, in contrast, drew upon concurrent explorations of the importance of touch in the perception of objects and space to justify their emphasis upon the figure in representational painting, despite their rejection of certain expressive elements usually conveyed through the figure, such as narrative, symbolism, and emotion. One could say

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[125] For more on this issue, see Kathleen Pyne's "Portrait of a Collector as an Agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and Connoisseurship," *Art Bulletin* 78 (March 1996), 75-97. On the profound influence of Pater upon Berenson, see Paul Barolsky, "Pater and Berenson," *New Criterion* 2 (April 1984), 47-57.

[126] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 40.

[127] "The Undefinable in Art," reprinted from *Cornhill Magazine* in *Littell's Living Age* 139 (21 December 1878), 768.

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that the Berensons' conception of figure painting privileges the figure at the expense of the body, especially the material and emotionally expressive aspects of the body commonly associated with the feminine.

In fact, the theory of tactile values was so devoted to the evacuation of embodied touch from the experience of art that it does not account in any way for the role of paint handling in art, despite the emergence of brushwork as an area of intense concern among many critics in the second half of the nineteenth century. References to facture are rare in the Berensons' writings, even when most appropriate, as in the 1894 *Venetian Painters of the Renaissance*. The discussion of Titian, for example, merely acknowledges that in his late works the painter achieved masterful images through the manipulation of light and shadow attained "by the almost total suppression of outlines, by the harmonizing of his colours, and by the largeness and vigour of his brushwork."[128] The lack of interest in the material aspect of paint is even more surprising when we consider that in 1892 Mary Berenson privately formulated a history of art that followed a linear evolution beginning with Titian, moving through Spain and Holland, and finding its teleological end in the modern French school. She admired Titian's late work in particular because it could be understood as "pure painting," outside of any historical context.[129] At this same moment Bernard too, in a notebook entry, linked the "astonishing affect of reality" achieved by Titian, Hals, Tintoretto, Velázquez, and Rembrandt to their "fascinating brushwork" and saw this as a significant precursor to the beauty of Impressionist painting.[130]

That so little of this information found its way into the Berensons' published writings, and that Bernard's history of art privileged Giotto rather than Titian suggests that something had changed between the early 1890s, when the Berensons paid occasional visits to Durand-Ruel's galleries, and 1896, with the publication of *The Florentine*

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[128] Berenson, *The Venetian Painters*, 22.
[129] Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, 35.
[130] Quoted from Berenson's 1892 notebook in Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, 36-7.

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Painters and the original presentation of tactile values. Perhaps it was in fact the suspicion that this evolutionary scheme would continue to dissolve the figure to the point of abstraction that caused them to suppress their delight in bravura painting. It may also be that the Berensons found it necessary to resist the seductive pleasures of brushwork, which due to its material prominence could not help but bring to mind the sensuous activity of the painter and the role of the artist's body in the production of the work. This would be distracting to the spectator who was supposed to be concentrating instead on cerebral and disembodied tactile values. One also wonders to what degree questions of gender came into play here in terms of whose scheme would eventually dominate, given the dynamic between Mary's private role as the more "intuitive," feminine spectator of the pair, who in the early 1890s published under a number of names but could not yet publish as "Mary Berenson," and Bernard's position as a masculine, Harvard-identified authority.

A number of passages from William James's 1890 *Principles of Psychology* (along with Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form*, the most important source for the Berensons' mid-1890s theories) demonstrate the degree to which the valuation of an ideated sense of touch also implies a rejection of the feminized body and "feminine" ways of knowing, such as tact and instinct. James took issue with Platonism and its modern variants, stating, "Plato's earlier pupils used to admit Sensation's existence, grudgingly, but they trampled it in the dust as something corporeal, non-cognitive, and vile. His latest followers seem to seek to crowd it out of existence altogether."[131] But while James was more interested in sensation and its relation to perception than the Platonists and Neo-Kantians, he frequently associated the senses, including sight as well as touch, with the corporeal and non-cognitive as well as with the infantile and the womanly—not to mention the artistic.

Writing on the subject of mental imagery and its relation to imagination, James relied heavily upon the writings of Francis Galton, quoting the English scientist's

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[131] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2, 9-10.

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commentary on visualization, in which he claimed, "The power of visualizing is higher in the female sex than in the male, and is somewhat, but not much, higher in public-school boys than in men."[132] Galton suggested that age, "hard abstract thinking," and "book-learning" also dim the capacity to visualize, which is highest in young children, "who seem to spend years of difficulty in distinguishing between the subjective and objective world."[133] Moreover, the French, so often considered to be the most thoroughly artistic of all nationalities, were recognized as experts in visualization.[134]

In contrast, "scientific men, as a class, have feeble powers of visual representation," perhaps because "an over-ready perception of sharp mental pictures is antagonistic to the acquirement of habits of highly-generalized and abstract thought, especially when the steps of reasoning are carried on by words as symbols, and that if the faculty of seeing the pictures was ever possessed by men who think hard, it is very apt to be lost by disuse."[135] Those lacking strong abilities of visualization can nonetheless become artists through the use of "other modes of conception, chiefly, I believe, connected with the incipient motor sense, not of the eyeballs only but of the muscles generally," with the result that "*men who declare themselves entirely deficient in the power of seeing mental pictures can nevertheless give lifelike descriptions* of what they have seen, and can otherwise express themselves as if they were gifted with a vivid visual imagination. *They can also become painters of the rank of Royal Academicians.*"[136]

A sensibility for color was also linked to the emotional, the intuitive, and the artistic. James explained that, according to the physiologist Alexander Bain, "a man's advance to the scientific stage (the stage of noticing and abstracting the bond of similarity) may often be due to an *absence* of certain emotional sensibilities," with the result that a

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[132] Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (1883), quoted in James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2, 55. It was in this book that Galton originated the concept of eugenics.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 53.
[136] Ibid.

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good sense for color "may no less determine a mind away from science than it determines it toward painting. . . . A certain richness of the aesthetic nature may, therefore, easily keep one in the intuitive stage."[137] As we have seen throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the intuitive remained the domain of women and savages.

The sexes also differed according to James in that men were more liable to experience "genuinely *cerebral* forms of pleasure and displeasure," as opposed to the more visceral and embodied "*coarser* emotions" of grief, fear, rage, and love.[138] As he explained these cerebral pleasures, "Concords of sounds, of colors, of lines, logical consistencies, teleological fitnesses, affect us with a pleasure that seems ingrained in the very form of the representation itself, and to borrow nothing from any reverberation surging up from the parts below the brain."[139] Experts in aesthetics were most likely to perceive the arts in cognitive rather than emotional or physical terms. Although some bodily "reverberation" may be involved, "long familiarity with a certain class of effects, even aesthetic ones, has blunted mere emotional excitability as much as it has sharpened taste and judgment," with the result that we "get the intellectual emotion, if such it be called, pure and undefiled."[140] A "sentimental layman," continued James,

> would feel, and ought to feel, horrified, on being admitted into such a critic's mind, to see how cold, how thin, how void of human significance, are the motives for favor or disfavor that there prevail. The capacity to make a nice spot on the wall will outweigh a picture's whole content; a foolish trick of words will preserve a poem; an utterly meaningless fitness of sequence in one musical composition set at naught any amount of "expressiveness" in another.[141]

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[137] Ibid., 361.
[138] Ibid., 449, 468.
[139] Ibid., 468.
[140] Ibid., 471.
[141] Ibid.

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But if the "sentimental layman" should feel "horrified," the man of advanced taste should understand. To demonstrate the absurdity of an interest in the "coarser emotions" and "expressiveness" as opposed to formal "fitness," James told of observing an English couple as they admired Titian's *Assumption* in Venice. Drawing near "to learn with what superior forms of susceptibility they might be endowed, all I overheard was the woman's voice murmuring: 'What a *deprecatory* expression her face wears! What self-abneg*ation!* How *unworthy* she feels of the honor she is receiving!' Their honest hearts had been kept warm all the time by a glow of spurious sentiment that would have fairly made old Titian sick."[142] Like the daughter in Morelli's anecdote relating to the "Correggio" *Magdalene*, the woman in James's story lacks the disinterested formal sensibilities of the sophisticated aesthete. Indeed, James concluded,

> in every art, in every science, there is the keen perception of certain relations being *right* or not, and there is the emotional flush and thrill consequent thereupon. And these are two things, not one. In the former of them it is that experts and masters are at home. The latter accompaniments are bodily commotions that they hardly feel, but that may be experienced in their fulness [*sic*] by *crétins* and philistines in whom the critical judgment is at its lowest ebb.[143]

To James, the highest artistic experience, the "aesthetic emotion, *pure and simple*, the pleasure given us by certain lines and masses, and combinations of colors and sounds, is an absolutely sensational experience, an optical or auricular feeling that is primary, and not due to the repercussion backwards of other sensations consecutively aroused."[144] The sense of touch certainly had no place within this conception of art. Nor did he believe that touch had an originary role in pleasure, and he devoted a number of pages to repudiating Bain's ideas on tactile contact as a cause of more cerebral emotions and experiences.

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[142] Ibid., 473.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 468.

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James quoted Bain's declaration, "Touch is the fundamental and generic sense. . . . Even after the remaining senses are differentiated, the primary sense continues to be a leading susceptibility of the mind."[145] Furthermore, in Bain's words,

> our love pleasures begin and end in sensual contact. Touch is both the alpha and omega of affection. As the terminal and satisfying sensation, the *ne plus ultra*, it must be a pleasure of the highest degree. . . . It must be that there is a source of pleasure in the companionship of other sentient creatures, over and above the help afforded by them in obtaining the necessities of life. To account for this, I can suggest nothing but the primary and independent pleasure of the animal embrace.[146]

Bain also posited that the sense of touch plays a role in parental instinct, which may have at its foundation "that intense pleasure in the embrace of the young which we find to characterize the parental feeling throughout. . . . For the sake of the pleasure, the parent discovers the necessity of nourishing the subject of it, and comes to regard the ministering function as a part or condition of the delight."[147] In response, James jeered, "Prof. Bain does not explain why a satin cushion kept at about 98° F. would not on the whole give us the pleasure in question more cheaply than our friends and babies do."[148] In his view, the feeling of love or tenderness for another person precedes and even causes the delight in making physical contact with that person. Moreover, he associated the tactile activities of maternity with what he considered to be the more vile and repugnant aspects of corporeality.

The Berensons, while relying upon studies such as James's in formulating their account of aesthetic pleasure, nevertheless took issue with some aspects of their theories. In 1896 Mary Berenson described aesthetics as "still the vaguest and most fantastic branch

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[145] Alexander Bain, *Emotions and Will* (1859), quoted in James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2, 551 n.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 552 n.
[148] Ibid.

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of psychology" perhaps because psychologists devoted too much attention to the art experiences of the child and the "savage," and connoisseurs focused too much on documents and archives.[149] As the Berensons believed they must dedicate greater attention to the works of art themselves and from them develop a "psychological reconstruction" of the painter's career, so too they felt that the sense of touch, in its cerebral, "ideated" form, could be elevated from the realm of the child and the savage and recuperated for aesthetics. As I suggested earlier, by retaining an allegiance to the figure through its imagined tactility they could prevent their evolutionary conception of painting, which was propelled by the medium's requirements as a two-dimensional art form that seeks to represent three dimensions, from moving toward complete abstraction.

But while the Berensons' concept of an "ideated" rather than embodied perception of art would influence those who sought to advance the "pure" gaze of formalism over the "bodily commotions" experienced by "*crétins* and philistines," the process through which these connoisseurs claimed tactile values are perceived actually harks back to primal infant sensations. These are the very sensations that tactile values were said to supplant by advancing the viewer beyond "all the elements of association with sentiment" that might be expressed through art. In *The Florentine Painters* Bernard Berenson stated:

> In the same unconscious years [of infancy] we learn to make of touch, of the third dimension, the test of reality. The child is still dimly aware of the intimate connexion between touch and the third dimension. He cannot persuade himself of the unreality of Looking-Glass Land until he has touched the back of the mirror. Later, we entirely forget the connexion, although it remains true that every time our eyes recognize reality, we are, as a matter of fact, giving tactile values to retinal impressions.[150]

When Mary Berenson described Bernard's method as "a decided shock," yet "so true to our most intimate sensations, that we feel as if we had always known it," she was

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[149] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson], "The Philosophy of Enjoyment of Art," 844.
[150] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 2.

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indicating its uncanniness, anticipating as it does the moment Lacan would later term the "mirror stage," when the child first recognizes itself as an individual being.

Prior to this phase of development, the infant experiences itself as a series of fragmented movements, enclosed to great degree within the mother's touch, gestures, and voice, but does not yet feel itself to be a unified whole. As Anthony Vidler describes it, during the "mirror stage" this fragmented consciousness participates in "a sort of drama impelled toward a spatial identification of the self with regard to its reflection"[151] as the child begins to individuate. Eventually the infant comes to understand itself as a whole through the image it sees in the mirror, but this self-image is paradoxical and the unity is an illusion, for they occur only through the recognition of the double in the mirror—a representation split off from the self.[152] Whereas the child had formerly been mirrored and doubled by its mother, now it is doubled by its own reflection. And with this positive recognition of the individual self also comes a negative component, a loss, in the knowledge that it can never recreate the original sense of oneness with the mother (as it cannot merge the "self" and the reflection) despite the continuing desire to do so.

This split between the self and reflection—recognized but largely repressed—is rehearsed within the concept of tactile values, which enacts various splits, particularly between embodied and "ideated" sensations and between content and form. But the Berensons' scheme—based in the same physio-psychological studies regarding issues of spatial perception and representational illusion that paved the way for Lacan to formulate his concept of the "mirror stage"—makes evident that such divisions cannot be maintained

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[151] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 77.

[152] My understanding of the "mirror stage" or "mirror phase" is less Lacanian than post-Lacanian, shaped by feminist theorists, and indebted in particular to Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), as well as Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996). The original essay on this topic was delivered as a lecture in 1937: Jacques Lacan, "Le stade du miroir. Théorie d'un moment structurant et génétique de la consitution de la réalité, conçu en relation avec l'expérience et la doctrine psychanalytique," and first published in English as "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949), reprinted in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 1-7.

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easily. At the moment when the viewer is supposed to be transported by tactile values beyond the body, he or she is nevertheless reenacting the perceptual processes through which his or her status as a "split subject" was originally internalized. The viewer is returned to the mirror/mother, to the site of repression. As Mary Berenson explained it, Bernard in his theory "accounts for the possibility of our realizing represented movement in a vivid way by the mimetic element in our natures, which makes it almost certain that we shall tend to imitate nearly every motion that we see, whether in real life or in representation."[153] The child who imitates the mother and who is mirrored simultaneously by the maternal voice and gesture (one thinks here of Alfred de Lostalot, praising Cassatt for capturing in a "few lines barely emphasized with shading . . . the child's naive miming and the mother's enveloping gestures and infinite caresses")[154] becomes the adult spectator who unconsciously repeats the need to imitate when viewing a painting.

The uncanniness of this return is implied in Berenson's appreciation of Botticelli. "Never pretty, scarcely ever charming, or even attractive; rarely correct in drawing, and seldom satisfactory in colour; in types ill favoured; in feeling acutely intense and even dolorous—what is it then that makes Sandro Botticelli so irresistible that nowadays we may have no alternative but to worship or abhor him?," he asked. "The secret," he answered, is "that in European painting there has never again been an artist so indifferent to representation and so intent upon presentation."[155] Botticelli could be appreciated by those who "care for nothing in the work of art but what it represents," but his full worth could only be realized by those capable of going beyond subject matter to recognize his

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[153] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson], "The Philosophy of Enjoyment of Art," 846. The phenomenon of imitation was frequently studied in this era; see, for example, Gabriel Tarde's important *Les lois de l'imitation: étude sociologique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1890), and the American philosopher Josiah Royce's discussion of Tarde's ideas, "The Imitative Functions and their Place in Human Nature," *Century Magazine* 48 (May 1894), 137-45. Royce argued that children aquire a sense of self through the imitation of their elders, and furthermore, that "this process of acquiring one's selfhood vicariously" does not cease with childhood (142).

[154] De Lostalot, "Expositions Diverses, Peintres-Graveurs," 235.

[155] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 33.

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"unparalleled power of perfectly combining touch with values of movement."[156] Yet Berenson described the Italian painter's artistic aims not in terms of a natural and untroubled achievement but rather as a struggle against the spectral presence of the body: "In fact, the mere subject, and even representation in general, was so indifferent to Botticelli, that he appears almost as if haunted by the idea of communicating the *unembodied* values of touch and movement," seeking to render "even tactile values with almost no body . . . by translating them as faithfully as may be into values of movement."[157] Botticelli achieved this through linearity, for his lines, "with all their power of stimulating our imagination of movement," create "[p]ure values of movement abstracted, unconnected with any representation whatever."[158]

In Berenson's view, *The Birth of Venus* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) epitomized this formal achievement within Botticelli's oeuvre. He described the painting in language reminiscent of the Symbolist arabesque, language with which he was likely familiar as he had formulated the concept of tactile values while immersing himself in contemporary art in Paris.[159] He claimed that in *The Birth of Venus* "the tactile imagination is roused to a keen activity, by itself almost as life-heightening as music," to the point where "the power of music is even surpassed," as in "the goddess's mane-like tresses of hair fluttering to the wind" where "the movement is directly life-communicating."[160] Like the Symbolist view of the arabesque as a self-generating device, Berenson's idea of the musical linearity of Botticelli's work is intimately linked here to an image of asexual birth—Venus rising from the waters.

At the same time, Berenson found this linearity (which he linked to the Japanese art praised by critics such as Fénéon) to be deeply seductive. But rather than discussing

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156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., 34.
158 Ibid.
159 On this subject, see Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, 34-7.
160 Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 33.

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this aspect of Botticelli's painting in relation to the obvious picture, the *Venus*, Berenson displaced it to the body of the centaur in the same artist's *Pallas and Centaur* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence), noting almost breathlessly that the artist

> constructs the torso and flanks in such a way that every line, every indentation, every boss appeals so vividly to the sense of touch that our fingers feel as if they had everywhere been in contact with his body. . . . As to the hair—imagine shapes having the supreme life of line you may see in the contours of licking flame, and yet possessed of all the plasticity of something which caresses the hand that models it to its own desire![161]

Even as he extolled tactile values for their purported state of purity in relation to bodily appetites and pleasures, Berenson frequently embedded his celebration of examples of the concept within a sexualized language.

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Despite the return of the repressed body in Berenson's application of tactile values, his theories would be among the most influential of the aesthetic systems that shaped the "pure" gaze of twentieth-century Formalism. Still, his promotion of a disembodied and disinterested mode of perception was by no means innovative but rather represented to a great extent another variant of Platonic and Kantian aesthetics, revitalized, as they had been periodically since the Enlightenment, by an appeal to science. In the late eighteenth century, the distinction between the science-mined, dispassionate "knower" [*connoisseur*] of art and the less methodical, more excitable "lover" [*amateur*] of art was given visual form in engravings done by the German artist Daniel Chodowiecki for the 1780 Goettingen Pocket Calendar. Conceived as a popular guide to acceptable and tasteful behavior, the calendar included twelve monthly illustrations grouped in six pairs of "how-to" and "how-not-to" images. *July* and *August* [Fig. 132] took as their theme "Kunst

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[161] Ibid., 34.

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Kenntnis" (also captioned in French as "Connoissance des Arts"), with *July* depicting the proper deportment of two connoisseurs. These men remain motionless, hands modestly clasped over the genitals or tucked under the arms, at a respectful distance from their object of contemplation, a statue of Pomona—not coincidentally, the tempting and fecund goddess of fruit trees and gardens.

In contrast, the gentlemen of *August* gesticulate animatedly before the same statue, their legs and hands opened; one man goes so far as to touch a finger to Pomona's offering of fruit. The most vulgar "Freudian reading" is difficult to resist, particularly considering the suggestive contact of the upraised digit to Pomona's bounty as well as the manner in which the hilt of the second man's sword has become far more prominent in the *August* illustration. *July*, on the other hand, personifies the eighteenth-century definition of the connoisseur that emerged from bourgeois aesthetics, incarnating the male viewer's disinterested stance and the triumph of reason over the basic instincts.[162]

The visceral sense of touch could have no place within such a formulation of art. However, a few writers of the late nineteenth-century took a less restrictive view of the role of embodied sensation in art. For instance, in an 1881 article challenging contemporary writers working in a Kantian vein such as Herbert Spencer and Grant Allen, Jean-Marie Guyau proclaimed, "The sense of touch . . . is a constant occasion for all sorts of aesthetic emotions."[163] Like James, Guyau associated tactility with the feminine, but without the same pejorative connotations. "If we followed to the end the doctrine of certain aestheticians," Guyau observed,

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[162] For more on this issue, and on the 1780 Goettingen Pocket Calendar, see Lynda Nead's important essay, "Bodies of Judgment: Art, Obscenity, and the Connoisseur," 203-25, and Anne-Marie Link, "The Social Practice of Taste in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany: A Case Study," *Oxford Art Journal* 15 (1992), 3-14. It is also interesting to note that Chodowiecki, the prolific engraver, produced a great many sensitive images of breastfeeding.

[163] Jean-Marie Guyau, "Le Plaisir du beau et le plaisir du jeu d'après l'école de l'évolution," *Revue des deux mondes* 46 (15 August 1881), 770: "Le sens du tact . . . est une occasion constante d'émotions esthétiques de toute sorte."

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> we would have to believe that blind sculptors could have no feeling for the beautiful in touching their hands to statues. If touch lacks an ability to perceive color, it furnishes on the other hand a notion that the eye alone cannot give us, and which has a considerable aesthetic value: that of *softness*, of *silkiness*, of *smoothness*. That which characterizes the beauty of velvet is its softness to the touch no less than its brilliance. In the idea that we have made of feminine beauty, the velvet of her skin becomes an essential element. At times the colors themselves derive some appeal from the association of ideas drawn from touch. The image of a very green lawn is associated with the idea of a certain softness under the feet: the pleasure that our members experience here augments that which the eye experiences in seeing. The brilliance of blond or black tresses is always linked to the sensation of *silkiness* that the hand experiences when it caresses them.[164]

Here the sense of touch is not completely "ideated" but rather encompasses both bodily and cerebral pleasures and desires.

Even "the blue of the very sky," to Guyau, "as impalpable as it might be, at times acquires a velvety appearance, which augments its charm and lends to it an indefinable softness."[165] In opposition to the Berensons and their stated goal of defining the indefinable, Guyau was more comfortable with the unknown as well as the unindividuated, which he associated with the feminine quality of grace. "In order to see this," he suggested,

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[164] Ibid.: "Si l'on poussait jusqu'au bout la doctrine de certains esthéticiens, on en arriverait à soutenir que les sculpteurs aveugles n'avaient pas le sentiment du beau en touchant de leurs mains les statues. Si la couleur manque au toucher, il nous fournit en revanche une notion que l'oeil seul ne peut nous donner, et qui a une valeur esthétique considérable, celle du *doux*, du *soyeux*, du *poli*. Ce qui caractérise la beauté du velours, c'est un douceur au toucher non moins que son brillant. Dans l'idée que nous nous faisons de la beauté d'une femme, le velouté de sa peau entre comme élément essentiel. Les coleurs même empruntent parfois quelque attrait à des associations d'idées tirées du tact. A l'image d'un gazon bien vert est associée l'idée d'une certain mollesse sous les pieds: le plaisir que nos membres éprouveraient à s'y étendre augmente celui que l'oeil ressent à le regarder. Au brillant des cheveux blonds ou noirs se lie toujours la sensation du *soyeux* que la main éprouverait en les caressant."

[165] Ibid.: "Le bleu du ciel lui-même, si impalpable qu'il soit, acquiert parfois une apparence de velouté, qui augmente son charme en lui prêtant une douceur indéfinissable."

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> imagine what the bird feels when it opens its wings and glides like a line through the air; we remember what we experience when taken away on a galloping horse, on a boat that is thrust along the waves, or even in the whirl of a waltz: all our movements evoke in us some idea of the infinite, of boundless desire, of a superabundant and crazy life, something of a disdain for individuality, some need to feel yourself go without holding back, to lose yourself in it all; and these vague ideas enter in as an essential element in the impression that is caused by a mass of movements.[166]

Like Berenson, Guyau was influenced in his promotion of the "life-enhancing" aspects of movement and art by Nietzsche's concept of "vitalism." But unlike the American connoisseur, who sought to establish the self-sufficiency of form above sentiment or subject matter, Guyau embraced aspects of experience frequently proscribed by male critics in particular as threateningly reminiscent of the sometimes overwhelming presence of the female or maternal body. The "supreme beauty of movement," being "that which translates the riches of life," he believed, should encompass both masculine force and feminine grace, "making them express together the most energetic and sweet will."[167]

Guyau further attended to the uncanny aspects of touch in *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*. The sense of touch is "*par excellence*, the sense of life, and through it death is also revealed the most surely to us."[168] Because touch is "the sense of life" it has taken on great importance both in the relations between the sexes and between parents and children, he continued, citing the writings of Bain as an important precedent for his

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[166] Ibid., 763: "Pour le découvrir, imaginons ce que peut ressentir l'oiseau ouvrant ses ailes et glissant comme un trait dans l'air; rappelons-nous ce que nous avons éprouvé nous-mêmes en nous sentant emportés sur un cheval au galop, sur une barque qui s'enfonce au creux des vagues, ou encore dans le tourbillon d'une valse: tous ces mouvemens évoquent en nous je ne sais quelle idée d'infini, de désir sans mesure, de vie surabondante et folle, je ne sais quel dédain de l'individualité, quel besoin de se sentir aller sans se retenir, de se perdre dans le tout; et ces idées vagues entrent comme élément essentiel dans l'impression que nous causent une foule de mouvemens."

[167] Ibid.: "beauté suprême dans les mouvemens"; "celle qui traduit la vie la plus riche"; "faisant exprimer tout ensemple la volonté la plus énergique et la plus douce."

[168] Guyau, *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, 4: "Le toucher est, par excellence, le sens de la vie, et c'est aussi celui qui nous révèle le plus sûrement la mort."

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thinking, especially regarding maternity and tactility. He agreed with Bain's choice to reject the hypothesis of Spencer, "who boiled the love of parents for their progeny down to a simple matter of 'love of the weak,'" for

> if he had reason to view the most primitive maternal love as a type of reflex response to "the grasp of the little one," it is this grasp that reveals to the mother not the weakness, but the very force of life, of a life that—the most animal mother can even vaguely sense it well enough—comes from herself, is in a profound harmony with her own self, and all whose palpitations are, so to speak, the echoes of the beating of her own heart.[169]

Although this view of maternity once again aligns the human mother with her primitive and animal counterparts, it nevertheless does not seek to degrade her for this connection, for touch is an essential and valuable sense and tool to Guyau, especially in enabling the mother and child to mirror each other, as one's heartbeat echoes the other's.

In fact, in his 1884 book *Les Problèmes de l'esthétique contemporaine* Guyau even argued in favor of the unconscious sexual instincts associated with touch in particular as an integral aspect of aesthetics, positing that sexual desire plays a role in the creation and reception of art,[170] unlike Berenson, who later in life elaborated that his aesthetic aimed to elevate art above the body's "cannibal appetites" and its "reproductive or transitive energies."[171] Guyau agreed with Berenson and James that the "aesthetic emotion" is the "most immaterial and most *intellectual* of the human emotions" and was the most likely to be perceived by means of the eyes and ears by virtue of their being

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[169] Ibid.: "qui ramène simplement l'amour des parents pour leur progéniture à 'l'amour du faible'"; "s'il a raison de voir dans l'amour maternel le plus primitif une sorte de réponse réflexe à 'l'étreinte du petit', c'est que cette étreinte révèle à la mère non pas la faiblesse, mais la force même de la vie, d'une vie qui,—la mère la plus animale le sent bien encore vaguement,—est sortie d'elle-même, est dans une profonde harmonie avec la sienne propre, et dont toutes les palpitations ne sont pour ainsi dire que le retentissement des battements de son propre coeur."

[170] This aspect of Guyau's theories is discussed by Shaw in *Dream States*, 62-4, 135-6, 158-9.

[171] Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (1948), quoted and discussed in Pyne, "Portrait of a Collector as an Agnostic," 94.

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"preserved from all direct contact with objects."[172] Nonetheless, while Berenson endeavored to purify tactility of its basis in the body by aligning it with an etherealized sense of sight, Guyau brought hearing and sight closer to touch by analogizing the vibrations of light and sound waves as they reach eye and ear to a kind of expressive tactility. For instance, when viewing a face, he claimed, "it is not only the plastic form of this face that we perceive, but also its frown or smile, vibrating in the ray of light that meets in movement our optic nerves."[173]

Guyau also believed that the "highest goal of art is to produce an aesthetic emotion of a social character,"[174] a shared type of emotion most likely to be achieved through metaphorical or physical touch. He pronounced that touch is "the most primitive and most sure method of putting into communication, into harmony, into *sociality*, two nervous systems, two consciousnesses, two lives."[175] Then, raising the question of *dédoublement*, he specified that each individual consciousness, "according to the most recent psychological research, in spite of an apparent unity is itself a society, a harmony between phenomena, between elementary states of consciousness, perhaps between cellular consciousnesses."[176] Guyau's conception of art, based upon multiplicity and contact rather than singularity and self-sufficient unity, stood in great contrast to the cult of individual originality that had gained momentum after 1860.

Another writer of this era to argue in favor of a more inclusive definition of art with regard to its appeal to the senses was the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. His *What is Art?* (first published in English and French in 1898), a passionate attack on formalism and

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[172] Guyau, *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, 5: "émotion esthétique"; "plus immatérielle et la plus *intellectuelle* des émotions humaines"; "préservés de tout contact direct avec les objets. . . ."

[173] Ibid.: "ce n'est pas seulement la forme plastique de ce visage que nous percevons, c'est sa grimace ou son sourire, vibrant dans le rayon du soleil qui met en mouvement nos nerfs optiques."

[174] Ibid., 21: "Le but le plus haut de l'art est de produire une émotion esthétique d'un caractère sociale."

[175] Ibid., 3: "le moyen le plus primitif et le plus sûr de mettre en communication, d'harmoniser, de *socialiser* deux systèmes nerveux, deux consciences, deux vies."

[176] Ibid., 8: "selon les recherches les plus récentes des psychologues, malgré son unité apparente, est elle-même une société, une harmonie entre des phénomènes, entre des états de conscience élémentaires, peut-être entre des consciences cellulaires."

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art for art's sake, quoted with approval Guyau's writings on the aesthetic impressions given by touch, taste, and smell while also claiming that "the tailor's work is art" and "those who do not see in the adornment of woman an affair of the highest art are very small minded and dull."[177] Ultimately, Tolstoy predicted, the art of the future would "not be poorer, but infinitely richer in subject matter," drawing upon "the simple feelings accessible to all" which as yet were "almost untouched" in art.[178]

These more inclusive rather than teleological conceptions of art were widely studied, but in the end less influential than the Berensons' system. This may be due in part to circumstance. Guyau, though well-respected, was a sociologist rather than a connoisseur, which limited his art world audience, and his death at a young age in 1888 surely prevented his theories from gaining wider acceptance. The well-known Tolstoy was extremely controversial, and even writers sympathetic to his ideas found them to be excessive and unbalanced (i.e. Dante and Shakespeare were "savage and meaningless," while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represented his pinnacle of art). René Doumic, who agreed "it is quite certain that art should not be considered a privilege of the *élite*, or addressed to the initiated alone," still complained that by "selecting a point of view exactly opposite to that of the artist, and not content with doing full justice to the import of art, Tolstoy ignores entirely the value of its form."[179]

Paul Elmer More, who examined *What is Art?* in 1900 in the context of the ancient feud between philosophy and art, saw Tolstoy's theory as the latest exemplar of the "contest between religion and the senses," astutely linking the repudiation of sensuous perception to the idealization and denigration of women.[180] According to More, "the

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[177] Leo N. Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (first Russian ed. 1896, first English and French eds. 1898), trans. Almyer Maude (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1960), 17-9.
[178] Ibid., 178.
[179] René Doumic, "Les Idées du comte Tolstoï sur l'art," *Revue des deux mondes* 147 (15 May 1898), trans. and reprinted [under the name "René Dominic"] as "Count Tolstoy's Ideas on Art," *Living Age* 218 (27 August 1898), 609, 611.
[180] Paul Elmer More, "The Ancient Feud between Philosophy and Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 87 (September 1900), 339.

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same horror of the lust of the eye and the pride of life" expressed by St. Augustine and promulgated by the Church had led to a concept of the "eternal feminine" which was

> strangely idealized, giving us in religion the worship of the Virgin Mary, and in art the raptures of chivalry culminating in Dante's adoration of Beatrice. But there is a darker side to the picture. Because the men of the new faith could not acquiesce in any simple life of the senses, woman must be either etherealized into an abstraction of religious virtues, or, if taken humanly, must be debased as the bearer of all the temptations of the flesh. She is the earthly vision of heaven or hell,—unless to some more human satirist she appears simply as purgatory.[181]

Not coincidentally, both types of idealized woman cited here had been revived in the arts during the late nineteenth century—the Virgin Mary (in France) and Dante's Beatrice (in England, among the Pre-Raphaelites)—along with her debased counterparts.

Though the religious aspect of this view of women played a lesser role in the aesthetic of agnostic connoisseurs such as the Berensons, the anti-sensation bias of their theories and their injunction against subject matter and the expression of emotion in painting nonetheless had the effect of further marginalizing women artists such as Cassatt who worked in traditionally feminine or gender-"appropriate" themes. The images for which she was renowned, with their emphasis upon sensuous tactility and physical contact that at times blurs the boundaries between figures, represented the very same embodied and emotional processes repudiated as improper concerns for painting by the concept of ideated and individualistic "tactile values."

In keeping with this line of thinking, one might understand a painting like *Young Women Picking Fruit* [Fig. 126] as representing two figures in the sensuous pursuit of the arts (a reading justified by the allegorical theme of the "Modern Woman" mural to which the work is related). As such, the painting could be analogized to the *August* image from

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[181] Ibid.

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the Goettinger Calendar [Fig. 132], the 1780 illustration of "how-not-to" view art according to the rules of distinterested connoisseurship. Cassatt's women do not partake in a sexualized relation to the objects of their appreciation—though they are represented in a manner recalling emblems of fertility like Pomona—but theirs is an actively tactile connection with the allegorical fruits they pluck and hold. They might even be imagined as painter and model, with the woman at right lifting her arm to touch brush to canvas. In many ways Cassatt's image presents a conception of painting that is more true to the actual experience of an artist than the Berensons', for hers admits to the necessity of the material realm and the body in art's creation, and to the inextricability of that body from the vagaries of life, death, and emotion, despite the drive to escape them through aesthetic activity. Her women are presented as creative, procreative, contemplative—and embodied.[182]

Unfortunately, we do not know much about what the Berensons thought of Cassatt's work. On the one hand, they might have found some aspects of her style to be sympathetic, such as the interest in linearity and pattern she shared with Botticelli. On the other, it seems unlikely that they would have tolerated the attention she paid to the emotional relationship between mother and child, nor the echoes of religious symbolism that were called up in the resemblance of some of her images to depictions of the Madonna and Child. The Berensons did admire a number of contemporary artists, and Degas in particular gained their approval for exhibiting a "supreme mastery over the art of movement" rivaling that of Velázquez and Leonardo.[183] (It is also possible that Berenson found in Degas the same quality of "impersonality" that he hailed in Vélazquez, "who

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[182] Cassatt created a number of images suggestive of contemplation at this time. See for example, *Woman Holding a Zinnia* (National Gallery of Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), BrCR 198, which depicts the same red-headed model shown standing in *Young Women Picking Fruit*.

[183] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 31.

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painted without ever betraying an emotion."[184]) The only indiciation we have of the Berensons' opinion of Cassatt's work is tantalizingly brief. In 1892 Mary Berenson wrote to her mother, recounting that she had spoken with someone who enthusiastically admired Cassatt's paintings because they were "so flat," much in the manner of Manet's *Olympia*: "Perhaps Logan can see light in the comparison," Mary suggested; "I could not."[185]

III.

The Berensons by no means believed that the theory of tactile values was limited to Italian painting of the Renaissance but felt that it had a greater potential application. Mary Berenson explained that the concept "will apply equally to every school in which the living figure is the preoccupying interest. Indeed, Mr. Berenson's references to Greek art, to Rembrandt, to Velasquez, to Degas, to the Japanese, hint to a thoroughgoing application of the theory on the author's own part."[186] Though tactile values as a whole were never adopted as a standard for aesthetic appreciation, Berenson's *Florentine Painters* was widely reviewed and debated, and various elements derived from his theories were quickly assimilated by critics of modern art who were also important promulgators of formalism, especially Roger Fry.

I would like to turn now to some key passages from Bernard Berenson's writings on images of the Madonna and Child, particularly those by Giotto and Raphael, to suggest more specifically how his works contributed to an environment where artists such as Cassatt, who treated the maternal image and its associated emotional content, were relegated to a position outside the mainstream of modernism. I will also discuss another group of concurrent and more inclusive theories of art history and criticism, most of them—perhaps not coincidentally—proposed or practiced by women, only to be

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[184] On Degas's mastery of movement, see Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 31; on "impersonality," see Bernard Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1897), in *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, vol. 2 (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 1968), 75.

[185] Letter from Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson] to Hannah Smith, September 3, 1892, quoted in Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, 36. Logan was Mary Berenson's brother.

[186] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson], "The Philosophy of Enjoyment of Art," 848.

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marginalized by the growing dominance of modernism and formalism. And yet, significant elements of these "feminine" aesthetic theories and practices would be revived in the late twentieth century—again, perhaps not coincidentally, mainly by women, many of them interested in the work of Mary Cassatt.

The image of the Madonna and Child experienced no greater popularity in the modern Western world than during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, in part because it held out the promise and possibility of the ideal in an era dominated by science and positivism, and because it could be interpreted to represent the model of feminine domesticity and self-sacrifice currently being urged upon women. Madonna-as-mother imagery also appealed immediately to the newly interested but artistically unsophisticated spectators disparaged by writers like James and the Berensons for their interest in subject matter and sentiment, and such imagery was soon sought out by the wealthy collectors whom the Berensons sought to educate and assist in their purchases. A variety of audiences were served in this era by large-scale, copiously illustrated volumes such as Ripley Hitchcock's *Madonnas by Old Masters* (1888), Julia Cartwright's *Christ and His Mother in Italian Art* (1897), and Adolfo Venturi's *La Madonna, Svolgimento artistico della rappresentazioni della vergine* (1900; first French edition 1902).

The image of the Madonna also played a role in defining Berenson's career, not only in his capacity as a disinterested connoisseur, but as an intermediary between owners or dealers of art works and patrons. His first venture into "applied connoisseurship" involved the purchase of a Bronzino Madonna for a friend in 1890, and during the early years of the twentieth century he was preoccupied by the futile attempt to fulfill the desire of his most important patron, Isabella Stewart Gardner, for a "*heavenly* Raphael Madonna."[187] But most importantly, Berenson employed two images of the Madonna and

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[187] David Alan Brown, *Raphael and America* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 52. The phrase "*heavenly* Raphael Madonna" is quoted from a 1901 letter from Gardner to Berenson.

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Child in his inaugural demonstration of the concept of tactile values, in the opening pages of *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance.*

According to Berenson, in order to comprehend how Giotto fulfills the "first condition of painting as art, which . . . is somehow to stimulate our tactile imagination," the reader should "cover with the same glance two pictures of nearly the same subject that hang side by side in the Uffizi at Florence, one by 'Cimabue,' and the other by Giotto" [Figs. 1, 2]:

> The difference is striking, but it does not consist so much in a difference of pattern and types, as of realization. In the "Cimabue" we patiently decipher the lines and colours, and we conclude at last that they were intended to represent a woman seated, men and angels standing by or kneeling. To recognize these representations we have had to make many times the effort that the actual objects would have required, and in consequence our feeling of capacity has not only been confirmed, but actually put into question. With what sense of relief, of rapidly rising vitality, we turn to the Giotto! Our eyes have scarcely had time to light on it before we realize it completely—the throne occupying a real space, the Virgin satisfactorily seated upon it, the angels grouped in rows about it. Our tactile imagination is put to play immediately. Our palms and fingers accompany our eyes much more quickly than in presence of real objects, the sensations varying constantly with the various projections represented, as of face, torso, knees; confirming in every way our feeling of capacity for coping with things—for life, in short.[188]

Berenson's experience of Giotto's panel could be characterized as an intellectualized and disembodied but nonetheless sexual instance of arousal, with the "rapidly rising vitality" felt before the easily accessible figure of the Virgin.

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[188] Berenson, *The Florentine Painters*, 6.

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As Hayden Maginnis points out, Berenson's innovation in his discussion of Giotto was not merely to emphasize those aspects of Italian painting that would help to direct art history toward formalism, but also to rewrite the art history which had come before him, as far back as Vasari's account of the birth of modern painting.[189] Until Berenson's *Florentine Painters*, the standard version of art's progress began with the *Rucellai Madonna* [Fig. 133], the first significant work to be discussed in *The Lives of the Painters*, where it was attributed to Cimabue. The image had come to popular attention in the nineteenth century with the enormous success of Lord Frederic Leighton's 1853–55 painting, *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* (National Gallery, London, on loan from Her Majesty the Queen). As late as 1893 Frederic Harrison invoked the *Rucellai Madonna* as an exemplar of spiritual and artistic purity in an art world contaminated by excessive emphasis on the exhibition and market system. "Would it be the same to us," he asked, "if the *Madonna* had been ordered by a dealer and hung in the Exhibition with bits of *genre* and studies from the nude? . . . Would it be all the same, if it had been 'the picture of the year,' and bought to adorn a contractor's mansion?"[190]

Despite his popularity, Cimabue had become a figure of some debate by the 1880s. William J. Stillman, for instance, stated, "we are perfectly justified in considering Cimabue to have been overrated from his own day down; that he was simply the ablest painter of his own day in Florence, and that his fortune in being the master of Giotto is his greatest claim to our gratitude."[191] Stillman found the Rucellai panel to be notable mainly for "a charm beyond that of art—the sacredness which lingers in the eyes which have looked into the sorrows and aspirations of the thousands of unhappy ones who in the past have laid

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[189] Maginnis, *Painting in the Age of Giotto*, 84-5. Berenson had traveled extensively through Italy, checking his opinions against Vasari, and published an article, "Vasari in the Light of Recent Publications" in *Nation* 56 (13 April 1893), 271-3.

[190] Frederic Harrison, "Art and Shoddy: A Reply to Criticisms," *Forum* 15 (August 1893), 724.

[191] W[illiam] J. Stillman, "Italian Old Masters. Cimabue," *Century Magazine* 37 (November 1888), 67.

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their hearts before the Madonna."[192] In 1889 Franz Wickoff argued that the painting should be reattributed to the less advanced Duccio, given its stylistic similarities to the Siena Cathedral *Maestà*, an opinion that gained wider acceptance with its promotion by J. P. Richter of the National Gallery, London, in 1898.[193]

Berenson did not discuss the *Rucellai Madonna* in his late-nineteenth century volumes at all, and his analysis of Duccio in *The Central Italian Painters*, despite its high praise, served mainly to demonstrate that Duccio, unlike the great Giotto, was merely an artist for whom "the human figure was in the first place important as a person in a drama, then as a member in a composition, and only at the last, if at all, as an object whereby to stimulate our ideated feelings of touch and movement."[194] Cimabue received far worse treatment by Berenson, for he appeared in *The Florentine Painters* on a single page and only as a foil for the *Ognissanti Madonna*. As a result, Giotto's painting stands out in greater relief as the image at the origin of modern painting.

Furthermore, the *Ognissanti Madonna* was not especially revered in the nineteenth century before having been singled out by Berenson to carry the burden of promoting his "tactile values" program.[195] By selecting a relatively unknown painting by Giotto, at the expense of Cimabue and Duccio, Berenson installed himself in the place formerly held by Vasari as the scholar who discovered modernity at its source. And it may be significant that the image that serves as this source—an image of Madonna and Child—depicts a scene of virgin birth. The male artist with his creative abilities, his cunning capacity for depicting human figures that "conveyed a *keener* sense of reality, of life-likeness than the objects themselves!," surpasses the procreative powers of the woman who merely gives

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[192] Ibid., 69.

[193] Franz Wickoff, "Über die Zeit des Guido von Siena," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 10 (1889), 277-8; J. P. Richter, *Lectures on the National Gallery* (London, New York, Bombay: Longmans, 1898), 6.

[194] Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters*, 59.

[195] For a brief resumé of nineteenth-century opinion on the *Ognissanti Madonna*, see Maginnis, *Painting in the Age of Giotto*, 84-5.

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birth, for he fathers a movement that endures for centuries. So too it is with the modern male art historian (for Mary Berenson would soon disappear from public view), who with his theories elevates an appreciation for the unembodied, ostensibly objective, and ultimately masculine formal elements of the art work.

The preparation for Berenson's *Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, which followed the year after *The Florentine Painters*, brought the connoisseur face-to-face with another problem regarding Madonnas: how to handle Raphael, whom he described as "the most famous and most beloved name in modern art," to the point that "*'Belle comme une madonne de Raphael'* is, among the most artistic people in Europe, still the highest praise that can be given to female beauty."[196] But it was not always the case that Raphael's Madonna and Child images represented the most popular pictures in his oeuvre. For most of the century the grand historical and religious narratives were recognized as his highest achievements. By the 1860s, however, the Madonna and Child pictures began to be advanced for their moral values as well as their aesthetic virtues and were increasingly coveted by American collectors.[197]

In the 1890s Raphael's Marian imagery came to be viewed by a number of critics in a manner that was epitomized by two works, the *Madonna dell Granduca* [Fig. 81] and the *Sistine Madonna* [Fig. 59]. Walter Pater, in keeping with his aestheticism, preferred the early picture, describing it as "without hesitation, the loveliest of his Madonnas, perhaps of all Madonnas; and let it stand as representative of as many as fifty or sixty

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[196] Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters*, 94, 96.

[197] Brown, *Raphael and America*, 16. Among the mid-nineteenth-century discussions of Raphael's Marian imagery, see James P. Walker, *Book of Raphael's Madonnas* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1860); Miner Kellogg, *Researches into the History of a Painting by Raphael of Urbino entitled "La Belle Jardinière"* (London: [W. Phillips, Printer], 1860); and François-Anatole Gruyer, *Les Vièrges de Raphaël, et l'iconographie de la Vierge* (Paris: Renouard, 1869). Raphael's Madonnas, particularly the *Madonna degli Seddia* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence), also figured prominently in Henry James's well-known short story about the dilemmas of a contemporary artist, "The Madonna of the Future," originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* 31 (March 1873), 276-97.

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types of that subject. . . . it is like a single, simple axiomatic thought."[198] J. F. Taintor, on the other hand, saw the *Sistine Madonna* as the highest point in the "evolution of the Madonna." He cited the *Madonna dell Granduca* as the only other image of this type that approached the greatness of the Dresden painting, observing, "This is no theological symbol; it does not reveal as its chief element fervid spirituality; it is not a portrait; and yet it blends them all in one. It is a type of *womanhood*, pure, holy, beautiful, with the light of unspeakable love in its face."[199] This Madonna, in his opinion, "does not know the glory of her own exaltation, nor does she dream of the divine possibilities in the life she so lightly holds in her arms." But in the *Sistine Madonna*, there is "a divine light shining in this Madonna's face, but it is not the divinity others had sought to put there; it is that which the noblest genius alone could conceive, the divinity that belongs to holy *motherhood*." The two works drew their meaning, for Taintor, from the fact that the "Madonna del [*sic*] Gran Duca is womanhood; the Sistine Madonna is motherhood."

Taintor cited Henry Drummond's *Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man* (1894) to justify his schema, claiming that it followed "the same beautiful story as it is rythmically [*sic*] told in art, the story of the slow development of the idea of motherhood in the face of the Madonna. . . . Toward this, art has been unconsciously tending; all its progress through all the stages had been toward this, its highest, holiest goal." Drummond, though, had brought Raphael into his argument to prove the superiority of divine design over even humankind's most glorious artistic creations, claiming, "In a far truer sense than Raphael produced his 'Holy Family' Nature has produced a Holy Family. . . . Time has not tarnished it; no later art has improved upon it; nor genius discovered anything more lovely; nor religion anything more divine."[200] Berenson, though also hewing to an evolutionary

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[198] Walter Pater, "Raphael," reprinted from *Fortnightly Review* in *Littell's Living Age* 195 (10 December 1892), 647.

[199] J. F. Taintor, *The Evolution of the Madonna* (Minneapolis: The Beard Art and Stationery Co., 1898), n.p.

[200] Henry Drummond, *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man* (1894) (New York: J. Pott & Co., 1898), 317.

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model, was not much interested either in Design nor in Madonnas as symbols, whether of religion or womanhood. Raphael presented him with a special problem: how to discuss the most widely loved artist of his time when he found Raphael's work—and the Madonnas in particular—to conform to neither his theories nor taste.[201]

Berenson opened *The Central Italian Painters* with an elaboration of his theory of tactile values, explaining that all art can be divided into two categories: Decoration and Illustration. The former included all that Berenson valued in art, particularly form and movement; the latter represented that which he rejected as "mere reproductions of things" or the visual equivalent to "Literature."[202] After his discussion of Duccio and a more or less dismissive account of a number of Sienese painters, Berenson looked to Piero della Francesca. Though "finally, judged as an Illustrator" who was too often "clogged by his science," Piero merited praise for his highest moments, characterized by "impersonality."[203] By this term Berenson meant two things: the artist must not reproduce his or her feelings about what is being painted, nor attempt to represent the emotions of the figures depicted. He accounted for the "potent attractiveness" of this unemotional art as being due to its rejection of "specialized expression of feeling—so attractive to our weak flesh," thereby leaving the viewer "more open to receive the purely artistic impressions of tactile values, movement, and chiaroscuro."[204] This type of art is associated with masculinity: Piero has "for artistic reasons, chosen types the most manly, and, for perhaps similar reasons, a landscape which happens to be of the greatest severity and dignity."[205] In a more general sense, Berenson explained, this impassive art is appealing because when we see that an artist's figures "are not moved at all where perhaps we should be overwhelmed, we ascribe to them the calm and majesty of heroes; and as we

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201 Calo provides a useful discussion of this aspect of Berenson's writings on Raphael in *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, 72-6.
202 Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters*, 46, 48.
203 Ibid., 75.
204 Ibid., 76.
205 Ibid., 76.

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more than half become the things we admire, we also, for a moment too brief, are heroes."[206]

Berenson was so opposed to the depiction of emotion in art that he promoted a sort of aesthetic decapitation:

> So unnecessary do I find facial expression, and indeed, at times so disturbing, that if a great statue happens to be without a head, I seldom miss it; for the forms and the action, if both are adequate, are expressive enough to enable me to complete the figure in the sense that they indicate; while there is always a chance that the head, in works of even the best masters, will be over-expressive—in a direction either not necessitated by the forms and action, or in flat contradiction to them.[207]

This passage is remarkable as a fulfillment of ideas articulated earlier in the century, first by Darwin in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1852) and also by Duranty in his "Promenades au Louvre" (1877). Darwin, by emphasizing the continuities in expression between humans and animals, and by admitting to the indecipherable nature of a good deal of human expression, called into question the centrality of the depiction of the passions as a central point of classical aesthetics. Duranty, too, by valuing opaque gestures in art, further undermined the clear expression of emotion as an important artistic tenet. Berenson, finding the absence of a head preferable to the presence of an emotionally expressive one, delivered a final blow to the "tête d'expression" and to the critical tradition that supported the classical and academic doctrines of an immediately legible physiognomy. At the same time, he spoke to a fantasy of a body that remains sufficiently expressive and whole despite its fragmentation.

Considering his praise for Piero's unemotional and impassive figures, it is difficult to imagine that Berenson could find anything worth admiring in Raphael. In fact, he

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[206] Ibid., 77.

[207] Ibid., 76-7. In *The Florentine Painters*, Berenson expressed his admiration for the facial expressions of the figures in Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* (31), but this is a rare example of such approbation.

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resorted to inventing a new category, "space-composition," to account for Raphael's place in the pantheon of art. Through space-composition, the artist "opens out the space [the painting] frames in," which has the effect of "humaniz[ing] the void, making of it an enclosed Eden, a domed mansion wherein our higher selves find at last an abode, not only as comforting, as measured to our everyday needs, as the homes of the happier among us, but as transporting, as exalting as are those things only which build up the ideal life."[208] Berenson explained that this evocation of an infinite yet protective space created the religious or spiritual feeling so often associated with Raphael's work; his analysis also resembles an attempt, through the contemplation of representational illusion, to reexperience a *heimlich* uterine space, but as space, not feeling.

Not surprisingly, Berenson (like Pater) appreciated the *Madonna dell Granduca*, asking his reader,

> has it ever occurred to you to note that the whole of her figure was not there? So perfect is the arrangement that the attention is entirely absorbed by the grouping of the heads, the balance of the Virgin's draped arm and the Child's body. You are not allowed to ask yourself how the figure ends. And observe how it holds its own, easily poised, in the panel which is just large enough to contain it without crowding, without suggesting room for aught else beside.[209]

The incompleteness of Raphael's figure has nothing to do, in Berenson's analysis, with the contingency suggested by Impressionist cropping; again, he understood the fragmented body as expressively whole. As for the more complex compositions, Berenson wrote of the only work he found to be completely successful, the *Belle Jardinière* (Musée du Louvre, Paris): "Here you have the full negation of the *plein-air* treatment of the figure. The Madonna is under a domed sky, and she fills it completely, as subtly as in the Granduca panel, but here it is the whole out-of-doors, the universe, and a human being

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[208] Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters*, 88-9.
[209] Ibid., 101.

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super-eminent over it."[210] In the end, Berenson concluded, "Raphael was not an artist in the sense that Michelangelo, Leonardo, Velazquez, or ever Rembrandt was." for he was mainly an "Illustrator," and not a "Decorator."[211]

If Berenson's writings had not been enough to shift the current of art historical opinion regarding Raphael's Madonnas, Heinrich Wölfflin's equally influential 1899 book, *Classic Art, An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, confirmed the preeminence of the formal reading of this group of images that lend themselves to analysis according to a number of criteria. "Raphael won lasting popularity as a painter of Madonnas and it may well seem superfluous to attempt to catch the magic of these pictures with the clumsy weapons of formal analysis," Wölfflin suggested coyly, before insinuating with some derision that this "magic" actually has its roots in our earliest and most frequently repeated experiences of art: "We have been familiar with them from childhood onwards, through a far greater mass of reproductions than any other artist in the world has ever had, and they appeal so strongly with their traits of motherly love and childish gaiety, solemn dignity and a strange supernatural quality, that we do not seek any further artistic meaning."[212]

This is a mistake of the aesthetically uneducated, according to Wölfflin, because "a glance at Raphael's drawings would show that the problem, as the artist saw it, did not lie where the public would think and that the task was not just a question of a single charming head or this or that childish attitude, but that it was the structure of a group as a whole, the harmonising of the general directions formed by the movements of different heads and limbs."[213] He continued, "This should not hinder anyone from approaching Raphael from the point of view of emotion and charm, but an essential part of the artist's intentions is revealed only to the spectator who goes beyond the pleasurable emotions aroused at first

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[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art, An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance* (1899), trans. Peter and Linda Murphy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 82.
[213] Ibid.

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sight and is able to consider the picture from a formal point of view."[214] Wölfflin's deprecation of the spectator's interest in the skillful depiction of the "charming head" or "childish attitude" in Raphael's pictures repudiates the expressive aspects for which Cassatt was generally praised.

Of course, not all art historians and critics were studying images from the emerging formalist perspective during the final decade of the nineteenth century. In 1895 a new edition of Anna Jameson's works was published, which included a revised version of her 1852 classic, *Legends of the Madonna*.[215] An *Atlantic Monthly* review characterized her writing in terms of its emotional value and general accessibility, commenting, "However learned she may be, she is never dry; however poetic, she is never beyond average comprehension; and withal she knows so well just what to say and how to say it that she has won a lasting place in the hearts of the people."[216] As for her method, "To her the first question to ask in the presence of a masterpiece was, What is it all about? A picture, like a book, has a story to tell, and the story itself was, in her opinion, a more important matter than the authorship or the technical skill employed in its narration."[217] The *Atlantic Monthly* reviewer went on to suggest that Jameson's approach to art history continued to be relevant, and might even lead to "a still more profound mode of criticism . . . a criticism of the philosophical principles which are the fundamental *motif* of art."[218]

The editor of the new Jameson volume, Estelle Hurll, also published her own consideration of Marian imagery in the 1897 book *The Madonna in Art*. Unlike Wölfflin, Hurll did not denigrate the popular sentiment regarding these types of pictures, observing, "The Madonna is the universal type of motherhood, a subject which, in its very nature, appeals to all classes and conditions of people. No one is too ignorant to understand it,

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[214] Ibid.
[215] Anna Jameson, *The Writings on Art of Anna Jameson*, 5 vols., ed. Estelle M. Hurll (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1895).
[216] "Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture," *Atlantic Monthly* 77 (April 1896), 562-3.
[217] Ibid., 563.
[218] Ibid.

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and none too wise to be superior to its charm. The little child appreciates it as readily as the old man, and both, alike, are drawn to it by an irresistible attraction. . . . So long as we have mothers, art will continue to produce Madonnas."[219]

Hurll approached her subject employing two categories: "The first is based on the style of composition in which the picture is painted; the second, on the subject which it treats. The first examines the mechanical arrangement of the figures; the second asks, what is the real relation between them? The first deals with external characteristics; the second, with the inner significance."[220] The first category divided works into five compositional genres: "The Portrait Madonna," "The Madonna Enthroned," "The Madonna in the Sky," "The Pastoral Madonna," and "The Madonna in a Home Environment." The second category attended to the emotional connection between the figures. In "The Madonna of Love (The Mater Amabilis)," the relation "is purely maternal. The emphasis is upon a mother's natural affection as displayed towards her child"; in "The Madonna in Adoration (The Madre Pia)," the humble mother is seen "contemplating her child with awe"; while in "The Madonna as Witness," the mother "is preëminently the Christ-bearer, wearing the honors of her proud position as witness to her son's great destiny."[221]

The first part of Hurll's book, "Madonnas Classed by the Style of Composition," followed Jameson's basic model, while the second part, "Madonnas Classed According to Their Significance as Types of Motherhood" studied images in a manner exactly opposed to Berenson's rules of "impersonality," valuing pictures for the degree to which they captured the emotional bond between the figures and stimulated an emotional response in the spectator. Correggio, for example, "touches the heart. . . . his figures express a tumultuous gladness, an overflowing gayety."[222] Titian, in contrast, often paints a

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219 Estelle M. Hurll, *The Madonna in Art* (1897) (Boston: L. C. Page, 1906), xiii-iv.
220 Ibid., xv.
221 Ibid., xvii-xviii.
222 Ibid., 134.

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Madonna who is "by no means uniformly motherly. . . . But when love melts her heart how gracious is her unbending, how winning her smile!"[223] Hurll's analyses were not completely devoid of formal judgment, though sentiment remained her benchmark, as in her comment that the fame of Raphael's "more pretentious works," the large multifigure compositions, "rests not so much upon their inner significance as upon their splendid technique. They are unsurpassed for masterly handling of color, and for triumphs of chiaroscuro."[224]

Hurll's emphasis on the emotional expression in imagery and its ability to affect the viewer represented an attempt to mediate art history and the promotion of the Virgin as a model for feminine behavior. Another method for studying paintings in relation to women's lives had also been proposed in the 1890s, one that sought to glean information about the past for more progressive purposes. Ironically, the person who proposed this method—which could be considered not only a social but also a feminist history—was Mary Berenson. Before becoming involved with Bernard she had been well-known for her political efforts on behalf of women, and had published and lectured on women's issues. In an 1892 article for *The Woman's Herald* titled "Pictures in Venice as Documents about Venetian Women," she observed, "The art of another epoch may be studied and enjoyed in more than one way. Perhaps the most interesting way, in the long run, is to study it as part of the history of the period, to study it in the light of other historical facts, and as itself an important historical document."[225] While warning that pictures cannot be understood as "an exact reflection in art of the literary and political ideas of the period," she nevertheless felt that they "have a great many comments to make upon the life and customs of their day, and they often throw side lights upon matters

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223 Ibid., 141-2.

224 Ibid., 135.

225 M[ary] W[hitall] [later Mary Berenson], "Pictures in Venice as Documents about Venetian Women," *Woman's Herald* 7 (29 October 1892), 6.

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which other documents pass by in silence," and specifically, a culture's views on women.[226]

As proof, she considered the double-soled platform shoes often seen on women in seventeenth-century Venetian paintings, quoting the Doge's response when asked why Venetians dressed their women in footwear that made it difficult to walk: "They walk a great deal too much as it is."[227] Berenson noted, "The treatment of women implied by this remark, had its natural consequences: and here, again, Venetian pictures have a good deal to say."[228] Portraits of Venetian women, she explained, "except the courtesans (who may have ordered portraits as a sort of advertisement), are not at all common, and this fact is eloquent."[229] Women's portraits do "creep in, however, often enough, although not at all so often as men's, in religious pictures where the family kneels before the Virgin—as, for instance, in Titian's 'Madonna del Pessaro' in the Frari. Women seem to have been conscious of themselves as part of the family, although they had not reached the point of thinking of themselves as individuals."[230] These are extraordinary analyses of Renaissance paintings, not only because they were written in the late nineteenth century, but also because nothing like them would appear again until the late twentieth century.

Though the Berensons in their writings did not completely reject the idea of social context, they never followed through on the more radical aspects of this methodological approach. For instance, even though Mary is credited with writing most of the text for the *Venetian Painters*, the passage from that book discussing the *Pesaro Madonna* ignores her *Woman's Herald* analysis.[231] It appears as well that she slowed her feminist activities after separating from her first husband, who had been described in the *Woman's Penny*

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226 Ibid.
227 Ibid., 7.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid.
231 Berenson, *The Venetian Painters*, 19.

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Paper in 1890 as "an extremely liberal man, who is deeply interested in all the questions that vitally concern our sex."[232]

This situation is unfortunate for art history, and perhaps particularly so for Mary Berenson personally. That she had desired a reputation of her own is evident from her letters; in 1893 she wrote to her brother of her desire to publish another of her collaborations with Bernard, *A Guide to the Italian Pictures at Hampton Court*. She wished it to appear under her own name (though of course, it was the name of the husband from whom she was separated) "because it will give me an *independent* standing among professional people, who now of course know me, if they know me at all, as a pupil of Berenson."[233]

That she remained interested in a generally less restrictive method of critical analysis is demonstrated in her letters as well. In 1897 she wrote defensively to Bernard regarding another work by Titian:

> I am in turn, surprised at your answer to my question about *l'Homme au gant* [Musée du Louvre, Paris]. It was scarcely necessary to tell me that the presentation of character is not the same thing as line, colour, tactile values, movement or composition. What I meant you to think about, when I asked the question, was whether this presentation of character was not more direct, more vivid and more pleasure-giving than we should be likely to get either in literature or in life itself? Whether this instantaneous communication of the significance of the personality was *not* in short, an artistic pleasure. Just as in Masaccio, the spiritual significance is not an element added to and different from the artistic, but is an integral part of the artistic impression.[234]

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[232] Quoted in Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 117.
[233] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson] to Robert Pearsall Smith, November 24, 1893, quoted in *Mary Berenson: A Self-Portrait in Letters*, 54.
[234] Mary Costelloe [later Mary Berenson] to Bernard Berenson, August 22, 1896, quoted in *Mary Berenson: A Self-Portrait in Letters*, 68.

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To some degree, the private life of Mary Berenson and the future of art historical methodology were tied together. Once this woman who in the 1890s sought to make paintings "speak" to the condition of women was silenced as a result of her relationship with a more dominant and renowned partner, nothing further was heard on the matter in the critical literature of art for nearly a century.

* * *

It was also during the 1890s, when a wide variety of Madonna imagery was made available to and appreciated by audiences both popular and specialist, that Cassatt significantly broadened her own treatment of the mother and child theme. In the first half of the decade she created naturalistic and incisive drypoints before moving on to color prints done "in imitation of the Japanese" and paintings and pastels that echoed the works by the early Renaissance "primitives" or paralleled Symbolist experiments in *décoration.* After 1895 she expanded her stylistic choices even more, incorporating old master models that ranged from Northern domestic genre scenes to Italian Baroque and Netherlandish Virgins, all the while continuing to create compositions that could only be characterized as depictions of "modern life." In addition, she began to include images resembling the "Madonna in Adoration" and "Madonna as Witness" types among her "Modern Madonna" compositions, no longer working primarily after the "Mater Amabilis" model.

In a group of pictures sold to Durand-Ruel between mid-November 1897 and late November 1898 Cassatt experimented with imagery that oscillates between "modern life" scenes and Northern depictions of mothers and Madonnas. While not strictly beholden to old master conceptions of the "Madre Pia," *Three Women Admiring a Child*[235] [Fig. 134] and *Adoration* [Fig. 135] nevertheless suggest depictions of the Madonna and Child with St. Anne, as seen in an illustration from Jameson [Fig. 136]. (Mrs. Jameson commented that this picture demonstrated how German artists, "who were fond of this group,

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[235] This work was donated to the Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan, in 1908, making it one of the first pictures by Cassatt to enter an American public collection.

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imparted, even to the most religious treatment, a domestic sentiment.")[236] The half-length yet vertical compositional format of *Three Women Admiring a Child*, which gathers three dark-haired women in a circular arrangement around a blond-tressed child clad in white, intensifies the gaze upon this light-infused central figure as if to imply that he or she is a divine object of worship. But because the figures are shown in fashionable gowns and contemporary coifs, the image is easily understood as a scene of modern infant worship: "Baby Is King" (or "Queen"?). Rich yellow and orange pastel tones, applied in bold strokes that cause the image to pulse with a radiance barely contained by the occasional black outline defining a few inches of sleeve here or a finger there, evoke both the luxury of old-master gilding and the luminosity of Impressionist *plein-air* technique.

Adoration, though emphasizing cooler blues and greens rather than gold, also appears to glow from within. The compact composition presents two women involved in a highly tactile interaction with a child; Segard described the scene as depicting two women who "bend over the infant-king."[237] The woman at left embraces him (or her?) with her left arm and strangely elongated hand, which are positioned and tinted so that they can be easily misread as the child's arm and hand. The woman at right lifts the child's actual arm to her lips, to be kissed in a gesture that also implies her desire to consume the child's delicious, gleaming flesh. Whereas we have seen the bodies of mother and child appear to merge in earlier works such as *A Goodnight Hug* [Fig. 3] and *Mother's Kiss* [Fig. 97], *Adoration* stages a confusion in boundaries between the child and a doubled maternal presence.[238]

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[236] Jameson. *Legends of the Madonna*, 81.

[237] Segard, *Mary Cassatt*, 147: "se penchent vers l'enfant-roi."

[238] On the issue of an "obsessive excess" of "conformity to the ideology of the patriarchal family . . . that leans so heavily on the female side of the family as to exclude memory of its masculine aspect and its heterosexual foundations" in the maternal-themed photography of Julia Margaret Cameron that is relevant here, see Carol Armstrong, "Cupid's Pencil of Light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the Maternalization of Photography," *October* 76 (Spring 1996), 115-41; especially pp. 138-9.

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Another work done in these same years, *Patty-cake* [Fig. 137], in no way resembles any old master model, though it takes as its theme another aspect of tactility, for the child's attention is directed towards its own hands, one of which is held up for examination by the mother. In her elaborate gown the mother here is the picture of fashion, yet the dress also functions as a continuation of her figure, with its enormous puffed sleeves framing the child's body in the same way that the blue furniture depicted in Cassatt's early Impressionist works encircled figures in a protective and maternal (and possibly smothering) manner. This mother's body is also characterized by the anatomical distortion that Cassatt would increasingly employ in depicting her mothering figures, especially their arms. The pointed elbows seen in her images of willful girls and women [Figs. 6, 18] give way to a rubbery appendage with a misplaced joint or no elbow at all, which allows the arm to stretch to impossible lengths in order to wrap fully around a child's body. *Breakfast in Bed* [Fig. 138] also blurs the distinction between mother's body, clothing, and furnishings, making only the barest distinctions between her gown and the sheets and pillows upon which she reclines. The strange and abstracted still life of cup and saucer reads like an open question: is it meant to echo the nestling mother and child, to analogize figures and vessels, or is it merely a prominent bit of painting for painting's sake?

A Kiss for Baby Anne (No. 3) [Fig. 139], which depicts the same two figures seen at the center of *Three Women Admiring a Child* and featured in *Breakfast in Bed*, looks back to the "Mater Amabilis" genre while also partaking of a contemporary immediacy. The arrangement of the heads, the focus on the kiss, and even the general appearance of the fair figures (especially the mother's hair) are remarkably similar to Quentin Massys's *The Virgin Enthroned* [Fig. 140]. But at the same time, the handling of materials could not be more different, and Cassatt's assured hatching strokes endow the figures with a sense of motion that could not be more distinct from the static, marble-enframed Madonna and Child in the old master picture.

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A reference to the Northern tradition appears again in *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* [Fig. 141], though the type of picture brought to mind here, a genre image such as Caspar Netscher's mid-seventeenth-century *Mother's Care* [Fig. 142], is secular rather than sacred in nature. While Cassatt would never create a composition as busy as Netscher's, she did at this time begin to complicate the space in her pictures, adding more furnishings and accessories and regularly employing mirrors.[239] But in the same way that the mirrors in her Impressionist pictures refuse to offer a simple and satisfying one-to-one correspondence between figure and reflection [see Figs. 27, 46], with the result that the full plenitude of the desirable or comforting female figure is denied to the viewer, so too the mirrors in these later images subvert expectations.

The theme of a work such as *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* is not presented as a simple matter of the mother's effort to assist the child in creating an attractive self-presentation for the world. Rather, the coherence between even the adult self and image is called into question by the inclusion in the mirror of furniture and a window not otherwise visible to the viewer, by the impossibility of reconstructing the space in order to account for the perspective and reflection as presented, and most significantly, by the lack of adequate resemblance between the mother's figure in particular and her reflection. (Differences in the reflection include the appearance of a concave rather than convex bridge of the nose, an emphasis upon a full upper rather than lower lip, and much darkened hair color.) Even as the mother uses her hand to frame the lovely blond head of the child whose hair she combs, her own image as framed by the mirror is distorted, speaking to the impossibility of the complete unity between self and image or between reality and representation—an impossibility we learn to repress in childhood, but which continues to haunt us.

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[239] Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Mary Cassatt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 127.

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To a certain extent, the disjunction between figure and reflection in *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* only serves to emphasize the manner in which Cassatt did not require the somewhat obvious device of the mirror in order to draw attention to these fictions of unity. In contrast to Berenson's great artists of tactile values, who employed their formal means to create convincingly embodied figures, in his view more "lifelike" than living figures, as a mature artist Cassatt never attempted to achieve such an illusion. Though like Berensons she privileged the figure above all as the proper subject of art, as a modernist she was also drawn to the purely material aspects of paint and pastel and frequently manipulated them to contradict not simply the "ideated" corporeality valued by the Berensons but also the sense of completeness and union generally expected as a central element of maternal subject matter in art.

This tension between form and content in Cassatt's art manifests itself in *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* above all in the handling of the faces, which are formed out of a base of smooth pastel overlaid with unblended pink and blue hatching strokes that undermine the appearance of volume, and in the treatment of the hands. In some way, the disjunction in appearance between these hands is even more jarring than that between the same figure's "real" and reflected images. The left hand which steadies the child's chin is relatively finely drawn, the pastel softly smudged and the separation of the fingers indicated with lines of salmon pink and a lightly-applied black. The right hand, in contrast, is coarsely sketched and crudely shaped, shadowed in a deeper pink and outlined with heavy black strokes. The child's face is thus cradled between two hands that evince disunity rather than the fantasy of complete maternal wholeness. And a third maternal hand—seen in the reflection (as in the much earlier painting of Cassatt's mother, *Reading "Le Figaro"* [Fig. 27])—resembles a hand almost not at all.

After exploring Northern traditions in these pictures from 1897–98, in 1899 Cassatt looked to Italian Baroque as well as Flemish models, while continuing to create "modern life" images. In contrast to their immediate predecessors, the 1899 pictures

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appear somewhat more conservative and conventional. Again, although they do not adhere rigorously to the Marian image which they most closely resemble, the "Madonna as Witness" type, they nonetheless exhibit a strong likeness to this category of sacred image, in which the Madonna as queen "should show the prince to his people."[240] In the traditional conception of the "Madonna as Witness," the mother supports the child who stands at her side as both figures gaze out to the spectator. Cassatt's works incorporate this pose while turning the glances aside.

Cassatt painted three works of this type in 1899: *Jules Dried by His Mother* [Fig. 143], *Antoinette Holding Her Child by Both Hands* [Fig. 144], and *The Oval Mirror* [Fig. 145]. The composition of *Jules Dried by His Mother* echoes images such as Rubens's *The Madonna Holding a Rosary with the Standing Christ Child Blessing* [Fig. 146], with the mother who holds a white cloth to cover the child's genitals. The figure types and paint handling are also more Rubensian in this group of paintings. The young reddish-haired woman who appears most often in the 1897–98 images has been replaced by a more mature, full-bodied woman, and the facture is more fluid compared to the earlier works.

This is in contrast to a painting like *Breakfast in Bed* [Fig. 138], where the entire surface of the picture is agitated, especially the skin, because the paint has been applied with a stippling touch that approximates the restless hatching seen in related pastels. Indeed, Cassatt's handling here is so choppy at points that the critic Sadakichi Hartmann used it to illustrate his 1903 *Camera Work* article on "The Value of the Apparently Meaningless and Inaccurate."[241] Hartmann looked to Cassatt's work in support of the idea that "accidental lights, passing shimmers, speckles, [and] flashes" lend "virility to lines and masses," and that through such factural elements "the immobile becomes animated, the silent begins to speak, and the dull turns colorful."[242] Stating that she was "by no means a

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[240] Hurll, *The Madonna in Art*, 191.
[241] Sidney Allen [Sadakichi Hartmann], "The Value of the Apparently Meaningless and Innacurate," *Camera Work* (July 1903), 19.
[242] Ibid., 17.

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great artist," he still found that "on almost every one of her canvases, roughly, sometimes brutally composed, drawn, and painted, there is that touch, which by imparting to form and color some particular quality of effect, impossible to analyze, endows all her figures with the energy of life."[243] Writing in terms quite distinct from Berenson's views on life-likeness, he continued: "A hand, represented by a few fragmentary scratches and scrawls of the brush and a juxtaposition of color, after all gives a more life-like impression than one which is faultlessly drawn and colored with all due observations of precise and pedantic realities. . . ."[244]

Jules Dried by His Mother, unlike *Breakfast in Bed*, conforms to a more academic notion of facture, for the child's body has been laid on the canvas in smooth, sweeping strokes of paint, and the handling in general is broader and more controlled. The blue-black outlines defining the limbs in the earlier painting do not appear in *Jules Dried by His Mother*, nor is blue used to modulate skin tone in the same manner. Although the *Jules* picture appears too as if it might be set in a bedroom, the work displays none of the strange, searching mood of *Breakfast in Bed* nor its challenges to norms of composition and brushwork.

Antoinette Holding Her Child by Both Hands and *The Oval Mirror* recall a compositional type associated with Caravaggio, in works such as his *Holy Family with the Infant St. John the Baptist* [Fig. 147]. Though similar images representing the standing Child with his arms around the Madonna's neck are seen in works by della Robbia, for example, the age of the child in Cassatt's work is closer to the Baroque model than the cherubic infants generally depicted by the Florentine sculptor and his school. *The Oval Mirror* also brings in the device of the mirror, but again, its use here differs greatly from the slightly earlier picture, *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* [Fig. 141]. *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* is oblique, like the angle of the mirror's reflection; *The Oval*

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[243] Ibid., 18.
[244] Ibid., 18, 21.

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Mirror, though also perspectivally somewhat askew, is far more straightforward in both form and content. Whereas in the pastel the reflection evokes the disjunction between self and image, reality and representation, here the mirror is more important for its frame, which surrounds the heads of the figures like a giant aureole. The relaxed and confident pose of the naked boy in *The Oval Mirror* is underscored by the composition's dependence upon traditional models of the "infant-king," not only in the arrangement of the figures but also with regard to long-held beliefs perpetuating the veneration of the male child. Much the same could be said of *Jules Dried by His Mother* and *Antoinette Holding Her Child by Both Hands.*

Cassatt depicted the same figures in more contemporary scenes, posing them in a specifically modern interior in *Baby Getting up from His Nap* [Fig. 148] or in a garden setting in *The Sun Bath* [Fig. 149],[245] but the impression of the male child as prince or king placed on display by his proud mother is not much changed from *The Oval Mirror*. *Baby Getting up from His Nap* mediates between *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* and *Jules Dried by His Mother*, recalling the former picture in its more expansive composition and bright palette, while resembling the latter in the mother's deference to the child. *The Sun Bath* takes the same figures outdoors but nonetheless presents a scene of protective stability for the male child. Though the composition is horizontal, the fabric of the mother's robe is stretched from side to side so that her body appears to fill the canvas and to fully encompass the child's body. Furthermore, the two heads are surrounded by a halo of pink rhododendrons. The gravity of Cassatt's image is made evident when compared to a similar composition by Henri Edmond Cross, the c. 1897–98 *Mère jouant avec son enfant* [Fig. 150]. Cross's work, though belonging to the tradition of arcadian imagery, appears anecdotal in the playful exchange between mother and child. Cassatt's pensive

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[245] *Baby Getting Up from His Nap* was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1909.

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mother and child, on the other hand, suggest the solemnity of the Madonna and Child, despite the seemingly casual pose.

* * *

When a number of Cassatt's works of the late 1890s were first shown, at an 1898 Durand-Ruel exhibition held at the St. Botolph Club in Boston, the critic for the *Boston Evening Transcript* responded in terms compatible to some degree with Berenson's theories. (Though he had settled in Italy by this time, Berenson remained a significant figure in his home town for years to come.) Cassatt's pictures, according to the *Transcript* critic, revealed

> an extraordinary temperament, bold and keen, cool and firm, feminine and subtle, extremely modern in its tendencies and point of view, highly sensitive to form and action, but not so much to color and light. It is work that has style, in the modern sense, and much originality. It is to be accurately defined as realistic. It is sometimes almost cruel in its exactitude. It has no trace of conventionality. It is not remarkable for grace or tenderness. In drawing it is the most extraordinary manifestation of first-rate ability that we have seen in years.[246]

While her technique is "uncommonly solid, firm, clean-cut, and in some cases almost hard," her modeling was described as "a trifle flat," in the manner of Degas and Manet, but this "is well; she never overmodels her surfaces." Furthermore, the critic detected something like "impersonality" in Cassatt's figures, though it was interpreted not in terms of Berenson's "heroes" but rather of the local Brahmin culture: "Her heads are intellectual, but not emotional; her people are as cold-blooded and self-centered as the traditional aristocrats of Boston. They have the impudence to care not a jot what you think of them. They mind their own affairs, and ask nothing better than that all the rest of the world should do the same."

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[246] "The Fine Arts, Miss Cassatt's Exhibition at the St. Botolph Club," *Boston Evening Transcript* (24 March 1898), 6.

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Despite this appreciation for the aloofness of Cassatt's figures, the *Transcript* critic then deviated from Berenson's ideas by praising her mother and child pictures for their emotional qualities: "Through this crust of reserve pierces at intervals a beam of feeling which suddenly warms the heart. It is generally the maternal instinct. For it should be added that the eternal theme of art from the time of Giotto down to our day—the mother and child—is the constant theme here too." The expressiveness of Cassatt's mothers and children was deemed acceptable because of its restraint, which was conceptualized in relation to the sincerity of an American political hero and the physiognomically-attuned naturalism of a renowned French novelist:

> These casual and irrepressible betrayals of emotion are a thousand times more valuable than the trite and candid pictorial delineation of love, which so often overshoots the mark. Miss Cassatt is incapable, doubtless, of painting anything that does not exist; no less incapable of painting a trait or a gesture that she does not see before her; her matter-of-fact veracity is so obviously the habit of her life, that her art is remarkably convincing, and one does not have to put her under oath when she testifies. Such draughtsmanship can no more lie than George Washington. Her word is as good as her bond. There are some things in the exhibition that we wish the artist could have seen in a little more beautiful light, but there is an element of fateful logic in her processes which compels instant and abiding respect. She is as powerful as Balzac in setting a fact down, and leaving her public to make the most of it. And when these realists do run up against a bit of romance or grace or tender humanity, the surprise only adds to the impressiveness of it.

As proof of this view, the *Transcript* cited *Breakfast in Bed* [Fig. 138], in which "it is all-sufficient to note the sidewise glance of the young mother's eyes. Depend upon it, a sentimental painter would have spoiled all by trying to make too obvious a point of that

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glance." *Adoration* [Fig. 135], too, was cited alongside a pastel of two women titled *La Conversation*[247] as "capital specimens of naturalism applied to social motives."

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In spite the consonance between statements in this *Boston Evening Transcript* review and some of Berenson's ideas, his theories did not have an especially strong impact upon contemporary art criticism until filtered through Roger Fry's writings in particular. Fry drew upon many of his predecessor's preferences regarding the essential importance of formal means and the devaluation of emotion in art. For instance, in his 1911 "Post Impressionism" essay, considered to be a founding document in the history of formalist criticism, he explained with regard to the artist's choice of subject, "Like the poet [the artist] can call up at will from out of the whole visible world, reminiscences and remembered images of any visible or visually conceivable thing. But in calling up these images, with all the enrichment of emotional effect which they bring, he must be careful that they do not set up a demand independent of the need of his musical phrasing, his rhythm of line, colour and plane."[248] Cézanne's landscapes and quotidian still life arrangements represent the type of works that best fulfilled these requirements for Fry. It is hard to imagine, in contrast, an image of mother and child that would not "set up a demand" with respect to the conscious and unconscious emotional effects that in Fry's opinion hold an art work back in the "numbing" and "more poignant emotions of actual life" and prevent it from entering the realm of the more disinterested "imaginative life," which is distinguished "by the greater clearness of its perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotion."[249]

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[247] BrCR 260, now known as *The Conversation*, 1896 (private collection).
[248] Roger Fry, "Post Impressionism" (1 May 1911), 856-67, reprinted from *Fortnightly Review* in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 105.
[249] Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), reprinted from *New Quarterly* in *Vision and Design* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1963), 24, 26.

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One recent interpreter of Fry has argued that the English critic became less rigidly formalist in his later writings, as in the 1924 essay "The Artist and Psycho-analysis,"[250] when he acknowledged that the "keen emotions of pleasure" experienced by the few people who have "a sensitiveness to purely formal relations" might not be completely independent of extra-artistic sources.[251] This "pure beauty," Fry conceded, might in fact "get its force from arousing some very deep, very vague, and immensely generalized reminiscences. It looks as though art had got access to the substratum of all the emotional colours of life, to something which underlies all the particular and specialized emotions of actual life."[252] Here Fry appears to be admitting that there is something beyond explanation, something uncanny, to art's appeal, something that evokes a pre- or non-verbal state of being that cannot be expressed in words.

Nevertheless, while these remarks represent a slight loosening of Fry's formalism, other ideas he advanced in the same period serve to exclude the feminine and/or maternal from his conception of the ideal work of art. In the 1924 essay he emphasized that the contemplation of formal relations was "as much detached from the instinctive life as any human activity that we know; to be in that respect on a par with science."[253] As has been outlined above, the instinctive is generally considered interchangeable with the feminine and the maternal, and Fry himself wrote in a 1903 review of a book on picture collecting, "The fact is that women seldom learn; they do not, like some men, arrive by roundabout methods, by ingenuity and memory, at knowing a good picture from a bad. But if they have good taste they rarely sophisticate it—they have an instinct, a certainty and a rapidity of judgment which not even the most gifted men can emulate."[254]

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[250] See Christopher Reed, introduction to chapter 7, "Revision and Design: The Later Essays," in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 314.
[251] Fry, "The Artist and Psycho-analysis" (1924), reprinted in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 356.
[252] Ibid., 365.
[253] Ibid., 352.
[254] [Roger Fry], "Fine Arts. *Pictures and Picture Collecting.* By C. J. Holmes. No. I of the 'Collector's Library.' (Theherne.)," *Athenaeum* 122 (12 September 1903), 356.

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Fry also rescued facture from the insignificant position to which Berenson had consigned it, but not in a manner that recuperated the "feminine" aspects of tactility. Whereas Berenson's system, with its denigration of embodied sensation, could not account for the role of handling in art, Fry recapitulated late nineteenth-century ideas on the artistic gesture as a form of expressive handwriting in order to shift the burden of significance in art from the "ideated sense of touch" to what he described in his 1927 essay on Cézanne as "the actual material" of an artist's paintings, "since it is there, and nowhere else, that he leaves the precise imprint of his spirit."[255] Fry imagined the process of creation as a duel between the artist's "feeling" or "spirit" and the material with which he or she works—literal and figural materiality also being customarily associated with the maternal in particular.

To Fry, Cézanne was one of the rare artists who consistently succeeded in achieving a proper relation of execution to idea, for it "is not always possible for the artist to find in the material to his hand the perfect embodiment of his feeling," that moment when "the matter itself becomes eloquent."[256] Fry would not likely have found Cassatt capable of such a rapprochement of feeling and form, but I believe that she did have moments when she found in the material to *her* hand the perfect embodiment of *her* feeling, when her technical means and manipulation of materials were not somehow incidental to the portrayal of the mother and child but play an integral—and undervalued—role in her expression of that theme. Indeed, in her work "the matter itself" often "becomes eloquent" when it is not fluent. Her images are most expressive when shaped out of a rough and highly worked facture that embodies the struggles at the source of representation—in self-representation—experienced by the child not only in relation to "Looking-Glass Land" but also in its mirroring of and by the mother.

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[255] Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 49. Richard Shiff discusses this aspect of Fry's understanding of Cézanne in an essay in this volume, titled "Painting, Writing, Handwriting: Roger Fry and Paul Cézanne."

[256] Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, 41.

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Fry's formalism, though inaugurated while Cassatt was still painting, took some years before being fully fleshed out and gaining wide acceptance. Thus, it is not possible to point to a key text or moment when a certain critic writing in a formalist mode took apart Cassatt's work and definitively declared it to be peripheral to the mainstream of modernism. (Though we do get the gist of modernist opinion in Guillaume Apollinaire's 1914 statement that although she has "a very particular gift for capturing the most feminine attitudes of women . . . the paintings by Mary Cassatt that I like least are those in which there are children.")[257] By the time formalism had become a dominant mode of criticism, the prevailing opinion of her work was communicated mainly through omission—through her exclusion from the discussion altogether. In 1900, however, as Fry's critical career was just getting underway, Cassatt's artistic career was by no means complete; she would create for nearly 15 more years, and the criticism of her work would take a distinct turn, inflected by the growing popularity of psychology and eugenics.

IV.

Given the cultural obsession with images of the Madonna at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, it is not surprising to find certain canonical images making their way into psychological literature, and Freud's writings above all. Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* [Fig. 59] played an important role in his 1906 "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" as a figure with whom Dora identified both because of her "maternal longing for a child" and as "a counter-idea" to her feeling of being "oppressed by imputation of sexual guilt."[258] Freud's consideration of a "Holy Family" image, Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), also

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[257] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Mary Cassatt," *Paris-Journal* (10 June 1914), reprinted in *Apollinaire, Critique d'art* (Paris: Paris-Musées/Gallimard, 1993), 163: "un don très particulier de saisir les attitudes les plus féminines chez la femme. . . . les tableaux de Mary Cassatt qui me plaisent le moins sont ceux où il y a des enfants." In this regard, it is also of interest to note that John Rewald, in *The History of Impressionism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), illustrated four of Cassatt's works, but not a single image on the mother/child theme.

[258] See Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 7, 96, 104; and also in *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, 116, 125 n. 20.

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prompted him to connect the drive to knowledge with the maternal body and "the great question of where babies come from and what the father has to do with their origin."[259] The *Sistine Madonna*, however, closed down the curiosity of at least one viewer in the 1890s. Mary Berenson wrote to her family in 1891 that she "found the picture so absolutely beautiful or sane that it is impossible—or almost impossible—to feel any sentiment about it whatever," adding, "I don't care to criticize the picture that way—it is a perfect beauty as it is."[260]

Mary Berenson's linking of the beautiful and the sane in the *Sistine Madonna* speaks to the popular view of psychology, one that would continue to prevail for some time, for Freud's ideas would only begin to make their way into public consciousness after the 1895 publication of *Studies in Hysteria* (co-authored with Josef Breuer). It would not be until around 1910 that his concepts, especially those regarding the latent content of dreams, would begin to appear in the mainstream media.[261] This is not to say, however, that psychological theories in general had not captured the public imagination. To the contrary, the problem of hysteria was widely debated in these years, and "child study" had helped to disseminate many psychological concepts among an audience of women who ordinarily would have been shielded from such potentially controversial ideas.

Equally important in the public eye after 1900 was the idea of eugenics, the "nature" complement to child study's "nurture." Galton's idea that human heredity could be controlled through "selective breeding" took on new impetus in the United States after

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[259] Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood" (1910), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 11 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1957), 92.

[260] Quoted in Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, 194-5 n. 14.

[261] For an interesting contemporary account of the spread of Freud's ideas into American culture, see Edward M. Wyer, "The New Art of Interpreting Dreams," *Forum* 45 (May 1911), 589-600. Wyer attributed the increased attention to these ideas to Freud's participation in meetings held in 1909 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Clark University (a center for "child study"), as well as to the April 1910 issue of *The American Journal of Psychology*, containing articles by Freud, Jones, Ferenczi, Jung, and Stern, which Wyer described as comprising "the best general statement of the Freudian doctrines as yet obtainable in English" (592 n.)

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the publication of sociologist Edward A. Ross's *The Old World in the New* (1901), in which he expressed alarm that "low standard immigrants" were reproducing at a faster rate than the established American population, a problem he described as "race suicide."[262] The cause was taken up at the highest levels: President Theodore Roosevelt, also concerned with military preparedness and population, warned Congress in 1906 that he believed men and women of "good stock" who refused to have children to be "race criminals."[263] As women were considered to be at the vanguard of "nurture," so too they were believed to be most important to the cause of eugenics. Women's rights advocates would increasingly agitate to improve the situation of women as mothers, whose maternal activities were believed to be of the utmost importance to the future of the national state.[264] Nordau's ideas on "degeneration" continued to be relevant as a link between issues of morality, heredity, and art as well.

These American concerns with the mother's role in child psychology, eugenics, and the welfare of the nation are reflected in the reception of Cassatt's work during the first two decades of the twentieth century. American critics had yet to embrace the more innovative aspects of European avant-garde art, and in any case Cassatt herself no longer belonged at the forefront of modernism. Thus, as European critics turned their attention to the painters who were pushing toward abstraction, many American critics found in Cassatt a figure who could represent "modern art" to a more conservative aesthetic culture while also providing imagery that could be drawn into the discussion of contemporary concerns regarding maternity and nationalism.

One European who continued to express interest in Cassatt during the first years of the new century was Camille Mauclair, and in a 1902 *L'Art décoratif* essay he focused

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[262] Edward A. Ross's *The Old World in the New* (1901), quoted in Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 100.

[263] Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 102.

[264] For more on these issues, see Bell and Offen, introduction to the chapter "Nationalism, Materialism, and Motherhood, 1880–1914," in *Women, The Family, and Freedom*, 9-14.

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upon issues of popular psychology in her work. Mauclair explained that the child represents "the Unconscious materialized. Everything is perpetual childbirth in the secret of an unknown womb; every birth is a death and every death is reborn, and the infant is the most striking symbol of this."[265] Furthermore, he continued, "Our time, a restless psychologist, has sought rather to advance this being's age, to decipher on its barely sketched-out face the powerful thoughts that sleep within."[266] Cassatt, in contrast, "is perhaps the only painter of our time who has given to the child an interpretation limited to the child itself; in front of this being still in formation, she has not been impatient to divine its maturity. She stops her tranquil and sure contemplation at the very minute in which the creature she is studying appears before her, she captures the soul that is present, and that is all she needs to create a new psychology, rooted in and strongly inspired by nature."[267]

To emphasize Cassatt's difference from other artists who depicted children, Mauclair compared her work to that of Eugène Carrière [Fig. 151], whose subjects are "overcharged with precocious thoughts: across their tender skulls shimmers the phosphorescent gleam of the intellect that it elaborates; their gazes are unfathomably grave; they carry within them an entire program of suffering and dreams."[268] He also set her works against those of Renoir, whose children "are but flowers and fruits; with their delicate animality, they live only for the bloom of their downy flesh, its fresh pulp not yet

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[265] Camille Mauclair, "Un Peintre de l'enfance, Miss Mary Cassatt," *L'Art décoratif* 2 (August 1902), 178: "l'Inconscient matérialisé. Tout est accouchement perpétuel dans le secret d'un sein inconnu, toute naissance est une mort et toute mort renaît, et l'enfant en est le symbole saisissante."

This article is reprinted, without illustrations, as "Un Simple: Mary Cassatt," in Camille Mauclair, *Les Trois crises de l'art actuel* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1906), 117-30.

[266] Mauclair, "Un Peintre de l'enfance, Miss Mary Cassatt," 178: "L'époque actuelle, psychologue inquiète, a plutôt cherché à devancer l'âge de cet être, à déchiffrer sur ce visage ébauché les pensées qui y dorment en puissance."

[267] Ibid.: "est peut-être le seul peintre de ce temps qui ait donné de l'enfant une interprétation limitée à lui-même: elle n'a pas, devant cet être en formation, l'impatience de deviner sa maturité. Elle arrête sa contemplation tranquille et sûre à la minute même où lui apparait la créature étudiée, elle en saisit l'âme présente, et cela lui suffit pour créer une psychologie neuve, attachante et fortement inspirée de la nature."

[268] Ibid., 179: "surchargés de pensées précoces: à travers leurs crânes tendres miroite la lueur phosphorescente de l'intellect qui s'élabore, leurs regards sont insondablement graves, ils portent en eux tout un programme de souffrance et de rêve."

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impregnated with the juice of consciousness."[269] Nonetheless, a comparison between one of Renoir's works of the period and a Cassatt painting illustrated in Mauclair's article, *The Reading Lesson* [Fig. 152], shows that the two artists were in fact working in a similar manner in the period. In addition to subject matter, Cassatt's image shares with Renoir's *L'Alphabet (Jean et Gabrielle)* [Fig. 153] an interest in Rubensian facture and figures.

Mauclair touched upon Cassatt's prolonged study of the old masters, pointing out that she derived from them "a singularly strong passion for the realities of drawing, for expression that is broad in its planes and volumes, and an aversion to hermetic and subtle art."[270] She was not, like "the protesting Americans such as Whistler or Poe, haunted by the delirious dreams and complexes of old Europe."[271] Rather,

> That which is most striking at first about her is the need for immediate expression and a love of health. In this vast series of young women and children, there is not a nervous face, no vague impulse toward a baffling or ambiguous psychology. The fresh complexions, the smiling and bright faces, the pure and good lips, the happy flesh of a beautiful race, the free, natural and logical gestures, please with their simplicity. It is good here that the work of an Anglo-Saxon is exempt from Pre-Raphaelite refinements; it is feminine in the tenderness of its models and expressions, but robust, enamored of the beauty of blood, the alacrity of organisms without defects, of the supple seduction of the body that demands only the open air, cool water, regular exercise; it has a charm that others must derive from cosmetics, the darkening of

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269 Ibid.: "ne sont que des fleurs et des fruits; d'une délicate animalité, ils ne vivent que par l'efflorescence de leur chair duvetée, dont la pulpe fraîche n'est pas encore imprégnée du suc de la conscience."

270 Ibid., 180: "une passion singulièrement forte pour les réalités du dessin, pour l'expression large par les plans et les volumes, l'aversion de l'art hermétique et subtil."

271 Ibid., "des Américains protestataires comme Whistler ou Poe, hantés des rêves déliés et complexes de la vieille Europe."

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twilight, from the coquettish preciosity of lace framing their pale faces, weary of being warned by the soul of an organism that is unconscious.[272]

Here Mauclair made reference to ideas popularized above all by Friedrich Froebel (best known as the founder of "kindergarten") and his American follower, G. Stanley Hall. Froebel, in Hall's words, "believed the child should live out of doors; would give each child a flower-bed that he might have access to mother earth; emphasized the need of abundant and healthful activity, and understood the hygienic necessities of leisure."[273] Issues of health and hygiene also arose in this period in relation to eugenics. Although scientists increasingly confirmed the differences between inheritable and non-inheritable qualities, Lamarckian ideas about "soft heredity"—that certain, generally moral qualities could be developed and passed on to offspring—persisted. The maintenance of health and cleanliness, which many believed could positively influence heredity, was also viewed as a marker of class difference, a central concern of the eugenic movement.

Mauclair concluded that Cassatt's work represents "a psychology evolving at the same time as the organism, without preceding it nor following it; she has understood how to fix a thankless hour, difficult to satisfy, of human evolution, and in this she is truly one of the painters of our era who truly has most naturally joined the establishment of thought to the establishment of form."[274] Moreover, when he discussed her work again in a 1903

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[272] Ibid., 180-1: "Ce qui frappe d'abord en elle c'est le besoin d'expression immédiate et l'amour de la santé. En cette vaste série de jeunes femmes et d'enfants, pas un visage névrosé, pas une velléité de psychologie déroutante ou ambiguë. Les carnations franches, les regards riants et clairs, les lèvres pures et bonnes, les chairs heureuses d'une belle race, les gestes libres, naturels et logiques, plaisent par la simplicité. C'est bien là l'oeuvre d'une Anglo-Saxonne exempte des raffinements préraphaélites, féminine par la tendresse des modelés et des expressions, mais robuste, mais éprise de la beauté du sang, de l'alacrité des organismes sans tares, de la souple séduction des corps ne demandant qu'au grand air, à l'eau froide, à l'accoutumance des exercices, le charme que d'autres empruntent aux fards, aux ennuagements des pénombres, aux coquettes préciosités des dentelles encadrant de précoces et pâles visages, lassés d'être avertis par l'âme dans un organisme qui s'ignore."

[273] G. Stanley Hall, "Some Defects of Kindergarten in America," *Forum* 28 (January 1900), 587.

[274] Mauclair, "Un Peintre de l'enfance, Miss Mary Cassatt," 184: "une psychologie s'élaborant en même temps que l'organisme, sans le précéder, sans le suivre: elle a su fixer une heure ingrate, difficilement saisissable, de l'évolution humaine, et en cela elle est vraiment un des peintres de notre époque qui ont le plus naturellement touché à la constatation de la pensée à travers la constatation de la forme."

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book on the "French Impressionists," he remarked that, "besides the great qualities of solid draughtsmanship, correct values, and skilful [*sic*] interpretation of flesh and stuffs," her pictures exhibit "a profound sentiment of infantile life, childish gestures, clear and unconscious looks, and the loving expression of the mothers. Miss Cassatt is the painter and psychologist of babies and young mothers whom she likes to depict in the freshness of an orchard, or against backgrounds of the flowered hangings of dressing-rooms, amidst bright linens, tubs, and china, in smiling intimacy."[275]

Despite the general interest in such matters of "child psychology" in the United States after 1900, it took some time before critics there completely warmed to Cassatt's works. In 1903, when Durand-Ruel exhibited a selection of her newest works along with some of her older pictures, reviewers picked up a refrain dating back to her "Modern Woman" mural, characterizing the artist as "the apostle of the ugly woman in art." The *New York Daily Tribune* critic stated that her "innate distinction" enabled her to "triumph over the unlovely character of many of her models and withdraws attention from the positively ugly costumes in which, apparently, she prefers to paint them. Her little naked children, for example, are almost rather unattractive figures, but she contrives to express the sentiment of childhood with such sincerity and dignity that the wellnigh brutal realism of her method sinks out of sight."[276]

A *New York Times* critic, in an article titled, "The Cassatt Oils and Pastels, Ugly Women in Curious Gowns and Babies in No Gowns at All," also made this aspect of Cassatt's production the centerpiece of a review.[277] *Young Women Picking Fruit* [Fig. 126] was singled out as an example of the artist's "very violent reaction against the prettiness of Bouguereau's and Cabanel's women," for she "is the apostle of the ugly

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[275] Camille Mauclair, *The French Impressionists*, trans. P. G. Konody (London: Duckworth & Co., and New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1903), 148, 150.
[276] "Art Exhibitions. Opening of the Season—Paintings by Mary Cassatt and Louis Loeb," *New York Daily Tribune* (11 November 1903), 8.
[277] "The Cassatt Oils and Pastels, Ugly Women in Curious Gowns and Babies in No Gowns at All," *New York Times* (6 November 1903), 7.

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woman in art, like certain novelists of her sex who at one time, following in the track of Charlotte Brontë, made the woman to whom Fate has been unfair in the matter of looks the heroine of their romances."

The *Times* critic found the appealing color in some of the newer works to compensate for the unattractive features of the figures. *Jules Dried by His Mother* [Fig. 143] was interpreted as an image of a girl with her mother, "to whom Providence has allotted a very ugly nose and a full, coarse mouth." The picture was described as evincing "a touch of sweetness," and the brushwork "is broad and easy; the color values fine." The pastels were viewed as more successful than the oils, for "one feels Miss Cassatt handles this material with more pleasure and perhaps more skill . . . at any rate, the pastel suits better her color schemes." To this end, *Patty-cake* [Fig. 137] was notable for the "rendering of stuffs" in which "one often finds passages of extreme clearness, done with a certainty of touch and a correctness in seizing the color that excites one's admiration."

The critic for New York's *Evening Post*, however, expressed concern over the disjunction between the expensive dresses and the ugly women who wore them, framing the question in relation both to Cassatt's rough technique and issues of class. "The babies are all nude," observed this critic, "and in painting their little bodies the artist shows some of the best of her skill both in drawing and color."[278] As for the women,

> it is hard to guess who and what they are. You find them gowned in good clothes or draped in wrappers of silk or other costly stuffs. Enough of character appears in their countenances to make us certain they are of the strictly respectable world. But whether it is owing to brutality of method in depicting them or something in Miss Cassatt's artistic temperament which inclines her to be uncompromisingly truthful in rendering nature and thus overshoot the mark by falling into coarseness, is more than can be made out from the evidence within the frames. Each woman looks honest, but

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[278] "Some Picture Shows." *Evening Post: New York* (5 November 1903), 7.

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> none is unmistakably a lady. Yet the people of the class to which these women appear to belong never, in France at least, wear such fine clothes. Some look like peasant women, yet they are not the nurses, but the mothers. It must be that it is the artist's fault that we cannot make a better "diagnosis." It must be her determination not to err on the side of beauty and refinement, and with this, if the truth must be told, her inability to really render what is before her not only with sincerity, but with convincing truth. There are delicate lines in the ruddiest peasant's face as well as in that of a lady mother in her chamber, but the artist either cannot see them or, if she does, cannot fix them on her canvas.

This critic accused Cassatt of brutality for the sake of brutality, of having taken naturalism too far.

Once again, *Young Women Picking Fruit* was found to be Cassatt's most crude picture, for each head "shows in the place where the ear ought to be a few slabs of reddish paint plastered on without the slightest thought, apparently, of form." In her better moments, though, she was credited as painting "with virility," and of not being "afraid of her material and tools." Of the recent paintings, *Baby Getting up from His Nap* [Fig. 148] was "very pretty in color," *Three Women Admiring a Child* [Fig. 134] was "one of the best of all the pictures," and *Jules Dried by His Mother* "presents most of Miss Cassatt's best qualities as a painter in characteristic style."

Despite critical ambivalence, the 1903 show resulted in an important sale: *Mother and Sara Admiring the Baby* [Fig. 154] was purchased by the museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, becoming the first work by Cassatt to enter an American public collection.[279] In 1904, too, Cassatt attracted attention in the museum world with *The Caress* [Fig. 155], which was awarded prizes at the annual exhibitions of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago, though she refused them,

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[279] The work was deaccessioned by the museum in 1944.

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having been opposed to juries since leaving the Salon system. Charles Caffin noted a difference between *The Caress* and most of her other pictures, calling it "certainly one of her most beautiful examples, since she has deferred on this occasion to popular prejudice as to choose types of humanity that are not positively disconcerting in their homeliness. As a result, there is nothing to interfere with our enjoyment of her mastery of composition and drawing, of tone and lighting."[280] The critic for the *Chicago Record-Herald* appreciated her "group of what may be termed strictly modern Madonnas."[281] Compositionally, *The Caress* does in fact recall a Holy Family image that had been highly important to Cassatt during her stay in Parma, Correggio's *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Mary Magdalene* [Fig. 9]. That the term "modern Madonna" was used quite loosely by the *Chicago Record-Herald* critic is evident from the other work exhibited by Cassatt as part of this group, *Reine Lefebvre Holding a Nude Baby* [Fig. 156], a picture of a mother in a fashionable dress that was preferred to *The Caress* as being "[e]xceptionally clever and original."[282]

Christian Brinton discussed the artist's relation to art historical precedent as well as her Impressionist colleagues in a 1905 article, "Concerning Miss Cassatt and Certain Etchings." To Brinton, the women of the Impressionist group "gave the movement that essential touch of humanity it might otherwise have lacked. . . . The impersonality of haystack or strip of water they supplemented by the intimacy of the dressing room and the nursery. They were natural Impressionists, for painting with them was never divorced from the pervasive instincts of domesticity and of maternity."[283] In Brinton's view, Cassatt shared Degas's "strength of line . . . and much also of his solemn, almost classic restraint.

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[280] Charles Caffin, "American Studio Talk, Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition," *International Studio* 22 (March 1904), ccxxxix.

[281] "Current News of Art," *Chicago Record-Herald* (23 October 1904), page number not known (original found in Cassatt Scrapbook in the Art Institute of Chicago Library).

[282] This work was purchased by the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, out of its annual summer exhibition in 1909.

[283] Christian Brinton, "Concerning Miss Cassatt and Certain Etchings," *International Studio* 27 (November 1905), I.

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In each case beneath the clear precision of modern coloring and the freedom of modern handling lies something of that balance, that antique equipoise, naively rediscovered at the dawn of the Renaissance."[284]

Brinton then moved on to Cassatt's maternal imagery, remarking that

> While her range of expression is wide, her choice of motive is restricted. . . . No one has caught more faithfully the accent at once simple and profound of that mutual, reciprocal existence. The beseeching tenderness of motherhood and the spontaneous, primal frankness of childhood has never found a more sympathetic interpreter. All the mystery, actual or fancied, that seems to encircle infancy and all the gentle ministration of maternity are here recorded with a truth and a vitality new to art. Though in essence they recall the eternal Mother and Child, these scenes are not weighted with the momentous awe of the old masters. They are conceived amid refreshing and always local surroundings. Mother or sometimes the nurse bathes, dresses and feeds the infant in a quiet, well-lit room, with here a crisp curtain and there a white bed. Or again, he is taken into a garden bright with blossoms and the green vesture of early summer. There is no attempt at anecdote, no assault upon sentiment. You are free to think of the deeper significance of each group, yet you are not compelled to see anything there beside unstudied composition, sure, strong outline and clear, harmonious colour.[285]

In general, Brinton felt that Cassatt art was "specifically French in outward expression" yet "in each of its manifestations lurks a restraint, an austere disregard of mere prettiness which, let us agree, is perhaps less Parisian than Pennsylvanian."[286]

In 1907, Kenyon Cox also sought to situate Cassatt in relation to the female members of the Impressionist group, describing her work as "more personal and

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[284] Ibid., IV.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid., VII.

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masculine" than that of Morisot.[287] "Her femininity," he remarked, "shows in her choice of subject and her sympathy with childhood and motherhood, but it is a large, full-blooded sentiment that she expresses, not a dainty one, and she expresses it in a direct and vigorous manner, caring more for incisiveness of expression than for charm—more for character than for beauty."[288] Unlike many earlier critics, who emphasized Cassatt's "brutal" facture, Cox felt that if "there is nothing anaemic about her art neither is there any coarseness, and affectation of any kind is far from her. . . . Her handling is marked neither by great suavity nor willful roughness and is without any special research or ostentation; it is the handling of a painter who thinks more of large matters of forms and hue than of the preciousness of the material employed."[289]

Cox then focused on *Sara Handing a Toy to the Baby* [Fig. 157], claiming it to be "far and away the best and most entirely successful picture of hers that I have ever seen—a picture in which all her merits are splendidly present while her occasional faults are entirely absent from it."[290] Cox's interest in the picture was mainly formal, and he found its general lack of emotion to be appealing, explaining,

> The chubby-faced little girl, with her pale hair and dark eyes, has a delightfully childish smile, but the most charming things in the picture are the head of the mother and the whole head and figure of the boy. The mother with her round forehead, large nose and small eye, is scarcely beautiful and her wholesome, placid face has little expression, but her ample personality reminds one somehow of the delightfully buxom saint who holds the Christ Child in Titian's "Madonna of the Rabbit" [Fig. 158], while as a piece of blonde flesh painting and delicate shadowless modelling the head is altogether admirable. As for the boy there is no word for him but adorable. His red-gold, curling

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[287] Kenyon Cox, "The Collection of Mr. Alfred Atmore Pope," in *Noteworthy Paintings in American Private Collections* (1907), eds. John La Farge and August F. Jaccaci, vol. 2 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), 283.
[288] Ibid., 287.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.

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> hair, the fold in his little neck brought out by the turn of his head, the modelling of his back and hips, the lines of arm and side and the child-like action of the dimpled left hand—above all the soft yet firm and elastic texture of his flesh and the exquisite flesh color, all these things make this figure as beautiful a rendering of babyhood as any in the whole range of art.[291]

The reference to Titian is apt, for Cassatt's works after the turn of the century often featured figures of a full-bodied sensuality reminiscent not only of Rubens but also of the Venetian master, whose work she had greatly admired during her stay in Spain.

A 1907 *New York Times* article discussed Cassatt's relation to gender and to the old masters in slightly different terms than Cox. After noting that she had "assimilated some of the radical traits" of Manet and Degas, this writer claimed, "Like a man, like a German of the fifteenth century, she sternly repressed all longing on the part of the spectator for prettiness in women and children, such as the general public admires. Her models were triumphs of uncomeliness, even more so than those of Renoir, for example."[292] This critic, like the *Evening Post* critic in 1903, brought up the matter of class, remarking, "If her women and children were obviously members of a lower caste of humanity, at any rate they had beauty of texture. What they lacked in romance they gained in wholesomeness and health." Indeed, "her mothers are Madonnas of the bourgeoisie, simple, unassuming, and unmoved." Thanks mainly to Durand-Ruel, this critic explained, "her pictures have become, if not exactly popular, yet accepted as approved by connoisseurs."

That Cassatt refused to pander to popular tastes in maternal imagery through the "proper" expression of emotion was also the opinion of a *Boston Evening Transcript* review from 1909. "The exclusion of sentimentality in painting," stated this critic,

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[291] Ibid., 288.

[292] "Miss Cassatt's 'Triumphs of Unncomeliness,' Women and Children She Paints Not Pretty But Highly Approved by Connoisseurs," *New York Times* (25 August 1907), magazine section, 8.

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> is undoubtedly a negative merit of considerable value, but on the other hand one can hardly help the feeling that Miss Cassatt is almost brutally indifferent to the "human interest." Her bambinos are dangerously near to the still-life class of objects, a sort of human bric-a-brac. True, babies are little animals, especially other people's babies; and in this point of view Miss Cassatt sets forth the unadorned facts with signal ability. And the mothers! Let the Old Masters depict the tender, yearning, protective, loving aspects of the mother, the sentimental aspect if you will; we have learned that there are other phases of nursery existence, and among them is one especially well brought out in these pictures, namely, a certain fatuous maternal complacency, beaming, radiant, supreme and almost sublime. But it is not intentionally underlined; nothing is intentionally insisted upon; there is no going behind the returns; we are assisting at a sort of natural history demonstration of facts, without any commentary and without any bias.[293]

Even as late as 1909, the lack of idealization in Cassatt's imagery was still at issue. The painter Philip L. Hale, in a review of the same exhibition published in the *Boston Herald*, made a similar point about Cassatt's children, commenting in more jocular terms, "Miss Cassatt perceives these pathetic, weird homunculi as they are. If the maternal handkerchief has not been efficiently used one is allowed to suspect it; and if I were one of these literary art critics of which America boasts so choice a collection, I would say that a faint odor of sour milk exhaled from these chubby faces."[294]

The *Boston Evening Transcript* critic provided a perfunctory description of one of Cassatt's most recent works, *Children Playing with a Cat* [Fig. 159]: "a nude infant sits bold upright contemplating a gray cat. The mother wears a yellow gown. Baby's elder sister in blue, holding the cat, looks at her little brother or sitter with an expression of ill-disguised contempt." *Young Women Picking Fruit* was seen as a bit too abstract, with

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[293] "Miss Cassatt's Exhibition," *Boston Evening Transcript* (9 February 1909), 11.

[294] Philip L. Hale, "Miss Cassatt's Works," 7. Hale was the father of Cassatt biographer Nancy Hale.

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flowering shrubs that "do not stay back where they belong." *Young Mother Sewing* [Fig. 160], though, "has more charm than the rest, so far, and more air. . . . The child in white leaning on the mother's lap, the blue and white vase with nasturtiums in it, the glimpse of green lawn outside the window, the deft movement of the sewing hands, all these details are well done, and contribute to a picture of decided attractiveness."

In contrast to the pretty appeal of *Young Mother Sewing*, the *Transcript* critic continued, "Some of the other paintings of babies are of a primitive verity; they are more or less reminiscent of older art, not the sophisticated state of it, but the naive and primitive beginnings. Such is the babe looking over his mother's shoulder in the corner, a little old man of the most amusing and natural impassiveness, expressionless as the Sphinx." This last painting, *Baby Charles Looking Over His Mother's Shoulder (No. 3)* [Fig. 161], represents one of Cassatt's most interesting manipulations of a mirror image. The same frame seen in *The Oval Mirror* [Fig. 145] appears here, but whereas no reflection is visible in that painting, the mirror in *Baby Charles* incorporates a number of odd features in a painting that reverses most of our expectations for figural art. The mother's broad, orange-clad back occupies most of the foreground, yet this back is the least important element in the composition (excepting the patch of plain background at left). The mother's face appears solely in the mirror, but in much reduced and unfocused form. The child's face and shoulders, then, serve as the focal point for the picture, but their significance is almost mocked by the mirror reflection, which lacks the blue ribbon seen around the "real" child's neck while featuring a generous glimpse of its buttocks.

Cassatt also treated the subject of the mirror in another work of this period, *Mother Wearing a Sunflower on Her Dress* [Fig. 162], expanding upon her exploration of the device in the earlier pastel, *Mother Combing Her Child's Hair* [Fig. 141]. Whereas the child in the pastel is being cared for by her mother and is not actively engaged with the mirror, in *Mother Wearing a Sunflower* the woman appears to be initiating the child into the secrets of "Looking-Glass Land." Though this picture would not appear to have any

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specific old master Madonna and Child precedent, Judith A. Barter makes the interesting point that Cassatt began working on it at the same time she purchased Simon Vouet's c. 1640 *Toilet of Venus* (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh), which employs images of flowers and mirror reflections in support of *vanitas* symbolism.[295] Yet, as Barter suggests, the picture appears life-affirming, for sunflowers were associated with fecundity in Marian imagery and with regeneration during the Arts and Crafts movement.

On the other hand, Harriet Scott Chessman, in an equally compelling analysis provides a more negative interpretation of the scene, finding that the distortions in the painting's perspective and mirror reflection are not sufficiently disruptive so as to interrupt the inculcation of the girl in the cultural degradation of women as vain objects of the male gaze.[296] While I find it likely that Cassatt did comment upon restrictive notions of female beauty here, I also believe that, given her preference for models who were consistently described as "ugly," the picture also offers an alternative to the reproduction of mothering and of female vanity, by demonstrating the transformative powers of art. The round shape of the hand mirror, which is too small to hold the bountiful image of the child, cannot be read as anything but a mirror, but the rectangular frame at back could just as easily be understood as enclosing a painting within a painting. As Cassatt herself successfully internalized certain aspects of personality mirrored from her mother, through her art she was able to create herself in her own desired image, becoming an artist, a possibility that is offered here to the child.[297]

At the same moment that Cassatt could repudiate so many elements of classical representation, she could also create images that were almost fully consonant with old

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[295] Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," 98-9.

[296] Chessman, "Mary Cassatt and the Maternal Body," 255-8.

[297] I wonder, too, if Cassatt was familiar with the sunflower emblem of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which had been adopted by the Philadelphia-based organization by 1896. Sunflowers had been used as by local groups as a suffrage symbol as early as 1887, according to Margaret Finnegan, in *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 115.

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master tradition, such as *Woman in an Orange Wrapper Holding Her Nude Baby* [Fig. 163]. With its simplified triangular composition, gemlike palette, relatively soft handling, and conventionally pretty child, this picture has much in common with a painting like Raphael's *Small Cowper Madonna* [Fig. 164], which had gained greatly in popularity since having been lauded as "perhaps the most lovely of all Raphael's Madonnas" by Morelli in 1883.[298]

Garner Teall approached the question of Cassatt's relation to Marian imagery throughout history by linking her to the tradition beginning, *pace* Berenson, with Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* [Fig. 2]. Teall's 1910 *Good Housekeeping* article (indicative of a new trend in the Cassatt literature: her celebration in the "ladies' magazines") identified the mother and child theme as "art's supreme subject."[299] Moreover, "Giotto was the first great painter to cast aside the formal style of the conventional Byzantines. He painted natural pictures which appealed to the heart. In the fourteenth century he painted a mother and child that revolutionized all art up to then. This splendid work may be seen in Florence today. It has not lost its interest."[300]

Cassatt's art, according to Teall, is great art because, like Giotto's painting and that of all the great artists to follow him, "it is the work of a true and of a gifted humanist who perfectly expresses her humanism. One may not compare it to the painting of Andrea del Sarto, or Raphael, or Titian, to Correggio, or to Rubens—it is itself strikingly individual, though it has in it just that which makes these masters loved—a humanity speaking by art's voice to man's ear of beautiful things he comprehends"; she also "puts health into the

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[298] On the changing reputation of the *Small Cowper Madonna*, see Brown, *Raphael and America*, 82-6. When P. A. B. Widener bought the work for more than half a million dollars in 1914, the *New York Herald* (7 February 1914) described the purchase as the "Most Important Single Art Transaction Ever Undertaken" (Brown, 86).

[299] Gardner Teall, "Mother and Child, The Theme as Developed in the Art of Mary Cassatt," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* 50 (February 1910), 141.

[300] Ibid.

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beautiful souls she suggests, from infancy to maternity, and she never leaves us feeling sorry for mankind."[301]

After reviewing Cassatt's career through the 1880s, Teall reassured his readers, "one must not be frightened away by this talk of impressionism." In terms suggesting the degree to which the spirit of Nordau lived on in the American reaction to the Fauves and Expressionists, he continued,

> There are no perversely blue cows, pink sheep or purple faces devised for spectric contortionists by Mary Cassatt's brain. In common with that of Renoir, her art is a sane art. The obviousness of the merely pretty in life concerns her little, or not at all; yet the soulfulness of beauty is a thing she marvelously well suggests in her subdued whites and grays and in quiet but lovely fresh spring colors, spread on her canvases in solid but fine and unobtrusive impasto, and again with her pastels, in the luminosity of well-chosen pigments. Her technique makes a strong appeal to the layman.[302]

As a sane humanist whose color and facture proved nothing to fear, Cassatt could thus be deemed safe for an audience of American women, and Teall closed his article by claiming her to be a "great artist who paints with perfect fidelity that nobility of womanhood which is the American ideal."[303]

The author of a 1911 article in *The Craftsman* continued the line of thinking on Cassatt's maternal imagery that would come to the fore as World War I threatened, which interpreted her works as symbolic of the "religion of humanity." The *Craftsman* writer pronounced, "Although her first experience in art influence lay in Italy, that land of pictured mothers and babes, Miss Cassatt's art is remote from the Mediaeval Madonna of tradition. It is not the deification of motherhood, one feels on these canvases, rather, the great possibilities of human achievement."[304] W. Howard Stanton, in a *Harper's Monthly*

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[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid., 146.
[303] Ibid.
[304] "Mary Cassatt's Achievement: Its Value to the World of Art," *Craftsman* 19 (March 1911), 545.

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Magazine article of the same year, loosely based around *Patty-cake* [Fig. 137], similarly stated, "There is no longer need of the excuse of religion which Renaissance painters employed in their representations of maternity; modern art has wider perception and greater subtlety."[305] Yet Cassatt's vision of maternity was not merely quotidian:

> Beyond method and color, the elusive, haunting *motif* of motherhood is ever latent in her scenes of home life, changing form with each new picture, but coming back again and again, as if never quite caught and definitely fixed in the artist's mind. And these ever-new variations of a world-old theme disclose imagination and delicate fancy, and being divested of outworn conventions of the past, present a new symbolism of the thought and quality of our time.

Motherhood, as interpreted by Cassatt, was uncanny, in short: elusive, haunting, and impossible to fix, but simultaneously brand new, fresh, and American.

Some commentators would deny Cassatt's relation to religious symbolism altogether in this period. Clara MacChesney, for instance, declared in *Arts and Decoration*: "She paints what she sees, and nothing else. She uses no stratagems of light or decorations, she is never allegorical, and she never paints modern Holy Families, nor Madonnas."[306] MacChesney's interpretation stressed the eugenic and psychological aspect of Cassatt's works, observing that "Although her children are at times emphatically homely, yet they are not anaemic, but are joyously healthy. . . . She may be called a painter of the psychology of babies, having such a profound feeling for, and knowledge of infantile life with its puerile gestures."[307] These remarks reiterate a constant theme in Cassatt criticism in this era, one that linked the ugliness of her models and their robust good health (as opposed to European cultural and hereditary decadence) with the positivistic bent of her representational style.

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[305] W. Stanton Howard, "*Mother and Child,* by Mary Cassatt," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 123 (September 1911), 596.
[306] Clara MacChesney, "Mary Cassatt and Her Work," *Arts and Decoration* 3 (June 1913), 266.
[307] Ibid., 266-7.

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This view of Cassatt as a positivist artist did not prevent most writers from continuing to associate her works with a vaguely religious symbolism. This type of reading was exemplified by Elisabeth Luther Cary in her 1914 *Good Housekeeping Magazine* article, "Painting Health and Sanity," in which she brought together health and hygiene, psychology, old master Madonnas, and the "religion of humanity." Cary opened her article with the question of Cassatt's achievement in relation to gender. Quoting George Moore's claim that "Women astonish us as much by their want of originality as they do by their extraordinary powers of assimilation" (which she found to be cruel but perhaps not unreasonable), Cary named Cassatt "thus far altogether the most brilliant exception to this derogatory classification."[308] Although the artist "has not contributed to art the discovery of any new method or theory, she has expressed an individual point of view, and has maintained it so steadily and with such intensity that she has bestowed an entirely new physiognomy upon an ancient theme."[309]

After briefly outlining the development of the mother and child subject from the Catacombs of Rome in the third century through the Renaissance, Cary observed:

> The change in religious feeling and in the attitude of the church toward art has banished the theme of the Madonna as a controlling motive in modern painting, but the "religion of humanity," to use a phrase that has had its richness of significance obscured by much handling, still finds the relation of mother and child the most important relation in life. The harmonious growth of the child, the health and balance of the mother, are the first concern of all the modern friends of the human race.[310]

Cary understood the "religion of humanity" to have a nationalist aspect, and a subhead under the title on the first page of the article elaborated that the growth and health of the mother and child "are, and should be, our first concern as a nation."[311] *John Asleep*

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[308] Cary, "Painting Health and Sanity," 153.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid., 156.
[311] Ibid., 153.

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Resting on His Mother's Shoulder (Sleepy Baby) [Fig. 165], a recent pastel, was reproduced to illustrate these ideas. The picture was described in a caption as a "twentieth-century madonna, expressing the beauty and significance of modern motherhood. In this picture Miss Cassatt has portrayed, better than words could phrase it, today's religion of humanity."[312] Indeed, Cary proclaimed, "She has represented the health and sanity of the human race as no other painter has represented it, by following consistently her personal ideal."[313]

Yet, Cary's praise for Cassatt's imagery went beyond her appreciation of its "new physiognomy" and modern symbolism, for she also found Cassatt to have mastered her technical means:

> Miss Cassatt seeks first of all the essential childish character in her subject; this she develops in her early pictures with conscientious realism, stating what she sees in carefully chosen terms, and in her later pictures with a fine lusty freedom of expression, a liberated technique. . . . In the energy of her design, the richness of her color, the lifelike modeling of the flesh that seems in the recent pictures to be vibrating with life, in the simplicity and spontaneity of the characterization, she has come a long distance from her first bold yet cautious essays.[314]

Cary detected in the artist's work a consonance between the artist's vibrant and energetic technique and the vigorous, healthy figures she depicted. Even more important, according to Cary, is that Cassatt is clearly the victor in Fry's "duel" between artistic "spirit" and "material":

> those who are artists and have had their battle with rebellious pigment, and their long drill in laws of color and design, will feel that she has achieved a still greater triumph in expressing a definite ideal without subtracting from the technical quality of her

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312 Ibid., 158.
313 Ibid., 156.
314 Ibid.

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> work. . . . The handling of the paint, the analysis of the forms, the skilful [*sic*] management of light and shadow, all have something to say to the man who works with paint, irrespective of the pleasant life and tender sentiment suggested by Miss Cassatt's pictures.[315]

Cary summarized Cassatt's work in her final sentence, proclaiming that in Cassatt's works "we may see, then, the meeting of two qualities frequently held to be irreconcilable: the 'human interest' that has come to be a byword with serious writers on account of the great numbers who cover with it technical deficiencies, and the sound art that commands the respect of the initiated few."[316] To Cary, Cassatt was able to achieve that which to Fry could only be approached by an artist as impersonal as Cézanne, finding "in the material to [her] hand the perfect embodiment of [her] feeling,"[317] thereby appealing both to the layperson and the connoisseur.

It was, of course, also in 1914 that Freud wrote one of the first examples of psychoanalytic art criticism, "The Moses of Michelangelo," which opened, "I may say at once that I am no connoisseur in art but simply a layman. I have often observed that the subject-matter of works of art has a stronger attraction for me than their formal and technical qualities, though to the artist their value lies first and foremost in these latter."[318] Jane Gallop has drawn from these words two important themes: that "we experience the relation to subject matter in art as forbidden, powerful, desiring, and embarrassing," and that psychoanalytical art criticism calls the legitimacy of objectivity into question from the moment of its inception, even as it seeks in many ways to uphold it.[319] By examining the theories of Bernard Berenson, which were instrumental in elevating the importance of

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315 Ibid., 156, 158.
316 Ibid., 158.
317 Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, 41.
318 Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo" (1914), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans, and ed. James Strachey, vol. 13 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1958), 211.
319 Gallop, "A Good Lay," 138.

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formal and technical qualities over subject matter for the spectator as well as the artist, and by looking to see how these ideas would be incorporated by Roger Fry into some of the founding texts of formalism, I hope to have suggested some of the ways in which these writers marginalized many of the qualities for which Cassatt had long been praised. But in 1914, for a moment, at least, one of Cassatt's critics—again, perhaps not coincidentally, a woman, publishing in a woman's magazine—could still hold form and content together, finding their interrelation to be powerful and desiring, yes, but neither forbidden nor embarrassing.

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CONCLUSION

Mary Cassatt prospered during the first decade of the twentieth century. Though she could no longer be counted among the avant garde in France, she continued to find patrons through the efforts of Durand-Ruel, and increasingly, Ambroise Vollard. In the United States, where her work was widely promoted by Durand-Ruel, her popularity soared. There she was applauded by critics and patrons who viewed her pictures as innovative, yet safe when compared to the Fauves or Expressionists, and who saw the artist herself as a modern woman and a representative American who had achieved professional success while remaining sufficiently conservative in her devotion to the subject of maternity. She was also extremely active in assisting the Havemeyers in assembling their collection during these years, and sought to place a number of important old master paintings into American museum collections.

At the end of 1910, after having experienced an especially successful year, which included a good deal of press coverage and the doubling of her sales income, Cassatt decided to travel through Europe to Constantinople and Egypt with her brother Gardner and his family.[1] However, the trip failed to live up to Cassatt's expectations. Tensions between family members rose, given the enforced intimacy of the situation, and then Gardner fell ill. In addition, the artist felt overwhelmed by the monumental and what seemed to her excessively masculine character of Egypt's "Temples & Tombs."[2] "Fancy going back to babies and women to paint," she wrote to Louisine Havemeyer, admitting, "I am crushed by the strength of this Art. I wonder, though, if ever I can paint again."[3] In April of 1911, not long after the family returned to France, Gardner passed away, sending Cassatt into a two-year period of physical and mental exhaustion. Suffering from

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[1] Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 287.
[2] Mary Cassatt to Theodate Pope, February 19 [1911], Cairo, in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 306.
[3] Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, March 8, 1911, quoted in Hale, *Mary Cassatt*, 233.

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insomnia, diabetes, and rheumatism, as well as doubts about her creative capacity, she would not return to artmaking until the summer of 1913.

In July of 1913, Cassatt reported to Louisine Havemeyer: "I was able to show Joseph [Durand-Ruel] a pastel nearly finished," and on December 4, she wrote, "I brought seven pastels to town, four were large; a nude boy and his Mother. They were in many respects the best I have done, more freely handled & more brilliant in color. I kept one only. It is one of the best & very important I felt I ought to keep something of mine for my family."[4] Durand-Ruel purchased the six works offered to him, including *Mother and Son in a Chaise Longue, Daughter Leaning Over Them* [Fig. 166], and Cassatt kept *Mother in a Striped Head Scarf Embraced by Her Baby* [Fig. 167] for herself.[5] Not only had she finally returned to work after a two-year hiatus, but she believed these images to be among her most significant accomplishments.

The final phase of Cassatt's career, which opened with the 1913 pastels and closed with a number of pictures created for the 1915 Knoedler exhibition to benefit suffrage that she helped to organize, attests to her lifelong devotion to art. At the age of 69, after experiencing a devastating personal loss, debilitating illness, and a professional crisis in confidence, she gathered her strength for another phase of creativity. (In fact, she likely would have continued working after 1915 had she not begun to lose her sight after developing cataracts.) This artist, who had made the child's attainment of a self-image one of the major themes of her work, had found herself at the center of a number of matters regarding her own self-representation during these years, ca. 1912 to 1915. The confluence of a number of events—the reappearance of Degas's ca. 1880–84 portrait, *Mary Cassatt Seated, Holding Cards* [Fig. 168], which she despised; the publication of

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[4] Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, July 16, 1913, quoted in Hale, *Mary Cassatt*, 254; Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Grasse, December 4 [1913], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 311.

[5] For a more detailed discussion of *Mother and Son in a Chaise Longue, Daughter Leaning Over Them (Young Mother, Daughter, and Son)* in the context of this late period of Cassatt's career, see Pamela A. Ivinski, "Mary Cassatt's *Young Mother, Daughter, and Son*," *Porticus: Journal of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester* 16-19 (1994–1996), 8-13.

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her first biography in 1913; the spectacle of the Armory Show, which minimized her contribution to modern art; and the 1915 exhibition of her works alongside those of Degas and a group of Old Master paintings held to benefit her favorite cause, a woman's right to vote—provides an opportunity to briefly consider the relation of the artist's feminist politics to her aesthetic production as she pondered her place in history and sought to ensure that she would be remembered on her own terms.

* * *

An obsession with Cassatt's appearance and personal life emerged in her home country around 1908, as American critics sought to establish her place within the history of American art. In reply to a request from the Carnegie Institute to provide an image of herself for an exhibition catalogue, Cassatt complained, "It is always unpleasant to me to see the photographs of the artists accompany their work, what has the public to do with the personal appearance of the author of picture or statue? Why should such curiosity if it exists be gratified?"[6] But her refusal to provide photographs of or information about herself could not stem the tide of interest, and she consented with some trepidation to be interviewed by Achille Segard, a novelist, poet, and art critic, for a biography. She may have acquiesced because he either agreed to or preferred to focus on the formal aspects of her work and the evolution of her career rather than the details of her personal life.[7]

It was at this same moment that Cassatt, seeking to dispose of some of the works in her collection, came upon the portrait Degas had painted of her during their Impressionist years. "[A]bove all I do not want to leave it with my family as being [a picture] of me," she wrote to Durand-Ruel, asking him to sell it—and to someone other than an American, if possible. "It has some qualities of art, but is so painful and represents

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[6] Mary Cassatt to John W. Beatty [of the Carnegie Institute], Mesnil-Beaufresne, October 6 [1908], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 299.

[7] For a good discussion of Segard's biography, see Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life*, 321-2.

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me as so repugnant a person, that I would not want anyone to know that I posed for it."[8] Various theories have been proposed to explain her distaste for the image, including the idea that it reminded her of the sad end to her friendship with Degas, the possibility that the pose would be seen as improper (resembling, as it does, that of her contemporaneous and somewhat controversial *Woman in a Loge with a Pearl Necklace* [Fig. 46]), or perhaps even because she may be represented holding tarot cards.[9] Whatever her reasons, she was at this moment extremely concerned with the question of her image for posterity, to the point that she sought to suppress those iterations that failed to meet her approval, as she had destroyed a group of early and unsaleable works from her own oeuvre in 1906.

Cassatt may have been thinking along the same physognomic lines as the critic Gardner Teall, who explained in his 1910 *Good Housekeeping* article on the artist, "I doubt if there exists a photograph of her, and yet I feel, as everyone must feel who knows her and who studies her work, that so much of herself is embodied in each of her pictures that they, perhaps, are almost themselves portraits of the soul of this great artist who paints with perfect fidelity that nobility of womanhood which is the American ideal."[10] The artist chose to let her work speak for her whenever possible, and may have felt a greater need to do so again in 1913, after both the publication of the Segard biography in France, which she feared might be viewed as a signal that her career was now a closed book, and the controversies surrounding the Armory Show in New York. As one of its organizers, John Quinn, explained, the huge modern art exhibition was intended to demonstrate that "American artists—young American artists, that is—do not dread, and

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[8] Mary Cassatt to Joseph Durand-Ruel, Grasse, [late 1912], quoted in Lionello Venturi, *Les Archives de L'Impressionisme*, vol. 2 (Paris, New York: Durand-Ruel, 1939), 129: "je désire surtout ne pas le laisser à ma famille comme étant de moi. Il a des qualités d'art, mais si pénible et me représente comme une personne si répugnante, que je ne voudrais pas qu'on sache que j'ai posé pour cela."

[9] Erica E. Hirshler, "Helping 'Fine Things Across the Atlantic': Mary Cassatt and Art Collecting in the United States," in Barter, ed., *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, 183.

[10] Teall, "Mother and Child, The Theme as Developed in the Art of Mary Cassatt," 146.

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have no need to dread, the ideas or the culture of Europe."[11] Such an idea, being advanced almost 50 years after Cassatt had first traveled to Europe in search of an artistic education, not only would have appeared self-evident to her, but may have even seemed to minimize her role in promoting the acceptance of avant-garde French art in the United States, through her own work and in her role as an adviser to collectors of the Impressionists. Furthermore, she may have felt the need to prove her own viability as an artist in the face of the newer modernists, about whom she wrote, "No sound artist ever looked except with scorn at these cubists and Matisse."[12]

When returning to work, Cassatt looked again to the old masters, and to Parma in particular, even asking Joseph Durand-Ruel to send away for photographs of works by Parmigianino.[13] In general, her 1913 pastels eschew the more complex figural arrangements and detailed backgrounds she had employed in pictures of the previous decade, among them *Children Playing with a Cat* [Fig. 159] and *Mother Wearing a Sunflower on Her Dress* [Fig. 162], to echo more closely the "Modern Madonna" type. *Mother in a Striped Head Scarf Embraced by Her Baby* [Fig. 167], for instance, harks back to the Caravaggesque poses of 1899, such as that seen in *The Oval Mirror* [Fig. 145]. The most ambitious of the pastels she produced in 1913, *Mother and Son in a Chaise Longue. Daughter Leaning Over Them*, employs a compositional template (and to a lesser degree, facial types) derived from works such as Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck* [Fig. 169]. To a certain extent, Cassatt's pastel can also be viewed as an effort to rework her first maternal image, the 1880 *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* [Fig. 56], for it presents a mirror image of the same basic composition. Here, the hints toward the "sexuality of Christ" of the earlier picture are made more evident, for the

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[11] Quoted in Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 43. Quinn lent one of the two works by Cassatt exhibited at the Armory Show.

[12] Mary Cassatt to Ellen Mary Cassatt, March 26 [1913?], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 310.

[13] Discussed in a letter from Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Grasse, January 11 [1913], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 308.

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prominent white *cache-sexe* draws greater attention to the genital area of this male child who is on the verge of outgrowing infancy.

Mother and Son in a Chaise Longue, Daughter Leaning Over Them, like the other works completed in late 1913, is characterized by a jewel-like palette incorporating green, red-purple, and orange tints, and the color is applied with a stroke that is perhaps the most consistently loose of her career. Despite her scorn for the aesthetic innovations of Matisse and the Expressionists, in these late pastels Cassatt utilized the brilliant pigments and free facture now identified more closely with these artists who followed on the heels of the Impressionists. *Mother and Son in a Chaise Longue, Daughter Leaning Over Them* thus mediates between the modernism that was being hotly debated in American art circles at the moment and the old master precedents that continued to inspire the artist.

Indeed, this pastel can be seen almost as if it were Cassatt's effort to demonstrate that she was still capable of fulfilling the discourse on her art that had recently appeared in Segard's biography. Curtis Wager-Smith, discussing the book in the *Public Ledger-Philadelphia* in 1914, quoted Segard's claim that Cassatt

> is devoted to her art, as if it were a religion. . . . She has the eyes of a painter and, in a measure, the mind of a sister of charity. She is consecrated to the service of childhood as if she belonged to all, and not to a few. Her conception of life and art is profound and touching. One perceives that she has a strong feeling that the place of the child in human life is of limitless importance, since he represents at one time both the present and the future, is the gage [sic] of immortality, the necessary medium for the continuation of the race, and its perpetuation.[14]

Wager-Smith agreed, adding that this "latent symbolism in Mary Cassatt's work is no trick of a fervent Gallic imagination. It underlies the numberless canvases of infants resting in their mothers' arms, of sturdy little bare bodies, standing vigorously upright to face the

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[14] Curtis Wager-Smith, "World-Famous Painter of Children and Their Mothers," *Public Ledger–Philadelphia* (3 May 1914), magazine section, 1.

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future, of women bending madonna-wise over their babies, or burying their faces in rosy, warm, fragrant flesh," concluding, "It is the final reason why her fame will endure."

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Not long after Cassatt completed the group of works including *Mother, Daughter, and Son* and *Mother in a Striped Head Scarf Embraced by Her Baby* [Fig. 167], she vacationed in the south of France with Louisine Havemeyer. The two women, who had grown more active in the effort to secure the vote for women after the death of Henry O. Havemeyer in 1907, began to rethink a Degas exhibition that Havemeyer had originally proposed to benefit suffrage. They decided to feature Cassatt's works as well as a selection of old master pictures, a thought that excited the artist, who was glad for the opportunity to promote her cause.[15] She was also concerned to maintain her own name as a colleague on the same level with Degas and as an original in her own right, remarking, "I am surprised at the coolness I show in thinking of exhibiting with Degas alone, but one thing Louie [Louisine] I can show, that I don't copy him in this age of copying. I cannot open a catalogue without seeing stealings from me."[16]

Before its opening the exhibition was highly publicized in a number of articles that sought to position Cassatt as an American whose greatest motivation was to improve the situation of women in her home country. As a subhead in Clara Savage's 1915 *New York Evening Post* article explained, "An American Woman; The Painter Is Known Here Only as a Name, But It is with the Interests of Her Countrywomen That She Is Concerned."[17] According to "a friend who has known Miss Cassatt for many years"—likely Louisine Havemeyer—the artist is "not a dreamer" but "an indefatigable worker" who nonetheless will not be found "forever enveloped in a blue painting-apron, her fingers paint-

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[15] For a good overview of the planning and reception of this exhibition, see Rebecca A. Rabinow, "The Suffrage Exhibition of 1915," in *Splendid Legacy*, 89-95.

[16] Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Grasse, March 12 [1915], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 322.

[17] Clara Savage, "Mary Cassatt as She Really Is," *Evening Post: New York* (3 April 1915), section 3, p. 2.

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besmirched." Rather, she is a respectable lady who patronizes "a certain modiste who made gowns for the royal family," for she "loves beautiful things, as most women do." Cassatt is then lauded as a "true American woman," in order to assuage the doubts of those who viewed her expatriate status with suspicion. "She raises green corn and tomatoes in her garden," her friend observed, before explaining, "She is intensely interested in America, and especially in American women. It is for them that she has consented to send pictures to this country for the exhibition." Cassatt's personal letters, however, suggest that the artist held a somewhat less generous view of American women, for she had written in 1913, "I believe that the vote will be given freely, when women want it, the trouble is that so many don't want it for themselves and never think of others. American women have been spoiled, treated and indulged like children they must wake up to their duties."[18]

On the whole, the *Loan Exhibition of Masterpieces by Old and Modern Painters*, held in April of 1915 at the Knoedler Galleries in New York, was a great success, as a fund-raiser, as a publicity stunt, and as an aesthetic experience, despite the refusal of certain conservative women—including some Cassatt family members—to attend. *The New York Times Magazine* gratified the artist's ego by declaring, "The paintings by Mary Cassatt have a range less wide and a less monumental style [than Degas's], but they are well worthy of their present companionship with the art of the great French master."[19] This critic continued in the American tradition of linking the artist's individuality with that of her subjects as well as with health and sanity, observing,

> She has entered the field which the greatest painters of the world have cultivated and she has won from it a new type, a fresh victory. Her mothers with their children are not like any that have been painted before. She has asked profound questions of their

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[18] Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Grasse, January 11 [1913], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 309.
[19] "Art at Home and Abroad: Exhibition for Suffrage Cause," *New York Times Magazine* (4 April 1915), 15.

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> individuality and has secured her answers. She has given to each baby in its softness of unrevealing flesh unwritten by experience, something of its latent character. One differs from another in a dozen subtleties of observed detail. But in each is a glorious vitality, a power to live and be that recalls the ideal of the ancient Greeks. Unconsciously, no doubt, but indisputably, she has created an ideal of health and soundness in modern art that expresses our deepest and most fruitful modern feeling.

The *Evening Post*, too, expressed high praise for Cassatt's works, while also claiming that "perhaps no woman has done more for the permanent enrichment of her country" through her activities as an advisor to American collectors.[20] Like the *Times* critic, the *Post*'s critic believed that Cassatt held her own next to Degas, for "she never tried to be a man, a fatal temptation to many a woman artist." Moreover, this "feminine quality of her art is part of its stanchness, of its self-respect, of its dignity and distinction." After singling out *Lady at the Tea Table* for "a certain elegance and a certain irony," this critic turned to the mother and child pictures on view. *The Quiet Time* [Fig. 103] was cited as "one of the gems of the collection," for, "There is a beautiful hand in this . . . and the baby and the woman's head are drawn with great delicacy. It shows very clearly what Miss Cassatt meant by saying that an artist should be classic and modern." A pastel completed in early 1914, *Baby Lying on His Mother's Lap Reaching to Hold a Scarf* [Fig. 170], was viewed as illustrating the artist's "gift of being able to compose with thoughtfulness pictures that in the end have the fascinating appearance of unconsciousness," as well as her "instinct" for representing "that other quality which we are pleased to think is characteristic of our countrymen, namely sanity." The *Post* critic explained that Cassatt had "bent herself to master significant form" (a concept outlined by Clive Bell in his popular formalist text of 1913, *Art*), especially in works such as *The Oval Mirror* [Fig. 145], in which "there is found not only a complete expression of form, but, as

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[20] "Art Notes," *Evening Post: New York* (10 April 1915), 7.

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an inseparable part of it, a freer, richer handling of color. There is the freshness of a Rubens cherub in this child's body." As for *Mother and Son in a Chaise Longue, Daughter Leaning Over Them*, in this pastel "we see her reaching out, striving for further conquests, for further breadth of form."

By describing Cassatt as continuing to strive in her work, this critic touched upon an essential character trait of this artist, who refused to allow Segard (or anyone else, for that matter) to write the "final chapter" of her story. "Perhaps, who knows? I may have still something to do in this world," she had written to Louisine Havemeyer in 1913. "I never thought I would have. I felt as if I were halfway over the border. I am so much better I think I may be still stronger, strong enough to paint once more. Perhaps I may astonish Segard yet, who rather finishes me, in his book on my Art. . . ."[21] Unfortunately, Cassatt's artistic activity came to an end around 1915 because the cataracts that had begun to trouble her did not respond to treatment. But in her final surge of creativity, the artist brought together a number of strands that had threaded throughout her career regarding issues of representation and self-representation.

Not long after having completed her "Modern Woman" mural commission, Cassatt had written to a friend, "After all give me France—women do not have to fight for recognition here, if they do serious work. I suppose it is Mrs. [Potter] Palmer's French blood which gives her her organizing powers and her determination that women should be *someone* and not *something*."[22] It was this very goal—to be *someone* and not *something*—toward which American feminists were striving around 1915, according to University of Chicago Divinity School professor George Burman Foster. "Very simply, but, as it seems to me, very profoundly," Foster wrote in *The Forum*, woman

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[21] Mary Cassatt to Louisine Havemeyer, Grasse, May 21 [1913], quoted in Hale, *Mary Cassatt*, 254.
[22] These lines are quoted by Sara Hallowell from a letter she received from Cassatt, in a letter Hallowell wrote to Bertha Palmer, Philadelphia, February 6 [1894], in *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 254.

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> is seeking to be a *self*—and to be *for* herself. In past ideals,—secular, servile, aesthetic, angelic, domestic,—she has not been a self, and she has not been for herself. She has been for roaming, or working, or beauty, or other worldliness, or the home, but not for herself. The new, wonderful, final step which woman must take is to enter upon the free unfolding of her personality as an end in itself. It is this most necessary thing—the arrival of a free selfhood, the free devotement of independent personality—that is the new big thing of the day.[23]

Nevertheless, he noted, this did not mean that women need reject the "ideal of wifehood and motherhood," but these would be transformed into "a large and loftier wifehood and motherhood than the former private and narrow domesticity aspired to. It is increasingly evident to-day that woman's motherly impulses have deepened and widened until she means to be not simply the mother of the individual, but of society, of the state, with its man-made institutions, aye, of art and science, of religion and morals."[24] Cassatt, by lending her art and even, to some degree, her self (through articles such as Savage's), to benefit suffrage through the 1915 Knoedler exhibition, underscored her lifelong commitment to a woman's right to her individuality and her self, as well as to society's larger institutions, such as art and "morals," in her imagery as well as her practice.

At the same time, as a woman who was not a mother but who chose maternity as a main theme for her art, who was often seen as specializing in a "feminine" theme but treating it with a "masculine" acuity of vision and technique, Cassatt demonstrated that women should be free to weave many strands of self together, even strands that might seem to many to be unnatural, incompatible, or even uncanny. Frank Weitenkampf spoke to this aspect of her imagery when he wrote in 1916, "Her matter-of-fact setting down of lines, her disregard of popular liking for prettiness, a certain stiffness in models and

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[23] George Burman Foster, "The Philosophy of Feminism," *Forum* 52 (July 1914), 17. Foster is best known for popularizing the writings of Nietzsche and Tolstoy.
[24] Ibid., 20.

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rendition, all this is counterbalanced by a flexibility of mind, a ready adaptability of point-of-view, before the deeper significance of those whom she portrays. Robustness and restraint, sensitiveness and sense, hold the balance remarkably."[25] In fact, he noted, picking up on an idea first suggested by Albert Wolff in 1881 and then again by Yveling Rambaud in 1890, "There may come almost the idea of a sort of dual personality in this art, a perception and intuition quite feminine, and a firm, decisive touch of the drawing-instrument that is almost, though not altogether, masculine."[26] Cassatt herself sought not to fix the idea of woman or of child into a certain aspect or ideal. Rather, she argued for multiplicity as well as balance, this artist who was perceived as simultaneously masculine and feminine, emotional and intellectual, primitive and knowing. Weitenkampf drew the reader's attention to the color print, *Mother's Kiss* [Fig. 97], noting that as the mother bends to kiss her infant, the child's "readiness has yet a certain reserve, and the sidelong glance at the beholder seems to indicate a feeling of resentment at the disclosure."[27] This drama enacted between self and (m)other was not merely a private, individual experience for Cassatt but the public matter of her art, and the right of each woman to possess a self, both public and private, motivated her creativity throughout her life. In the end, Cassatt's oeuvre and the responses to it have much to teach us about the coincidence of the birth of psychoanalyis and the emergence of modern formalism at the beginning of the twentieth century and the resulting implications regarding "what is proper(ty)"[28] for women and for women artists.

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[25] Frank Weitenkamp, "The Dry-Points of Mary Cassatt," *Print Collector's Quarterly* 6 (1916), 400, 402. Weitenkamp was the Chief of the Prints Division of the New York Public Library.
[26] Ibid., 402.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, 33.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

All illustrations are by Mary Cassatt unless otherwise noted. Works by Cassatt are identified by Breeskin catalogue raisonné number, employing the following abbreviations:

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