

'Curiouser and Curiouser': John Singer Sargent's
Cosmopolitan Aesthetics

2 Volumes

Volume I of II

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Abstract

In the introduction to her *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories* (1927), Vernon Lee recounts her childhood wonderings in Italy with a young John Singer Sargent, remarking: ‘...mysterious, uncanny, a wizard, serpent, sphinx; strange, weird, curious. Such, at all events, were the adjectives, the comparisons, with which we capped each other, my friend John and I...’¹ Curious is, indeed, a curious term. This word and its associates - bizarre, strange, and exotic - appear habitually in the literature surrounding Sargent, including in critical reviews and personal letters. In the wider scope of the late nineteenth century, the term has an undeniable Aesthetic connotation, being used widely by Pater and Lee herself, most notably in Pater’s discussion of the *Mona Lisa* from his Leonardo essay of 1869. A previously unexplored letter from Sargent to Lee from 20 July 1881 includes a fascinating and little discussed reference to Pater, with Sargent stating, ‘Tell me what you think of Pater’s essays, I like one or two of them very much’² which, in combination with a letter from Lee to her mother in June of the same year, stating that, ‘he [Sargent] goes in for art for art’s sake’³ implies a tantalizing thread of association. Did Sargent consider himself a member of the Aesthetic cult? If so, is it possible to read the often eccentric and enigmatic body of works produced in his early career, between 1878 and 1886, as being influenced by and acting as a response to Aesthetic texts? The aim of this dissertation is ultimately to answer with a resounding ‘yes’ by examining closely Sargent’s earliest works in order to assert that they were created, and performed in participation with many of the dialogues surrounding beauty and sensation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

¹ Vernon Lee, *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories*, (London: Jay Lane, 1927), xxx-xxxi. I would like to thank Catherine Maxwell for bringing this text to my attention.

² Richard Ormond, “John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee,” *The Colby Quarterly*, v. 9, no. 3 (September 1970), 17.

³ Irene Cooper Willis, *Vernon Lee’s Letters*, (London: Privately Printed, 1937), 63.

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Author's Declaration

Some of the material presented within this thesis has previously been published in the following papers:

1. Liz Renes, "The 'Curiosity' of John Singer Sargent: An Exploration of Nineteenth Century Masculine Dualities", *Harts & Minds: The Journal of the Humanities and Arts*, v. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2013).
2. Liz Renes, "Vernon Lee's *Beauty and Sanity* and 1895: Color and Cultural Response", *Text in Context: A Graduate Student Journal*, v. 1, no. 2, Sex in Context (Spring/Summer 2014).

In addition, the following paper has been submitted for consideration and will appear in print next year:

Liz Renes, "The Mystery of White Things': Aestheticism, Obsession and Female Corporeal Whiteness", proceedings from the conference *Decadence and the Senses*, Goldsmith's, University of London, April 10-11, 2014. Printed in conjunction with Legenda Press and MHRA.

Except where stated, all of the work contained within this thesis represents the original contribution of the author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Introduction

Is Mr. Sargent in very fact an American painter? The *proper* answer to such a question is doubtless that we shall be well advised to claim him Born in Europe, he has spent his life in Europe, but none the less the burden of proof would rest with those who should undertake to show that he is European. Moreover, he has even on the face of it this great symptom of an American origin, that in the line of his art he might easily be mistaken for a Frenchman.

Henry James, *Harper's Weekly* (1887)¹

Henry James, that ever-astute observer of human complexity, perceptively addressed the intricate issue of John Singer Sargent's visual identity and characterised it in his own day as cross-cultural. In Sargent's professional practice and everyday life this was undoubtedly true. Although the extent of his cosmopolitanism will become evident in due course, in Sargent's early career between 1878 and 1886 there is another 'ism' which rears its head, one that has historically rarely been considered in relation to this artist - that of Aestheticism.

Take, for example, a trio of little discussed letters – one written by Sargent to his childhood friend, Vernon Lee (nee Violet Paget) and two written by Lee to her mother - from 1881 and 1884 respectively. Let us begin by examining the first two. Sargent's letter, printed in an article by Richard Ormond for the *Colby Quarterly* in 1970, has to date never been addressed in the academic field in the forty years since its appearance. Dated June 20th, 1881 it begins as many Victorian letters do with mundane social small talk - Sargent asks after their mutual friend Mary Robinson, and acknowledges receipt of Lee's manuscript of *Belcaro* – and yet it ends on an intriguing and evocative final note:

She [Mary Robinson] was going on a Thursday with a lady friend and I promised to be at the station which I did not reach in time owing to a miscalculation of distance & cabhorse power ... Your book *Belcaro* has at last arrived. I have been expecting it for weeks and it only came yesterday. I am

¹ Henry James, "John S. Sargent", *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 75, no. 449 (October 1887): 683.

going to read it at once. Tell me what you think of Pater's essays. I like one or two of them very much.²

Perhaps this statement might not have meant very much in the context of the letter; it is added in a short sentence at the end and Sargent does not comment upon it any further. However, Vernon Lee had written to her mother a month previous to this discussing Sargent, describing him with yet another brief but potentially revealing statement:

John is extremely serious, a great maker of theories; he goes in for art for art's own sake, says the subject of the picture is something not always in the way, etc. He is quite emancipated from all religious ideas. He speaks English without an accent but has to help himself out with French words.³

Here we have two extremely reliable and established sources linking Sargent, within the same month of 1881, not only to Walter Pater, the Oxford essayist and father of the British Aesthetic Movement, but to 'art for art's sake,' which is the English equivalent of a French slogan, 'l'art pour l'art', a phrase insisting on the 'for its own sake' values of art without an aim towards any overarching moral, social or educational function. It is loosely accredited to Théophile Gautier from the 1830s, famous for statements such as 'Nothing is really beautiful but that which cannot be made use of; everything that is useful is ugly' in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* of 1835.⁴

The phrase was eventually brought over and popularised in Britain as the motto for their own Aesthetic Movement, being first adopted by A.C. Swinburne in his essay on William Blake in 1868, and later reiterated by Walter Pater in his

² See Appendix B, Figure 1 for full transcript. John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee, undated (probably 1881), John Singer Sargent Catalogue Raisonné Archives. Reproduced in part in Richard Ormond, "John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee", *The Colby Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (September 1970): 17. I would like to thank Elaine Kilmurray for locating this letter for me in the Ormond private archives.

³ Irene Cooper Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters* (London: Privately Printed, 1937), 63. See Appendix B, Figure 2.

⁴ Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, trans. I.G. Burnham (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Sons, 1897), lvi.

Westminster Review article ‘The Poems of William Morris’ the same year.⁵ It is certain that Lee, being well versed in aesthetic vocabulary at this point, a fact I will discuss in a later chapter, would have used the phrase with certain knowledge of its larger implications. Her words have weight in and of themselves, but when coupled with Sargent’s expressed interest in Pater around the same period, they establish a solid foundation from which I intend to read Sargent’s works in this early period – as those indicative of his participation in what I call a ‘cosmopolitan Aesthetic’ movement, one which brought together interests in ‘for its own sake’ principles across multiple national boundaries.

That ‘art for art’s sake’ as a phrase in itself had a dual, international basis of usage establishes at least on a basic level this idea that Aestheticism was a larger, more sweeping movement than at first considered. It implies that French and British authors were at least interested in a similar notion of the extraction of art from didactic purpose. The fact that Sargent is writing this letter from Paris, asking about a British Aesthetic figure also contributes in some way to the multinational plot surrounding him as an artist. Pater’s following in France was quite small and select during this period and would not gain wider momentum until the 1890s, so it seems perhaps unlikely that he picked up on Pater during his studio training.⁶ However, it is possible that he was exposed to Gautier and the French origins of ‘l’art pour l’art’, and he may have reached out to Lee to discuss or seek advice on the British interpretation of the movement. Vernon Lee was an accomplished Pater admirer by this point, having followed his works since the initial publication of *The Renaissance* in 1873. Her credentials in this respect will be explored further in Chapter Two, but the consensus is that bringing up Pater with Lee would not have been out of the ordinary, and indeed would have been a logical discussion for someone with her strong Aesthetic leanings.

⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Walter Pater and Aesthetic Painting”, in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 38.

⁶ See Emily Eells, “Influence Occulte: The Reception of Pater’s Works in France before 1922”, in *The Reception of Walter Pater in Europe*, ed. Stephen Bann (London: Theommes Cotinum, 2004,) 87.

In keeping with this thread of thought, it is also probable that when Sargent states he was reading 'Pater's essays' in his 1881 letter that he was referring to *The Renaissance* itself. Sargent specifies 'essays' in the multiple, so it would make sense if he were referring to *The Renaissance* as it is a published collection of writings. Pater did have some writings published before this point, including essays published in *Macmillan's Magazine* and the *Fortnightly Review* in the late 1870s on various topics ranging from Wordsworth, Romanticism, Shakespeare and Greek sculpture, and it is possible Sargent may be referring to these. It was *The Renaissance*, however, which was the most well known for its influence on budding aesthetes, including many in Sargent's to-be-discussed social and artistic circles. This work caused quite an uproar upon its initial publication, for the Preface contained the words that would stir many a beauty-loving follower to action. As Jeffrey Wallen perceptively summarises:

In the first sentence of the "Preface" ... Pater rejects Ruskin's attempts to "define beauty in the abstract, to express it in the most general terms, to find some universal formula for it," and a few sentences later he ironically quotes Arnold's dictum "to see the object as in itself it really is" in order to disparage it with his own twist: "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly." Against these concerns with properly defining and knowing the artwork, Pater shifts his attention to the impressions and pleasures of the critic.⁷

Sargent was certainly intrigued by these concepts of the 'impressions and pleasures of the critic' as evidenced by two additionally provocative descriptions from Vernon Lee regarding Sargent during these early years in Paris – words which, again, would further complicate the international aesthetic pot in which he slowly simmered. Writing her reminiscences for Evan Charteris's Sargent biography after the occasion of Sargent's death in 1925, she again mentions this year of 1881:

When I met him, during his Paris years, in 1881, he described himself as an Impressionist and an 'intransigent' entirely given up to the faithful

⁷ Jeffrey Wallen, "Alive in the Grave: Walter Pater's Renaissance", *ELH* 66, no. 4, *The Nineteenth-Century* (Winter 1999): 1034.

reproduction of 'les valeurs.' Indeed for years after that, and maybe to the end of his days, I feel certain that his conscious endeavour, his self formulated program, was to paint whatever he saw with absolute and researchful fidelity, never avoiding ugliness nor seeking after beauty [*sic*].⁸

These terms again are distinctly French; 'intransigent', as Stephen Eiseman has clearly mapped out, was a term used to describe the *Société anonyme des artistes de peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.* before their formal adoption of the 'Impressionist' sobriquet in 1877.⁹ In addition, and turning finally to the third letter in my aforementioned trio, is the fact that some three years later Lee would write a brief postcard to her mother describing a summer's afternoon in London in June of 1884. She sets the scene thus: in the back garden of the home of the Pre-Raphaelite model, muse and painter Maria Spartali Stillman, Lee lounges on the grass with Sargent, Mary Robinson and Evelyn Pickering (later wife of the English Aesthetic designer William de Morgan) running passionately through 'discussions, weird, curious, cigarettes, bonbons, Baudelaire.'¹⁰

Thus in a brief three year period, at the height of what can be termed his early career, Sargent is reading Walter Pater, discussing Baudelaire, and calling himself an Impressionistic 'intransigent' while surrounding himself with a bevy of cosmopolitan Aesthetic figures who were major players in the dialogue on art and aesthetics in Britain and France. And the links extend even to an older generation of Aestheticism; Stillman and Pickering were second-generation proponents of Pre-Raphaelitism with ties to William Morris, while the next month the record will show that Sargent and Lee attended a garden party with the likes of Pater, Henry James, Maria Stillman and Lady Colin Campbell, the infamous subject of a now destroyed portrait by Whistler, the controversial painter who was the leader of a mid century group of Aesthetic cosmopolitan painters. The international

⁸ Vernon Lee, "J. S. S.: In Memoriam," in Evan Charteris, *John Sargent* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 251.

⁹ See Stephen F. Eisenman, "Intransigent Artist or How the Impressionists Got Their Name," in Charles S. Moffett, ed. *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886* (Phaidon: Oxford, 1986), 51-59.

¹⁰ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 144. See Appendix B, Figure 3.

implications of such a *déjeuner sur l'herbe* are obvious in their transparency, but are also significant for what such implications represent for us as art historians. It is not possible to extract the artist from his surroundings or his culture, and neither *should* such be done. If Sargent was indeed placing himself in this kind of circle, and having these kinds of discussions, then that *must* have had a powerful effect on the production of his art.

However, these letters not only present a contradictory view of Sargent and his Aesthetic and nationalistic alignments during this period, they also indicate that Aestheticism itself was not a movement split between nationalistic factions, as it has been in much of the art-historical scholarship for the last hundred years. Mentions of Aestheticism typically evoke associations with the British school, while Impressionism evokes that of the French. Sargent's flux between discussing Baudelaire with British Aesthetes in London, and Pater's use of the word 'impression' while France had a movement titled 'Impressionism' indicates wholeheartedly that Aestheticism – or an art movement dedicated to the pursuit of beauty and for its own sake pleasure - did not see itself as being so severely limited. What my research here will attest to is the view that the drive towards pure aesthetics was actually more closely related between these countries than previously thought, existing more as a uniquely cosmopolitan movement that shared principles across nationalistic boundaries. In this respect, I am not only arguing for a different interpretation of the existing record, but in order to do this, I will also add additional new data to it in order to explain my concerns. Sargent's work can be placed squarely in the centre of just such a movement, representing the issues shared on both sides. Not only is it possible to dissolve the peripheries of these movements, but my research will also negate what I have seen as a traditional approach to Sargent that often looks to identify or limit him within one specific national school or identity, an issue appearing even during his own time.

To indicate an example of such a limitation is to jump forward briefly in time to some forty years after Sargent's youthful 1880s, to a public event that in contrast would create a complex statement about Sargent and his 'national identity'. In 1926, the year after Sargent's death, King Edward and Queen Mary would preside

over the opening of the Sargent Galleries at the Tate, documented by Sir John Lavery in *The Opening of the Modern Foreign and Sargent Galleries at the Tate Gallery, 26 June 1926* (Fig. 1). Such an act firmly proclaimed Sargent's status as a heavyweight in the timeline of British art, setting him adjacent to rooms filled with national treasures by Turner and Constable.

But Sargent was not British, nor had he ever in his lifetime attempted to claim himself as such. His early career will show that he had a controversial and difficult relationship with Britain, a nation which often highly criticised his earliest works, enough so that at one point Sargent claimed they thought him too 'beastly French'.¹¹ This may explain why throughout his life he politely declined any effort made to be claimed for Victoria's Empire, nor to receive recognition for his role in British art outside of an acceptance to the Royal Academy. He turned down an offer of knighthood from Edward VII in 1907 and the presidency of the Royal Academy in 1918.¹² When jokingly asked by Whistler - in rhyme no less - if he would give up his American citizenship in 1894 when he became an R.A.:

Tell me one thing only – did you,

In the face of great temptation,

Chuck up the t'other nation

To become an En- glish – man ! ? [sic]¹³

¹¹ Sargent to Edwin Russell, 10 September, 1885. London, Tate Gallery Archives, Acquisition file for *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. See Appendix B, Figure 4.

¹² For Sargent's reply to the letter from the then Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in regards to his offer of knighthood, see Charles Merrill Mount, *John Singer Sargent: A Biography* (New York: Norton & Company, 1955), 239. For Sargent's father's opinion about his children's American-ness, which may have influenced Sargent's choice to remain so, see Richard Ormond, "The Letters of Fitzwilliam Sargent: The Youth of John Singer Sargent", *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1974): 17.

¹³ James McNeill Whistler to John Singer Sargent, 20 January 1894, *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler*, Record No. 02669, University of Glasgow. Accessed 11 November 2013. <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/> See Appendix B, Figure 5.

Sargent responded with typical succinctness: 'As for the question of nationality, I have not been invited to retouch it and I keep my twang. If you should hear anything to the contrary, please state that there was no transaction and that I am an American.'¹⁴

It is rather strange then that we as art historians have come to label Sargent as one nationalistic 'type' of painter or another given this fractured nature of the historical record. Looking merely at examples from before 1886, we have Vernon Lee describing him as 'a sort of completely accentless mongrel' with 'faubourg' or suburban manners due to his time spent in the multiculturalism of Paris.¹⁵ Then there is W. Graham Robertson, who remarks on Sargent in his 1931 autobiography *Time Was* that after he met Sargent and Henry James in 1884, he found them 'plus Anglais que les Anglais.'¹⁶ Sargent remarks that he is American, in the above letter to Whistler, thus bringing the count of nationality up to three. Sargent's own penchant for never 'staying put' complicates the view even more; he lived in Paris until 1887, and then spent the remainder of his life in London and simultaneously Boston after 1890 (due to the Boston Public Library commission), never stopping long for breath as he was continuously travelling all over the continent and even to parts of Africa.

In his early career he also exhibited in a wide variety of venues in all three countries - Britain, France and the United States – as seen in a chart I have compiled of his exhibition choices during this period in Appendix A. This chart also shows that such venues were not limited to conservative or mainly academic spaces, but also included a healthy number of major and minor avant-garde exhibitions, further obscuring any ease at a clear identification.¹⁷ His

¹⁴ Letter from John Singer Sargent to James McNeill Whistler, 22 January 1894. *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler* (Online Edition), Record no. 05387, University of Glasgow. Accessed 11 November 2013. <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/> See Appendix B, Figure 6.

¹⁵ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 61. See Appendix B, Figure 7.

¹⁶ W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was: The Reminiscences of W. Graham Robertson* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1931), 240.

¹⁷ See Appendix A for a chart showing his exhibition locations during this period. This will be discussed in further depth in the next chapter.

contemporary criticism, and even potentially the ensuing art-historical discussions that drew from such material, were unable to come to terms with this new 'type' of cosmopolitan artist Sargent represented, and thus chose one nation or another in order to claim him or simplify wider understanding of his art. My aim here is to set the record straight by indicating the starting point at which this split of categorisation began and ultimately progressed to our present day. In addition, this contemporary evidence also makes frequent discussion and use of highly aesthetic language and descriptions, flowing together ideas of artistic national traits with ideas on aesthetics, impressions and beauty, cementing my view of his involvement in this 'cosmopolitan Aestheticism'. Work must be done to reclaim Sargent's lost Aesthetic roots, or to indicate that he even *had* such roots, and the work throughout this dissertation will strive to uncover this.

Data, Method and Analysis

My main source material for initiating this tracing of the problematic nature of Sargent's intersections between cosmopolitanism and Aestheticism will come from his early critical reviews. This was a method of analysis born ultimately out of necessity. Sargent left little personal documentation as to his thoughts on specific movements or nationalities, in the media or even in private. Compound this with his frequent carelessness with his own correspondence, and his insistence after his death that his sisters burn much of his personal papers, and the existing record remains somewhat sparse. This may have been done in part to maintain his public image long after he could control it, but it had the unfortunate result of creating a historical Sargent that appears, in personal opinion, one-sided.

In order to gain a greater understanding, I was forced to look outward, and while the critical reviews from this period provided one source of information, my discovery and increasing interest in the documents left by those in his circle became an additional focus, as I began to find parallels in descriptive language between the two sets of material. Such private documents create a balance against the public media bias, but they also present a view of Sargent that was not

determined by the selective material he left behind. By perusing these documents, which I will discuss in Chapter Two, a few main points of profound intersection then became clear. Internationalism was vital, but so too were aesthetics, beauty and the avant-garde – presence amongst Pre-Raphaelites discussing Baudelaire expresses this acutely – creating links between Aesthetic drives and cosmopolitan concerns that intertwine irrevocably with Sargent at the centre. Analysis of these elements *together* gives a deeper understanding of Sargent’s seemingly fractured identity than previously thought, necessitating a method of wholeness as opposed to disparity.

This approach is also important in that it will bring to light a large body of research which to date has not been explored. This dissertation is the first place that Lee’s discussions with Sargent on Baudelaire have ever come to light, amongst other more revelatory letters and publications, including Sargent’s social interactions with Walter Pater. Without extant analysis or understanding of such material, even some one hundred years after his death we still struggle as an academic community to make sense of Sargent’s identity, and the argument always seems to fall within the terms of nation and location. It rarely, if ever, engages amidst broader concepts of artistic relationships, movements or the intersections between the arts.

As in Sargent’s case, when historically limiting an artist’s identity or ‘brand’ to one of cosmopolitan, his art becomes subsumed and relegated to his participation in national art characteristics, and less as one reflective of an individual with subjective drives open to multiple areas of influence. This may explain, for example, why over the course of writing this dissertation, I have found Sargent categorised amidst British, American and French collections, and the trend seems to lean towards the tendency that Sargent ‘appropriates’ the nationality of whatever country that specific library is in. The problem here is that our language and our hallmarks do not adequately embrace artists like Sargent, Lee, and James who were working spherically through multiple sources of inspiration. Thus I have had to define a new type of movement for the purposes of this dissertation - my

previously mentioned 'cosmopolitan Aestheticism' - in order to encompass more accurately what Sargent was attempting to do in his early career.

This type of fracture does give a wider hint towards how such international artists were perceived in their own time. The critical discomfort with understanding Sargent and its constant use of certain labels, which I critique in Chapter One, introduces a larger and increasingly pressing need in the contemporary art community to requisition artists, especially 'good' ones, in support of arguments on the superiority of certain nation-hoods. Petra Rau's statement that 'foreigners were often "the victims of [a] modernity" that promises pluralist existence only so long as it remains within a national framework' seems remarkably true here.¹⁸ Due to post-Civil War prosperity, for example, the United States sent art students in droves to Paris to learn techniques to bring home. Henry James, in continuing his statement from the start of this chapter, sums this up with the claim that:

It sounds like a paradox, but it is a very simple truth, that when today we look for "American art" we find it mainly in Paris. When we find it out of Paris, we at least find a great deal of Paris in it.¹⁹

However, regardless of international training, such students were always assumed to return and retain their 'American-ness' even in the midst of French 'taint' or 'influence', a concern also to be seen in some of Sargent's critical reviews. Artists like Whistler who went and never came back suffered from an eternal plight of exclusion and outsider status; Sargent was no exception. They found acceptance only within the creation of their own unique cosmopolitan group, their careers succeeding, as in Sargent's case, only when their national traits were tempered to meet the demands of their host-nation, as again stated by Rau:

¹⁸ Petra Rau, "The Trouble with Cosmopolitans: Ford and Forster between Nation and Internationalism", in Grace Brockington, ed. *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 179-80.

¹⁹ James, "John S. Sargent", 683.

On the one hand, they were signifiers of the exotic and of the international artistic avant-garde, and therefore of a desirable otherness which was often commercially marketable and consumable... In order to be “acceptable” (neither risible nor “degenerate”), foreignness and its commercially viable representations had to steer clear of un-English features...Significations of otherness were only tolerable and marketable when they did not challenge the supremacy of Englishness, or indeed did not make visible the historical heterogeneity of Englishness (and Britishness) following successive waves of immigration and assimilation.²⁰

That Sargent’s entry into the Parisian studio of the French portraitist Carolus-Duran in 1874 came at a time when it was ‘half full of Americans, English, and other aliens...’ seems to confirm this point.²¹ Though internationalism was encouraged, they were still outsiders, misfits, ‘alien’ and ‘foreign’. The creation of a cosmopolitan community was essential, and such a community needed a leader. Whistler, being one of the earliest of this genre, became the first; Sargent, as I will assert in this dissertation, became the second. However, the creation of such an alliance was not only necessitated by their social exclusion, but also by their more progressive views regarding art, beauty and aesthetics, hence internationalism and Aestheticism’s uniquely significant intersection.

National Characteristics

Sargent moved to study in Paris at a time when it was popular for British, American and even some German and Italian art students to travel to Paris for artistic tutelage, so being out of one’s home country to study art in itself wasn’t necessarily subversive. However, this dissertation will also show that Sargent was carving out unique associations with each representative national identity from America, Britain and France and was using those elements to inspire and evolve his art. Unlike his contemporary Kenyon Cox, who found the stimulus of Paris to be of

²⁰ Rau, “The Trouble with Cosmopolitans”, 179.

²¹ H. Arthur Kennedy, “In the Studio of Carolus-Duran”, *The Contemporary Review* 53, January –June 1888, 704.

an 'abnormal excitement' which left him feeling 'tired out', 'queerly and stupid'²², Sargent blossomed under the myriad of influences, resulting in his practically meteoric success.

A key goal of my exploration is then to insist not only upon his cosmopolitanism and relationship to Aesthetic figures and movements, but also to subtract out and define what elements of 'Britishness' and 'Frenchness' were being used simultaneously within his works – a type of Sargentian methodical roadmap. His British side, it will be seen, drew inspiration from Pater and the British aesthetes, but also found vision in the jewelled 'for its own sake' productions of the Pre-Raphaelites, and later Beardsley, Wilde and Decadence. Close analysis of many of Sargent's early paintings with representative works from some of these figures will indicate a striking connection of visible influence, showing that Sargent was clearly aligning himself with the theories and principles of British Aestheticism and their approaches to non-didactic art.

But the British material is only one-third of the source material relevant to Sargent in this multinational list. That he was training in Paris for the majority of this early period is also a significant point of interest and therefore his French artistic influences cannot be ruled out. It has been seen he was reading and discussing Baudelaire in 1884, and as previously mentioned was still claiming in 1886-87 that his art was considered too 'beastly French'.²³ There is little scholarly discussion regarding his relationship with French art after the British success of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (Fig. 2) in 1886, and this reflects potentially on the thought that his relationship with that country was severed or lessened after his wider acceptance into British artistic circles. My research will prove otherwise, and will show that even in this early period and beyond, French art would act as a seminal trait in Sargent's works even until his death in 1925, at least inasmuch as French art here can be relabelled as 'Impressionism.'

²² Kenyon Cox, *An American Art Student in Paris* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1986), 83-84.

²³ Sargent to Edwin Russell, 10 September 1885. See Appendix B, Figure 4.

In terms of this confluence of Impressionism, French influence, and the critical praise of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, I would like to take a brief moment aside here to explain why I have chosen this painting and 1886 as the end point for the exploration of this dissertation. In terms of logic, this work marks the separation point between an early experimental phase – when Sargent chose what to paint and what to exhibit – before his portraiture career took over and his clients and reputation dictated his public image. In the myriad of styles and –isms that are reflected in these early works - Impressionism, Hispanism and Exoticism, Whistlerianism, Aestheticism, and British Romantic Portraiture, many of which I will explore in this dissertation - we can see a youthful exploration of artistic expression, a priming point in Sargent’s development of his own visual identity, and an underrepresented and thus highly fertile ground to explore.

But what is also significant is that these dates coincide with Sargent’s links to Impressionism and its role in my wider cosmopolitan Aesthetic Movement. The start date of 1878 was chosen above 1874, when he first enrolled into Carolus-Duran’s studio in Paris, because it was not until 1878 that he began to formally exhibit publicly and thus produce work that generated published critical reviews. What is also significant is that this date period of 1878 to 1886 also coincides exactly with the dates of the major Impressionist group exhibitions. Sargent attended one of the earlier ones at Durand-Ruel’s with Paul Helleu in April 1876, where he first viewed Monet and then subsequently met the artist when he entered the gallery (and notably, it was *Sargent* who asked him to dinner).²⁴ They would paint together in Giverny some nine years later, reflected in Sargent’s 1885 work in the Tate, *Claude Monet Painting at the Edge of a Wood* (Fig. 3) but also in the large number of Sargent’s Impressionistic works from the last half of the 1880s; see for example, *A Morning Walk* (Fig. 4) of 1888, which bears a strong resemblance to Monet’s 1875 *Woman with a Parasol* (Fig. 5). These works indicate solid evidence of Sargent’s relationship with the French art world well after his supposed rejection from Paris due to the scandalous exhibition of *Madame X* (Fig. 6) in 1884,

²⁴ Monet states this as their first meeting in discussion with Charteris in 1926. See Charteris, *John Sargent*, 130.

contradicting the view that the French Impressionist influence on Sargent was merely a short-lived phase.²⁵

It will be seen, however, that in the years leading up to 1884, many of the critical reviews repeatedly stress his status as a member of the French Impressionist camp, often calling him squarely an 'Impressionist'. Yet regardless of this public labelling, his existence within this realm held tightly to Petra Rau's observation that such cosmopolitans were often 'victims of modernity.' He was never fully accepted by the Impressionists, though he often painted with Monet and occasionally purchased major and minor Impressionist art, including the full size study for Manet's *Le Balcon* (Fig. 7), recently acquired for the nation and currently in the Ashmolean, and Manet's smaller watercolour *Irises* (Fig. 8). In 1891, Pissarro wrote to his son of Sargent: 'As for his painting, that, of course, we can't approve of; he is not an enthusiast [of Impressionism]'²⁶ while Monet remarked to Charteris in 1926 that Sargent 'was not an Impressionist, in the sense of how we used the word, he was too much under the influence of Carolus-Duran.'²⁷ Such statements yet again add another facet of complexity to our understanding of Sargent's artistic identity,

²⁵ See Stanley Olsen's *Sargent At Broadway: The Impressionist Years*, which by its very title splits Sargent's Impressionistic influence into a short space of time. See also Kenneth McConkey, who calls this period a 'retrenching' for Sargent's Impressionism while Patrick McCaughey considers it 'a brief flirtation with Impressionism.' See Kenneth McConkey, "Impressionism in Britain", in Kenneth McConkey, ed. *Impressionism in Britain*, 11-86 (Milan: Amilcare Pizzi SpA, 1995) and Patrick McCaughey, "Native and Nomad: Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent", *Daedalus* 116, no. 1, Philanthropy, Patronage, Politics (Winter 1987): 149.

²⁶ Pissarro writes to his son regarding the latter's recent meeting with Sargent: 'What you say about Sargent doesn't surprise me; Monet had told me that he is very kind. As for his painting, that, of course, we can't approve of; he is not an enthusiast but rather an adroit performer...'. See Appendix B, Figure 8.

²⁷ 'Il n'était pas un Impressioniste, au sens où nous employons ce mot, il était trop sous l'influence de Carolus-Duran.' Charteris, *John Sargent*, 129-130. Monet also stated to Charteris in this 1926 interview: 'L'Impressionisme ce n'est que la sensation immédiate. Tous les grands peintres étaient plus ou moins impressionistes. C'est surtout un question d'instinct. Tout cela est plus simple que ne le croit Sargent.' 'Impressionism is only the immediate sensation. All of the great painters are more or less impressionists. It is mainly a question of instinct. This is simpler than that which Sargent believed.' All translations here are my own. For the entire exchange see Charteris, *John Sargent*, 122-131.

one seemingly fluid in its constant cycle of attribution, acceptance or rejection by varying national movements.

This leaves a final nationality in question - that of Sargent's 'American-ness', and how these traits work in relation to the other two. The American source material will be less represented in this dissertation in comparison to that from France and Britain; this was primarily a selective choice in order to create a more focused argument, but I also chose to do this because the American artistic identity I found mentioned in these reviews seemed uncertain, and in many ways drew frequently from the European elements I have previously defined - the reasons for this I will discuss this momentarily. What I also discovered, and which contributed to this decision, was that in the criticism I did review, though Sargent was often called American during this period, it was an adjective more often used to describe specific traits as opposed to referring to a broader, overall style.

This may be due in part to the fact that American art was still at a nascent point in the late 1870s, and had yet to establish itself as wholly independent of its European counterparts.²⁸ Unable to use the word 'American' to describe a defined style, American publications like *The New York Times* frequently broke down Sargent's art into separate factions, ascribing each element to a country; it is unsurprising then that his 'sterling honesty' and his 'courage and inventiveness' are decidedly American, while his bravura technique, 'trickiness' and 'cleverness' are decidedly French.²⁹ Such separations seem indicative of an early attempt to mete out the traits they wished to claim for their own art movement and separate them from their European counterparts, in the sense that they were trying to establish

²⁸ See H. Barbara Weinberg, "Late-Nineteenth-Century American Painting: Cosmopolitan Concerns and Critical Controversies", *Archives of American Art Journal* 23, no. 4 (1983): 19-26; Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Reconsidered Once Again", *Archives of American Art Journal* 23, no. 4 (1983): 8-18; Madeleine Fidell Beaufort and Jeanne K. Welcher, "Some Views of American Art Buying in New York in the 1870s and 1880s", *Oxford Art Journal* 5, no. 1 (1982): 48-55; Lois Marie Fink, "Innovation of Tradition in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Art", *American Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (November 1978): 63-71.

²⁹"Sargent's *El Jaleo* at the Schaus Gallery", *The New York Times*, October 13, 1882, 5; "The Art Works in Paris", *The New York Times*, September 29, 1878, 3. I will be discussing these in more depth in the next chapter.

what they wanted American art to be and not be. This was most likely an effort to fend off what one article claimed was the fact that the English ‘stigmatized American art as being simply a copy of the French’.³⁰ If honesty, for example, was American and trickiness was French, then any art that was honest could thus be claimed to be American, as the logic follows.

That Sargent exhibited with the first wave of artists at the recently established Society of American Artists in 1878 shows, at least on some level, that he wished to align himself with his American compatriots, even though he was born in Italy and was technically only American by parentage. His American-ness seems to be a point of lineage or homage at this early stage, as something appropriated from the studio and the Americanised culture of Paris at the time. When he later tells Whistler that he is American, he seems more likely to be meaning it as a reference to lineage and not stylistically. Therefore, in the crux of this dissertation, most discussions of the American contingency will act mainly as a foil to the French and British discussions, whose concepts seem to be more fully formed in the historical literature under discussion here.

French, British, American – my research will map out how these terms were used when applied to Sargent, and in their analysis I will also ascertain a more direct definition of how the late nineteenth-century processed and reacted to ‘cosmopolitanism’ in art. However, as the critics struggled to place Sargent in a defined set of national characteristics, they often turned to describing the more aesthetic and beauty-based qualities of his art, leading my research into a direct line to Aestheticism, the ‘impression’ and non-didactic art.

Reception and Criticism

Nineteenth century cosmopolitanism, Aestheticism, and Impressionism in France, Britain, and the United States – these subjects all provide a wealth of topical material that has been discussed in the art historical atmosphere. But in terms of Sargent and how these issues have been addressed in the twentieth and twenty

³⁰ “The Art Works in Paris”.

first centuries, a perusal of the academic literature appears on some levels just as fractured as the criticism's attempts at their own definitions. Therefore, in terms of the Sargent scholarship and how my research fits into this, it is important to follow a somewhat linear timeline, as it will create a contrast to the wider reaching approach I will take with my analysis of his art and criticism in the following chapters. In this respect, this dissertation will both complement and react against how Sargent has been perceived in the nearly one hundred years following his death, situating my work as both novel and integral to the Sargent intellectual canon.

The years after Sargent's death in 1925 saw his works, and certainly his style of art, fall out of favour as more avant-garde modes of expression took precedence. Roger Fry scathingly dismissed him in his 1926 critique of the posthumous retrospectives held in Britain and America, calling him a 'vulgarisation' and a 'feeble echo' of the works of Manet and the Impressionists while simultaneously questioning the public's labelling of him as an 'artist' on the same level as Sickert and Steer.³¹ 'We must look at these pictures not as works of art with a value in and for themselves, but as illustrations or reports about other things [done without] esthetic [sic] considerations.'³² Such a view may have resulted in the dearth of dialogue regarding Sargent until the 1970s, when his great-nephew Richard Ormond initiated a great revival Sargent studies through his release of family archival materials, culminating in the serial publication of Sargent's catalogue raisonné beginning in the late 1990s and continuing to the recent publication of volume eight in the present year.

Ormond's revival of Sargent is integral to the rise in Sargent publications appearing in the last twenty years and to the increase in worldwide exhibitions covering everything from Sargent's images of Venice, to his late in life watercolours and everything in between. What is striking, however, is that there is still little to no

³¹ Roger Fry, "J.S. Sargent as Seen at the Royal Academy Exhibition of his works, 1926, and in the National Gallery", in *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), 125-126.

³² *Ibid.*, 128-129.

in depth discussion regarding his relationship to Aestheticism, though cosmopolitanism has appeared with some frequency, with *Madame X* acting as the frontispiece for the catalogue to The National Gallery's 2006 *Americans in Paris* exhibition (even though he was only American through parentage). His participation in Aestheticism is mentioned often but only in its relationship to the 'art for art's sake' principle and how that translates visually, as a way of indicating he was painting for a pleasurable visual experience and not necessarily for storytelling or educational purposes.

It is my reading that perhaps part of the reason why Sargent and Aestheticism has not been explored further is due to the links between the movement and its homosexual subculture. The work of Trevor Fairbrother in *John Singer Sargent: The Sensualist* certainly addresses this, and in its broader subject matter of the 'senses' and Sargent's participation in the period's obsession with materiality and beauty, it is highly relevant to the work I have pursued with this dissertation. However, Fairbrother's twinning of Sargent's more decadent approaches to art as one that potentially went hand in hand with his own sexuality - which he also does to some extent in his 1994 *John Singer Sargent*, for example, which ends with a list of quotes by famous art historians that all address in one form or another Sargent's relationship (or lack thereof) with the opposite sex - obscures and limits the more important work he has done here in connecting Sargent to a type of Aestheticism or a concern with conveying beauty and sensuality. The drive becomes to prove whether or not Sargent was gay, as opposed to what Sargent being gay contributes to the discussion of his art. Cultivation of the sensual is not exclusive to sexuality, and perhaps one of the reasons why Sargent's links to Aestheticism have not been explored is because it is difficult in many ways to extract sexuality from the cultivation of beauty in art. Aside from such connections, Fairbrother's work does remain invaluable to my own research, significantly the brief and excellent overview provided in *John Singer Sargent of Sargent's 'aftermath'* in the period between his death and Ormond's revival of him

in the nineteen seventies, and has been pertinent in contributing to my understanding of Sargent in the twentieth century and beyond.³³

In my perusal of the material, I have observed that since the 1970s, art-historical research on Sargent has appeared to fall within a dichotomy of extremes, with the Ormond scholarship acting as a centre point of reference. Such publications can be split into two obvious factions: those either looking to bolster Sargent's status as timeless but not reactionary, or a more 'avant-garde camp' in line with academics like Trevor Fairbrother who look to explore, potentially to extremes, Sargent's subversive motivations. In the Ormond vein of research, and in some cases - as with Stanley Olsen - at the insistence of the family itself, a plethora of biographically based books on Sargent have come to light; Carter Ratcliff's 1982 *John Singer Sargent* focuses primarily on Sargent's artistic vision, often connecting Sargent's statements to Henry James and his method of prose. Kate F. Jennings's 1998 *John Singer Sargent* follows a similar vein, focusing instead on his lesser-known works. These works attempt to take hold and pair the images with the vast amount of biographical work published in the two main Sargent biographies by Evan Charteris (1926) and Charles Merrill Mount (1957), though the latter seems to have derived his material mainly from the former and seems less reliable as a scholarly endeavour.

Moving forwards from a basic biographical point, the Sargent scholarship breaks down into smaller factions, focusing on repeated themes within Sargent's work or his productions during smaller periods within certain locales. Barbara Dayer Gallati's *Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children*, Stanley Olsen's *Sargent At Broadway: The Impressionist Years*, Warren Adelson's *Sargent's Women* and Ormond's *Sargent's Venice* all function in this way, creating an intimate subject focus out of the vast amount of available biographical material. One of these works which has proved instrumental to this dissertation is Marc Simpson's 1997 *Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent*, one of

³³ Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 139-145.

the only publications that focuses specifically on Sargent's early career and the cosmopolitan implications of his early relationships and exhibition choices.

Some works of a more contentious nature in these focused studies have also appeared in the Sargent literary oeuvre; Alison Syme's recent *A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-Siècle Art* goes much further than Fairbrother in her explorations of Sargent's 'queerness' as it relates to his depictions of overtly vaginal flowers. David Lubin's discussion of Sargent in *Act of Portrayal: Eakins, Sargent, James* applies a more psychoanalytic view to Sargent's more 'misunderstood' or 'unorthodox' works. He interprets *The Boit Daughters*, for example, as Sargent's statement on the misogynistic trappings of Victorian female roles, with little Julia's doll acting as a 'buffer zone' against the viewer's visual violation of her 'pudendum.'³⁴ On a lighter note, and pointing to a different area of Sargent scholarship altogether is Roger Kimball's satirical critique of Lubin's argument in his 2005 *The Rape of the Masters*, insisting that this approach is as 'irrelevant as the mean temperature of Siberia, [and the] migratory patterns of Canadian geese.'³⁵ Intense sarcasm aside, these smaller, microcosm studies are important in coming to terms with Sargent's long and prolific career, enabling scholars to consume him in more manageable and 'bite sized' pieces or themes. However, this subject fracturing does discordantly encourage our penchant to place an artist in a specific 'box', an approach I would like to step away from in my own methods in this dissertation.

It is also relevant to note here that in this timeline of Sargent studies, very little has been done regarding his relationships to many of the figures I discuss as being part of his close circles in Paris and London during this period: Vernon Lee, Henry James, James McNeill Whistler, and Carolus-Duran. Though Vernon Lee has seen resurgence in popularity in recent years through the tireless efforts of Catherine Maxwell, Patricia Pulham, and Stefano Evangelista amongst others, very little work exists outside of Maxwell's article in the 2012 *Writing Women of the Fin*

³⁴ David Lubin, *Act of Portrayal: Eakins, Sargent, James* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), 86.

³⁵ Roger Kimball, *The Rape of the Masters* (New York: Encounter Books, 2004), 88.

de Siècle that engages with Lee's extended and deep seated relationship with Sargent.³⁶ This marks a period of some forty-plus years since Richard Ormond first broached the subject in his publication for *The Colby Quarterly* in 1970, and which gave us a first glimpse of Sargent's 'reading Pater' discussion with Vernon Lee. No work has been done regarding the vast amount of material that Irene Cooper Willis's 1937 collection of Lee's letters contain regarding Sargent, one of the primary and the most invaluable source of material for this dissertation, nor any of the other Aesthetic figures who gain prominence there.

In terms of Henry James, there is some little exploration into his relationship with Sargent: Adeline Tintner addresses it in her 'Sargent in the Fiction of Henry James' in *Apollo* in 1975, while Barry Maine has discussed Sargent and James's 'Venetian Interiors' as recently as 2002. There are other references to their friendship present amidst other James material, but there is not a single analysis of James's highly significant 1887 publication on Sargent in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* nor his prominence in Willis's collected edition of the letters of Lee. What is also astonishing is that there is virtually no research connecting all of these three figures *together* and what that meant for the Aesthetic circles in London and Paris during this period. Vernon Lee's relationship with the movement is thoroughly explored in the subsequent biographies that have appeared in recent years, such as Vineta Colby's 2003 *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*, but any significant discussion regarding James, Sargent and Aestheticism is notably absent. Remove the Sargent though and Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* has proved vital to my connections between James and the Aesthetic Movement.

³⁶ See for example Patricia Pulham, *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2008); Stefano Evangelista, "Vernon Lee in the Vatican: The Uneasy Alliance of Aestheticism and Archaeology", *Victorian Studies* 52 (2009): 25-35 and Catherine Maxwell, "'A Queer Sort of Interest': Vernon Lee's Homoerotic Allusion to John Singer Sargent and John Addington Symonds", in *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle*, eds. Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 166-178; also representative essays by all three in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, eds Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Another figure I will discuss that is important to Sargent's circle during this period is his Parisian painting instructor Carolus-Duran. Though mentioned succinctly in larger studies regarding the studio system in Paris during the end of the century, as in Barbara Weinberg's *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth Century American Painters and Their French Teachers*, and Gabriel Weisberg's *The Realist Tradition: French Painting and Drawing, 1830-1900*, Carolus-Duran is sadly underrepresented in the academic art historical realm, and amidst all the figures discussed in this dissertation, he is unfortunately the one most lost to history. Therefore my material here had to come mainly from contemporary articles and the writings of his students, such as Kenyon Cox's *An American Art Student in Paris: The Letters of Kenyon Cox, 1877-1882* and R.A.M. Stevenson's 1895 *The Art of Velazquez*, where he describes Carolus-Duran's person and studio methods, and their focal point in Velazquez's 'tonal mapping' method, in some depth. Sargent's relationship to Carolus-Duran, due to this lack of material, is explored in the majority through visual comparison, bolstered by the small amount of information I have been able to glean from the above sources.

This leaves one last significant figure already mentioned in relationship to Sargent, that of James McNeill Whistler. The body of material currently available on Whistler is colossal, but again as in the case with Henry James, none of this material specifically addresses his relationship with Sargent. There has, however, been a small trend in connecting Whistler and Sargent together in recent exhibitions, principally under the epithet of 'Americans Abroad': the very early 1954 Art Institute of Chicago's *Sargent, Whistler and Mary Cassatt* exhibition, and the more recent 2003 Tate *Whistler, Sargent and Steer: Impressionists in London from Tate Collections* and the National Gallery's 2006 *Americans in Paris: 1860-1900* all give both artists pride of place. The material connecting them seems to thread mainly through the themes of Impressionism or American-ism, and while these two elements are essential to my discussions regarding Sargent's cosmopolitan aesthetics, there is again no sense of weaving their interactions into a wider network of figures thriving amidst similar principles. My discovery of Pater's 1893 discussion in *The Daily Chronicle* on both Whistler and Sargent as being

representative figures of a cosmopolitan Aesthetic movement will hone this more clearly in Chapter Two, but until now such work has only scratched the surface.

It appears then in the art historical research there is never any kind of middle ground for Sargent, but rather a disparate sense of focused studies that in many ways exist at extremes. The works are either trying to come to terms with a large amount of available biographical information or are trying to interpret the images in such a way as to be antagonistic against their more traditional viewpoints. Sargent here becomes purely French/Impressionist, British or American, gay or not gay, conservative or avant-garde, Freudian interpreter of women or misogynistic flatterer. But what is to say that Sargent is not simultaneously all these things at once? If this is the case, then questions of specific nationality and approach should be moot in wider understanding of the artist's drive to see inspiration from everything surrounding them. As art historians we should be looking at these concepts from all angles in order to support our use of the term, hence my envelopment of biography, criticism, art and literature into a larger practice of Sargent-ian analysis.

Critical Aesthetic Language

There is one additional note to be made, and that is to bring the discussion back to Aestheticism. Aestheticism appeared in my research out of an in depth reading of the critical reviews, but it was not an immediately apparent revelation. As I created an exploratory table of the words used most frequently in the criticism during this eight-year period, I began to notice a repetition in use of the word 'impression' and many of its related words – I/impressionist/ism. These words, often used to indicate a sensuality of reading and intent on the part of the viewer and the artist, piqued my interest because they frequently seemed to entail that Sargent's works were being created/perceived as Aesthetic. In order to ascertain what the contemporary definition of the 'impression' meant, my research quickly turned to discussion on Pater and *The Renaissance* and his controversial Preface. That I could link Sargent back to Pater and the letter to Vernon Lee from 1881

seemed more than fortuitous, and as I began comparing the critical review language to the discussions of Sargent by those in his private social circle, one element becomes clear: Sargent was cultivating a style gleaned from multiple periods and methods, and he was doing it with a/Aesthetic purpose.

In addition to this, a 2012 discussion with Catherine Maxwell regarding Sargent, Lee and the 'curious', as evidenced in her previously cited essay from *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle*, brought to my attention the addition of this word and its synonyms – bizarre, strange, weird and so forth – to its use in the critical language, as these words also appeared at times within the material relating to Sargent. This discussion, to be explored in some depth in Chapter Two, circled back around to Pater and Aestheticism as I discovered the word 'curious' appeared frequently in *The Renaissance*, and is used often to imply queer or alternative desires and viewpoints. Lee attests that she and Sargent had a mutual attraction to this otherness, and that he often imbued it into many of his early paintings, supporting my argument that not only was Sargent in his early years highly Aesthetic, but that he was using his interest to fuel his art.

To couple such an interest in Aestheticism with the idea of cosmopolitanism circles back again to this use of language. The material I have collected here will demonstrate that Sargent established his early identity not only as Aesthetic but also as one that was a hybrid of both French and British Aesthetic interests. Close analysis of the texts he was reading and his circles of influence will convey that not only did he use both countries as source material, but that he positioned himself as the future leader of this 'cosmopolitan Aestheticism' after Whistler, in an effort to facilitate knowledge and understanding of 'for its own sake' philosophies across multiple continents and channels. In this way, one of the goals of this dissertation is to explore a larger idea that Aestheticism was actually a singular movement spread out across multiple nations, and I intend to negate the previously held art historical method of viewing each nation as having their own separate factions – i.e. British Aestheticism and French Impressionism. The research again will support this, showing that significant discussions on aesthetics appeared in print in both countries at nearly the exact same time, linked in part by an artistic network that

most likely channelled dialogues across cultural boundaries. Sargent's role here is acting as the eventual leader of the newer generation of such a network.

In terms of Sargent's participation here, and the lack of scholarly awareness on its import, it became increasingly obvious during the course of this research that no thought has been given to the significance of the vast number of major Aesthetic figures he included in his personal circle: Henry James, Vernon Lee, Whistler, Baron Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde, just to name a few. A very simple perusal of the Willis collection of Lee's letters reveals these names repeatedly in unison at various social events, and Sargent is often present. These figures were major players in the development and dissemination of the Aesthetic Movement and its principles, not just in England, but in France and the United States as well. Sargent did not merely drink tea and smoke cigarettes with these characters; my research will also show that he proved equally instrumental in widening the international scope of Aestheticism, especially by introducing members of the British faction to major players in France upon his formal move to London in the late 1880s, to be discussed in Chapter Two.

Sargent thus sits squarely within both French and British Aesthetic circles, or rather in my view, within one large cosmopolitan Aesthetic movement. The interchangeable interactions between all of these figures, and the ease and frequency with which they met does not imply that there were any distinctions of location but rather that they were all united in their cause to pursue beauty in all its forms. Additional analysis between Aesthetic texts produced in both Britain and France will also show concurrent parallels of intent; elements such as theoretical and philosophical borrowing, mimicry and inspiration, all strongly imply a sense of simultaneous – not linear – discussion. Scholarship often wishes to see one thing or another as 'coming first' in the search for the truthful origin of things, but this often negates the idea of communal intellectual development and debate in a drive to ascribe authorship to one figure or nation. The Aestheticism Sargent entered into in his early career was a large pool which had many currents, and was not, as it has been seen historically, a straight flowing river.

To keep with the water metaphor, this mention of Aestheticism as crossing multiple 'channels' will find a strong basis in my close examination of the critical reviews as examined in Chapter One. However, before any understanding can begin regarding their usage and parallels of language, an in depth understanding of the nineteenth-century 'impression' first needed to be ascertained, especially as it was postulated in certain national contexts. That the art critic George Moore even by 1893 had trouble separating the different forms of i/Impressionism hints at the depth of its complexity, especially for a twenty-first-century reader:

'Impressionism is a word that has lent itself to every kind of misinterpretation, for in its exact sense all true painting is penetrated with impressionism....'³⁷ A key approach to this method is to connect the use of terms in the criticism with their usage in contemporary literary and critical texts – such as Pater's *Renaissance* or Jules Castagnary's review of the early Impressionist exhibitions – in order to work through what exactly some of these critics were implying with their choice of language. This will not be absolute, for in many instances as I will show, French descriptions of what it means to be an 'Impressionist' are sometimes very similar to the writings of Pater and his stress on lower case 'impressions.' This analysis will show that while the critical reviews encouraged a reading of cultural separation in their use of these terms, they actually prove a form of collusion in the art for art's sake dialogue on both sides of the Channel.

This background chapter and description of the repeated language used to describe Sargent – 'curious', 'impressionist' and so forth – will set up a system of terminology that will then be used to analyse Sargent's painted works in the later chapters. Since the meaning behind the language can vary so widely, a further point of exploration here will be to indicate that the language, and the paintings that they describe, have further symbolic connections to Aestheticism. For example, critical indication of Sargent's 'strange' and 'bizarre' elements can connect back to Vernon Lee's discussion regarding their interests in the esoteric, discussed momentarily,

³⁷ George Moore, *Modern Painting* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 1893), 84, reproduced in Kate Flint, *Impressionists in England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 122.

which is an element that she attests Sargent explored through many of his works. That this language is also used to describe an attraction to otherness in the works of Pater, for example, further alludes to the idea that Sargent's works may have been created with a form of Aesthetic symbolism. I will call these elements in Sargent's paintings 'visual' or 'coded signifiers', to indicate that it is a type of coded visual language that has symbolic connections back to elements in Aesthetic texts.

The context of my three case study chapters, as they explore certain themes as they appear in Sargent's works during this period, is gleaned from this type of coded visual reading. The topics discussed here are chosen because they were themes that I have found repeatedly appearing in Aesthetic texts from both France and Britain during this period, enabling me to make a connection between the literary Aesthetic and the visual Aesthetic in Sargent's early works. Organised loosely according to a general chronology – the first theme of Orientalism, for example, covers the earliest part of this period, while the latter chapter on Colour covers mainly 1882 and later – these chapters will use Sargent's images to support my assertions of a cosmopolitan Aestheticism through a dissection of their international sources and influences, in both word and image. In addition to this, these studies will show that there is a way of using texts to unlock the 'bizarre' and esoteric elements of Sargent's early works, works which I believe he was producing in order to assert his status as Aesthetic, and to speak to a knowledgeable Aesthetic audience of his true alignments.

That Aestheticism, in both nineteenth-century and modern day art historical texts, is often defined as an exclusionary coterie of figures with 'ultra refined tastes'³⁸ also corresponds to my understanding that Sargent used certain visual clues in his works to advertise his Aesthetic sympathies, and the criticism supports this. Take, for example, a Salon review from A. Genevay from 1880:

His [Sargent's] *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* (Fig. 9) is one of the pictures in the Salon that most intrigues those members of the public who are unfamiliar with the refinements of sensual pleasures. If Théo were still alive, what an

³⁸ A. Genevay, "Salon de 1880 (Huitième Article)", *Le Musée artistique et littéraire* 4 (1880): 14-15.

inspiration this canvas would have been to his writing. This Oriental woman who perfumes herself and awakens passion... is a figure that is *bizarre* and original in effect. I wonder if... M. Sargent will have the distinction of having introduced a practice which might become dear to those with ultra refined tastes.³⁹

See here words like 'bizarre,' 'passion,' 'sensual,' in combination with references to Théophile Gautier, a writer who counted amongst his most fervent admirers the majority of Aestheticism's network. Genevay's double mention in the small frame of this review of those 'unfamiliar with... sensual pleasures' and those with 'ultra refined tastes' in connection to Sargent's art specifically places him through the use of such 'code' terms in the confines of Aestheticism.

Though this review is only a glimpse, Sargent's participation in the symbolic or esoteric during this period is proved mainly in part by Vernon Lee's statement in the introduction to her volume of 1927, *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories*, where she speculates on Sargent's innate attraction to the 'curious, strange, bizarre'. That some of Sargent's early criticism tries to come to terms with the strange nature of his images, namely *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (Fig. 10), a group portrait that oddly obscures the faces of two of the girls, sparked a wider connection here. Their confusion is natural: if Sargent's goal, or the goal of any portraitist for that matter, is to capture a likeness, why did he hide it? Instead of merely passing this off as eccentric affectation, I theorise instead in Chapter Four that this was done as a symbolic representation of the sensory identity of the child, a theme discussed in texts by both Baudelaire and Pater. In a form of circuitous argument, Sargent's attraction and execution of the 'bizarre' not only connects back to Aestheticism and its use of vocabulary, but also to cosmopolitan intentions as it relates to a subject discussed across multiple national channels.

This comparison of review by Genevay with a text by Lee shows that the dual combination of external and internal sources is essential to our wider comprehension of Sargent's Aesthetic alignments during this period; therefore, the body of work present in my second chapter will be essential in maintaining a

³⁹ Ibid.

balanced focus. Sargent, like anyone else in the world, did not live in a vacuum, and the social circle and private material explored here in many ways can indicate a more all-encompassing version of Sargent than the one that he cultivated for the wider public through his images. For example, it is one thing that we know Sargent was reading certain texts, but what is also significant in this material is that he was also *discussing* them, as in the 1884 *déjeuner sur l'herbe*, allowing him to translate Aestheticism from word into practice. This chapter will look at four key figures that I have singled out as being the most influential in Sargent's development of his own brand of cosmopolitan Aestheticism: Vernon Lee, Carolus-Duran, Henry James and Whistler. Each figure, it will be seen, had a different but defining role in disseminating Aestheticism into Sargent's person and art. Taken together, these first two chapters will then form the groundwork for the thematic concepts dealt with in the subsequent chapters, discussed through three 'case studies' in order to show in detail how these works can be read as engaging in such cosmopolitan Aesthetic concerns.

Chapter Three, the first of these studies, explores the Aesthetic fascination with Orientalism and Exoticism, an attraction Sargent worked through frequently in his early career. Though Sargent could be seen as simply partaking in the nineteenth-century cult for exotic things, the discussion and definition of what constitutes 'oriental' art, as discussed by Ruskin, Pater, and the French travel writer Eugène Fromentin, will broach many important points about issues of nationalism and symbolism as they perform within an Aesthetic-based rhetoric. However, Sargent's images in this vein do not fall in line with the overall imperialist theme of such viewpoints, or with the other Orientalist works produced by artists in this period, such as Leighton, Lewis and Gérôme, which deal either with ethnographic detail, or the negation of it in celebration of the more fantasy-based elements of foreign locales and cultures. That Sargent can be seen to be participating in both these types of compositions, depicting what Richard Burton called the 'dirty picturesque', while also at times extracting himself from a European imperialistic focus, hints at a complexity of approach not typical for his time. The distillation of such cultures into singular pieces, or disparate decorative elements, as I will

discuss, plays again into his interests in the strange and bizarre, forming again a bond with the queer interests of Aestheticism.

Chapter Four will examine Sargent's early depictions of children and explore the concept of the Aesthetic child, a symbolic theme found frequently in Aesthetic texts, which often describes the child as the site of pure aesthetic impressions. The way in which Sargent depicts children undergoes a significant shift in the works produced before and after 1881, and I argue that it was his interests in Aesthetic texts (recall he mentions reading Pater in the letter of July 1881) that potentially may have caused such shifts. However, Pater's discussion of the child also finds parallels with that of Baudelaire, so in order to read this more intuitively, I examine Sargent's key child portraits in light of comparison to not only French and British texts, but also against both a French and British example – that of Millais and his 1856 *Autumn Leaves* (Fig. 11) and Renoir and his 1884 *Children's Afternoon at the Wargemont* (Fig. 12). That Sargent, again, does not fit comfortably within the approaches taken by the representative works of these countries will insist again on the cosmopolitan nature of his work, while also solidifying his focus on the child's beauty and sensory experience.

Chapter Five will consider Sargent's use of colour and his execution of tonal colour studies, culminating in his intended choice to exhibit the all black *Madame X* and the all white *Mrs. Henry White* (Fig. 13) as a pair at the 1884 Salon. However, such works are in marked contrast to the overtly Impressionistic and prismatic palette of his early works, namely *Oyster Gatherers at Cancale* (Fig. 14) of 1878 and the later 1886 *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, a shift in palette I read as being influenced by the colour symbolism and primacy found in Aesthetic texts. The studies that predate this 1884 pair, as I will discuss, all place him within Aestheticism's trend of producing works of a single tonality, epitomised by Whistler's *White Girls* of the 1860s (Figs. 15 & 16) and even earlier with Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Fig. 17). Though this establishes a clear visual trend, these colours also appear with frequency in Aesthetic texts, where colours were being redefined outside of traditional social and ethical norms. Such a theme also found roots not only in contemporary discussions on scientific colour theory used by both the Pre-

Raphaelites and the Impressionists, but also from a older set of multicultural elements present in the art of the East, Spain, and even the Italian Renaissance. As opposed to being what many saw as an antagonistic reaction against the classical or naturalist movement in art, Sargent and Aestheticism's use of colour studies were actually part of a wider progression looking to incorporate colour and its symbolic meanings into a larger, global context.

Concluding Chronology

My pathways between Sargent's early works all come to an end in 1886, with the purchase of his *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* for the nation under the auspices of the Chantrey Bequest. *Carnation, Lily* marks a significant turning point in Sargent's style, bringing him almost full circle back to the prismatic plein air studies embodied by his 1878 *Oyster Gatherers at Cancale*. The similarities here, however, seem to end at the superficial. In as much as these two works appear to be stylistically similar, beneath the surface *Carnation, Lily* acts as a token of Sargent's culminating explorations into Aesthetic symbolism. *Oyster Gatherers at Cancale* conveys the simple beauty of a beach scene, with its crystallised reflections of light in water, blue sky, white sand and local female beauty, and is, for all intents and purposes, just that. Just as the Impressionists looked to capture the immediacy of life, and to translate scientifically the accuracy of colour as it reflected in shadows, so too does Sargent give us in this early work a quiet thing of beauty.

Moving forwards to *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* nearly a decade later, such simplicity seems to have come at the cost of *Oyster Gatherer's* gentle nuance. The work initially presents itself at a sentimental scene of children lighting lanterns in a garden, but upon closer inspection begins to hint at strange and hidden messages. *Carnation, Lily* confronts the viewer with a series of symbolic gestures and colours that allude to a number of potential cultural issues, such as childhood mortality, Aestheticism (and its symbolic connection with the lily), Impressionism and the use of light, and naturalism and a reaction against industrialism, that are not

present in many of his earliest works. In examining the work he has produced leading up to this work, the more mysterious elements of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* may become perhaps a little less mysterious when taking into account the gradual 'strangeness' appearing in his works up until this point. Sargent is known to have said in 1894, 'what a tiresome thing a perfectly clear symbol would be,'⁴⁰ and it appears that this statement may have taken root in his visual experimentations during this early period in his career.

Perhaps artistic growth can be in direct proportion to complexity. It is not unusual to assume that as his career progressed, and as he met with the myriad of artists, writers, dandies, poets and princes that Paris, London and the United States had to offer during this period, his experiences changed the colour of his art. Though he insisted many times in his life that he painted 'simply what I see,' this statement seems to crumble in light of the depth and complexity of approach he took with depicting such literal scenes of life, especially so early on. His quadruple portrait of *The Boit Daughters*, for example, could have been done in the straightforward manner similar to any number of the contemporary artists and mentors he considered during this time: Whistler, Renoir, or Carolus-Duran, who all present their sitters directly, without any openly symbolic gestures. But something changes between 1879 and 1882 when *The Boit Daughters* appeared in the Salon, and it is the aim of this thesis to argue that this change, this transition into a form of symbolism, was fed by an interest in Aestheticism and its texts, an interest cultivated, no doubt, by his relationships with major figures, and his travels amidst different cultures and forms of art.

Current art-historical research has seen a significant resurgence in nineteenth-century studies in the past twenty years, with major exhibitions occurring almost yearly regarding major and minor Victorian artists - Tate Britain's 2013 *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* the most recent in this line. Exhibitions of this nature insist, as I intend to do with Sargent in this dissertation, that in the context of their time, these artists were quite progressive in their

⁴⁰ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 144. See Appendix B, Figure 7.

approach and in many ways laid the groundwork for twentieth century modernism and abstraction. In order to paint something 'as it is' it must be removed from all narrative or educational context, a goal at the heart of Aestheticism's 'for its own sake' pursuits. That Sargent is participating in this movement and such pursuits denotes him as an artist avant-garde and modernist even for his own time. On top of this, his particular style, with its blend of international elements culled from multiple historical periods, countries and movements, set him almost entirely apart from any of his contemporaries, and speaks of a foresight into the cultural melting pot the world would become towards the start of the new century. He was, in short, the absolute epitome of Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life,' and that alone makes him worthy of reclamation and further reflection.

Chapter One

Curious Impressions and Critical Codes: A Philological Approach to Sargent's Critical Reviews

One of the main issues faced when researching this dissertation was attempting to find a viewpoint from which to interpret an artist who took great pains to ensure that only a selective amount of material survived past his death. That much material on Sargent did survive in the collections of those in his circle will become evident in the next chapter, but it is an incomplete and highly subjective view and not wholly reliable in giving a complete record. Vernon Lee's notation of her and Sargent's social outings in the summers of 1880-1884 solidly establish that he was cultivating Aesthetic and international contacts in Britain and France during this early period under discussion, but it is possible to pass the judgement that he was doing this solely to advance his career. In this respect, an alternative body of material needed to be assembled to complement, or perhaps even contest, the private views found in the writings of Lee, James, and others to be discussed in the following chapter.

Public criticism, via widely circulated newspapers and journals, provided an excellent foil of external representation to the internal, more private material of Sargent's inner circle, and it is this collection of material this chapter seeks to represent, dissect and apply to Sargent's case. This research, when taken together with the following chapter, presents a more concrete view of the extent of Sargent's interactions with my termed cosmopolitan Aesthetic movement, indicating that it was not only Sargent's choice and drive to be associated with such circles but also that it was influencing the increasing risks he took with the production of his art.

This chapter collects together a wide array of critical reviews of Sargent's earliest exhibited works as they appeared in venues across France, Britain and the United States in the early period between 1878-1886. Newspapers and journals are all strongly represented here, but there is also some material specific to France that comes from folios produced as guides or reference points for the Paris Salon, often written by critics who published concurrently within the newspapers. The United

States is more sparsely represented here, but was included because of its adaptation and re-interpretation of many themes and discussions found present in the European criticism, and serves to magnify the soon to be clear observation that many of these reviews were working hard to typify and claim Sargent for a certain nationality or group. My method of analysis in bringing together this large body of work, close to two hundred sources in all as represented in Part II of my bibliography, began with tracing repetitions in language and word usage. I specifically chose not to separate these works according to location, but rather to bring all the material together in order to see if there were any connecting patterns across national boundaries. That there were significant links in language will become evident momentarily, but such bonds were strengthened by the fact that they all applied the same descriptions or epithets to Sargent himself or to describe his art.

The key terms I mapped repeatedly in this collection of data was that of 'impression' and its associates, 'i/Impressionist/ism', 'clever', and various words describing some element of queerness intangible to the reviewer: 'strange', 'bizarre' and 'weird'. On the surface of things, such words do not seem to be related, and yet they appear with some consistency throughout this entire body of criticism, implying a connection through repetition. As I began exploring in more depth what such terms could have signified for art in the late nineteenth century, profound links to Aestheticism and the quest for all encompassing beauty, sensation and experience began to emerge. The current record connecting Sargent to Aestheticism is sparse, so the appearance of such language, in conjunction with the discussions of him in the private writings discussed in the next chapter, touches on a much neglected piece of Sargent's history, long before he came to the title of 'portraitist'. In the upcoming pages, I will dissect a large portion of the criticism that relates to the use of these terms in order to unpack the myriad of meanings such language had in its historical context, as well as apply it uniquely to Sargent and his relationship to Aestheticism.

I/impression(ist)/m

1878 was the first year Sargent began to exhibit publically in the Paris Salon, hence why I have chosen it as a starting point rather than 1874, the year he moved to Paris and entered into Carolus-Duran's studio. His choice to exhibit publically after four years of training, and under his own name, is significant as it marks not only his emergence from the studio-cocoon and the early formation of his public identity as an artist, but also what principles and movements he found relevant to this identity at such a formative stage. Once he was no longer under the umbrella of Carolus-Duran, how did he look to establish himself as an artist? What did he choose to paint, where did he choose to exhibit it, and who did he discuss it with? Though such questions will be answered further in this and the ensuing chapters, it is obvious according to the criticism that he defined himself as cosmopolitan, but other more traditional epithets – academic, avant-garde, portraitist, landscape artist, and so forth – are more difficult to ascertain.

At first glance, Sargent's self-characterisation seems uncertain, perhaps even fractured. A brief overview provided in Appendix A of his exhibition choices at this time show an eclectic mix of venues ranging from the avant-garde to the academic, from the small viewing rooms to the gargantuan Paris Salon. Before 1882, these are limited mainly to France and the United States, split between the Salon in the former and the very small Society of American Artists in the latter. 1882 and after saw Sargent adroitly playing with multiple countries and venues, ranging from the Royal Academy and the Salon to The Fine Art Society and the Galerie Georges Petit, while in 1884 he ventured further afield to *Les XX* in Brussels and the Dublin Sketching Gallery. There is little rhyme or reason to many of these exhibitions spaces, and very little consistency or allegiance to any one over the other outside of the Salon, which he submits to almost every year. However, even this option fell away after 1886, which I conjecture was due to the widespread British acclaim of his *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, which heralded his popularity in Britain where he had recently decided to make his home. From that point onwards, he focused on British and American exhibition spaces, gradually leaving France by

the wayside.

In this respect, Sargent early on was clearly not aligning himself with any specific nation or body of painters, and part of the difficulty seen in the critical reviews in regards to identifying him may be a result of this lack of commitment. This is why a deeper reading of the language of the reviews and their trends in usage seems apropos, as it will enable me to connect Sargent back to the wider theories and principles present in the texts we know he was reading (Pater and Baudelaire at least) and the people we know who surrounded him (who were themselves painting or writing in response to such texts), as seen in the next chapter.

In a general overview of the material I have collected, there is a large percentage that makes only brief mention of Sargent and is thus not wholly viable in relation to the deeper analysis I wish to make here. Especially in regards to the Salon reviews, Sargent and his work is often listed in brief passing amidst a sea of other artists, due in part to the ever increasing number of works exhibited in places like the Salon in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, the fact that Sargent even does warrant a mention is significant; amidst the thousands of works represented in the Salon, a vast majority of them did not even receive this type of brief recognition. Though at times his work is not talked about or described, the critics are still signposting him to their audience as work that should be seen, and that kind of media attention is valuable in and of itself, though not necessarily so in relation to my analysis of critical language.

The reviews I intend to dissect here which do attend to Sargent's submissions in some depth, as I have mentioned, mostly seem to contain a commonality of uncertainty and indecisiveness. Most of them are generally positive, and there is of course the gamut of criticism which takes no liking to him at all, but the majority of these publications appear on the fence in regards to how to approach, treat and judge Sargent in these early years. The language recognises that Sargent has talent for one so young, but they aren't quite sure what he is going to do with it and therefore they too are uncertain as to how to categorise him. Henry James echoes this sentiment in his 1887 *Harper's* article on Sargent, where

he states that 'his future is still the valuable thing he has to show. We must still ask ourselves what he will do with it ...'¹

There is an underlying feeling that they think Sargent could go either the academic portraitist route, in the vein of his mentor Carolus-Duran, or that his more *tour de force* type images could indicate he may go the way of the avant-garde. I discuss in some depth why this might be in due course, but I never sense any definitive type of literary ease with which they approach him, and my reading of this is due to his Aesthetic and potentially symbolic subject matter and methods. Therefore, what I have done with this material is to focus in on the criticism that shows a parallel in language and descriptors, in order to hone in on this unease and bring its underlying source into clearer light. This approach helped me to wade through and separate out the vast majority of traditional critical overview of Sargent and to create a focus on the reviews which seem to hint at something else, something which has not yet been discussed, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, in the Sargent literature at large - Aestheticism and Sargent's highly aesthetic intent.

The initial point of commonality I traced when bringing together these more substantial reviews was a generally consistent repetition of the word 'impression' and its related derivatives 'i/Impressionist/ism'. Use of these words in the context of the artistic dialogues emerging during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, even more accurately the last half, could have meant a plethora of different meanings, both literal and symbolic, and one of the main aims of this chapter is to map out such meanings. That the critical reviews use this word frequently of Sargent, and never in a consistent way, highlights this and indicates the extent of the complexity of what the 'impression' *could mean* when applied to an artistic medium. Definitions range from the literal – the first 'impression' something makes when you first view it – all the way to the spiritual, metaphysical or scientific – the 'impression' that light makes on the retina and its subsequent processing within the brain. Not all of these applications are relevant to the discussions of Sargent, so

¹ James, "John S. Sargent", 691.

in this case I wish to look specifically at those relating to ideas of beauty and quality, as issues of subjectivity will ultimately be addressed when those issues are connected back to my analysis of the 'impression' as it appears within Aesthetic texts. For now, however, I intend primarily to make a broad range of definitions as they come about within the critical material.

Initially, one way in which the label of 'i/Impressionist' was used was to associate Sargent to a certain movement or set of visual traits – these are terms of classification. This superficially seems logical; if a critic was attempting to describe a visual medium in print, it helps to link the artist creating that image to a well known set of visual characteristics or thematic, such as Impressionism. However, this logicity may fall by the wayside when that particular set of implied visual traits can either be French *or* British, and when the term is used with a capitalisation or without. Typing an upper case 'I' didn't always necessarily indicate a national movement, and could also rather imply a more generalised 'modern' type of painting, further blurring the boundaries between what being an Impressionist really meant in a historical context.

An example that highlights in part this sense of ambiguity is *La Nouvelle Revue's* 1882 review of the Salon. Though this review comes some three years after the start of the period I am exploring here, its clear distinction between Academic and Impressionist factions, and its placement of Sargent in the latter, acts as an excellent entry point into my observations of the ambiguity of the critical language surrounding Sargent, as I will discuss momentarily. This review, it will be seen, defines Sargent as akin to an 'Impressionist', but what 'Impressionist' means in this context is certainly up for debate. In this review, the author decided to approach its criticisms in the form of a dialogue between 'L'Académicien' and 'L'Impressioniste' which, albeit at times droll and capricious, clearly highlights the differences in how the academic and the avant-garde were interpreted. In the context of this argument, it is 'L'Impressioniste' who points out Sargent's *El Jaleo* (Fig. 18) to his companion as 'one of the most interesting in the Salon,' while it is 'L'Académicien'

who responds that he has his own 'reservations' over the sketchy nature of the painting, upon which he cannot 'settle for so little.'²

On a basic level, in the French art environment being an Impressionist seems to be the *opposite* of Academic – the men are clearly set up as opposing types here - but it is also an epithet dedicated to the capturing of feeling over form, with 'L'Impressioniste' being swept away by Sargent's brushwork while his friend finds such a method unfinished or incomplete. That Sargent is being labelled under such a title indicates two initially important points for our discussion: firstly, that as an 'Impressionist' Sargent's art is dedicated to sensual experience through colour and line, but also that such a visual performance is linked to art that is modern, chic and 'of the now'. This review makes no overt connections between Sargent's art and that of Manet, Monet, and Renoir, so for now being an Impressionist doesn't necessarily have any obvious movement implications, but is rather a catchall term to denote one who captures 'impressions' or sudden actions occurring in subjective experience, i.e. an Impression-ist.

However, in thinking of a the wider reading audience of this journal at its time of publication, it would have been widely known that 'Impressionist' would have pointed towards the French art movement, considering that group of painters had been called that term loosely in the press since 1874, and more formally when they adopted the name for their third exhibition in 1877.³ However, when British and American publications begin using this term in relation to Sargent, a relationship to the body of works produced by Monet and Renoir is not necessarily evident, but it rather can denote one as a follower of Whistler, or one who works in a similarly international blend of styles. For example, *The Athenaeum* calls his *Madame Subercaseaux* (Fig. 19) 'an Impressionist picture,' and then goes so far as to

²'A propos d'artistes, nous n'avons point encore vu un tableau qui est, à mon avis, un des plus intéressants du Salon'; 'Elle en a tout au plus la sensation et elle en communique l'impression indistincte; ici encore, je fais des reserves.... Je ne puis me contenter de si peu...' Émile Soldi, "Dialogue sur quelques Tableaux du Salon de 1882", *La Nouvelle Revue* 4, no. 16 (May/June 1882): 702-703. Translations are my own.

³ See Eisenman, "The Intransigent Artist", 189-197 for a full history of the various names applied to the movement between 1874 and 1877.

say that it is ‘very like Mr. Whistler’s work.’⁴ Though not combining it with the ‘impression’, for reasons I will discuss in a moment, two additional reviews link the fluidity of Sargent’s brushwork again to Whistler and British ‘Impressionism’ and should be noted here. According to *British Architect*, ‘On the other hand, for brushwork (now that Whistler is away) there is nothing here to complete with... Sargent’s full length “Portrait of Madame E.P.” (Fig. 20)⁵, while R.A.M. Stevenson, cousin to the famous novelist R.L. Stevenson and fellow student in Carolus-Duran’s studio, notes that:

Mr. Sargent, like Mr. Whistler, is very skilful in his treatment of those parts of the picture which he does not wish to make important; which are to play only a decorative part, to guide the eye elsewhere, and to support or increase the effect of the rest. His manner is somewhat different: Mr. Whistler swamps and omits; Mr. Sargent converts and utilises. [sic]⁶

In continued examples, *The Art Union* calls him a ‘daring American Impressionist,’⁷ while Henry James, in his 1887 ode to Sargent in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, astutely pointed out that ‘From the time of his first successes at the Salon he was hailed, I believe, as a recruit of high value to the camp of the Impressionists, and today he is for many people most conveniently pigeon-holed under that head.’⁸ How is it possible that Sargent can be a French, American *and* a British/Whistlerian

⁴ “The Salon, Paris – Fourth and Concluding Notice”, *The Athenaeum*, no. 2799 (June 18, 1881): 820. For other links to Whistler, see W.C. Brownell, “American Pictures at the Salon”, *The Magazine of Art* 6 (January 1883): 497-498; James S. Harding, “The Royal Academy Exhibition”, *The Art Amateur* 17, no. 2 (July 1887): 30.

⁵ E.W.G. “The Royal Academy and the Salon – II”, *British Architect* 13, no. 25 (18 June 1880): 292.

⁶ R.A.M. Stevenson. “The American Salon”, *Magazine of Art* 8 (January 1885): 514. Stevenson was a student in Carolus-Duran’s atelier with Sargent. He later became an influential writer and art critic, publishing a lengthy artistic review of Sargent in *The Art Journal* in 1888. See R.A.M. Stevenson, “J. S. Sargent”, *The Art Journal* (March 1888): 65-69.

⁷ T.C.F. “A London Letter”, *The Art Union* 1, no. 4 (April 1884): 85.

⁸ James, “John S. Sargent”, 684. I will be discussing James’s use of the ‘(I)impression/ist’ vocabulary in this article in much further depth in the next chapter.

Impressionist all at once? What exactly are the separations between these terms, all, as James puts it, 'pigeon-holed' under the same titular movement?

This requires further analysis. The French delineation of the term seems to be the most clear cut of the three, and points towards the 'intransigent' and later 'Impressionist' camp whose aesthetic focus was based in optical colour, plein-air study and representation of modern, contemporary life. However, when that term is used to connect Sargent to Whistler, the waters begin to muddy, as Whistler's style was characteristic of a uniquely French and British blend of elements, pushed towards the point of abstraction. When considering the usage of this term in a British context (as in *The Athenaeum* above quoted), Walter Sickert openly suggests that 'Impressionist' *usually* meant a specific relationship with Whistler, and that there was a sense of interchangeability between linking one's style to 'Whistler' or calling them an 'Impressionist' in a review, as they both implied the same thing. To Sickert, 'For to English ears the word "Impressionist" calls up associations of one name, and one name alone, and strangely enough, that of a painter who has always repudiated with emphasis its application to him or his work.'⁹

While it is true that these connections to Whistler could lean towards a more French labelling for Sargent – details to be found further in the next chapter – by 1881 he was definitively establishing an identity that moved towards amalgamation and internationalism, and the links to Whistler openly reflect this. For example, after Whistler viewed the Impressionist exhibition of 1881, Anna Greutzner Robins writes that he decided to create a parallel group of 'Whistler-ites' whose specifically 'un-British origins were a notable aspect of their identity' and that they were 'a group of colonials and first and second-generation European exiles whose collective identity anticipates the demography of the vast diaspora that makes up the present art internationalism.'¹⁰ Thus, to be connected to Whistler at this point was to be connected not only to 'impressionism', but also to the

⁹ Walter Sickert, "Impressionism – True and False", *Pall Mall Gazette*, no. 7451 (February 2, 1889): 3 quoted in *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Anna Gruetzner Robins (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

¹⁰ Anna Greutzner Robins, *A Fragile Modernism: Whistler and his Impressionist Followers* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 34.

cosmopolitan movement in art. But even without a specific mention of Whistler in a review, 'impressionist' seems to accomplish the same thing.

If the French and British delineations of 'i/Impressionism' had clear representative figures, then what exactly is an 'American Impressionist'? This critically is more difficult to ascertain. American criticism in Sargent's case seems to work on the principle of appropriation, i.e. in the sense that the 'good' elements of a work were adapted for the nascent American art movement, while the 'bad' elements were passed off as being a result of his 'French' background and training. *The New York Times* reviewing his *El Jaleo* in 1882 shows this most astutely, attempting to break down which elements were considered 'American' and which were considered 'French.' Ultimately, 'there is a trace of the American in the courage and inventiveness displayed'; however, 'he is French in methods and thoughts; he appeals to the demand of Paris by flattering the modern *culte* for Spanish things. [sic]'¹¹ This was not the first time *The New York Times* had made as much of a difference between French and American art. In an article from 1878, it was stated that 'the merit of American art is sterling honesty, as the vice of French art is trickiness and shallowness' while British art is 'at the whim of men who view art from a literary standpoint.'¹²

Under these descriptions, defining Sargent as an American 'Impressionist' can imply one of two things (or potentially both): that he was using French (read loose) brushwork and colours, but was doing so to depict the 'truth' of a scene (his 'American' trait), as opposed to creating a spectacle for pure sensory enjoyment *or* that he was simply capturing sudden 'moments' without moral or educational purpose, as a literal 'impressionist' or one who captures 'impressions.' I am more likely to read the American definition of such as some type of combination of both of these descriptions, but what appears clear is that regardless of method, if Sargent was described as an American 'Impressionist' it meant honesty and beauty, as opposed to vice/trickery and narrative, which will contradict significantly with a

¹¹ "Sargent's *El Jaleo* at the Schaus Gallery", 4.

¹² "The Artworks in Paris", 5.

later body of critical reviews, to be discussed, that frequently regarded him as shallowly 'clever'.

This idea of the 'impression' as an honest capturing of a sudden everyday scene, or as it would later be applied to photography, immortalisation of the 'decisive moment', is an excellent transition point into another facet of the 'impression' that is key to these critical discussions – that of ephemerality. I've established that being an 'i/Impressionist' could imply a link to movements or the styles of other artists, but it also could hint towards this concept that an artist was intent on capturing the suddenness of everyday life – the *impression* of modernity. This has a multitude of elements that move towards issues of subjectivity, so again some separation needs to be clearly laid out.

I want to begin with the idea of the scientific 'impression' – the stamp that light and environment make upon the retina. It is clearly established in the art historical literature that French Impressionism was a movement based on light and optics, influenced in part by the works of the chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul, which enabled painters to capture the truer colour values present in atmospheric light.¹³ However, little connection has been made with the fact that such concerns were also at the heart of the work of many British artists around the same period. George Field's *Chromatography*, used frequently by the Pre-Raphaelites, was published in 1835, with Chevreul's *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés* appearing in 1839, later translated into English in 1854. Though I will discuss what implications these works had on Sargent's later colour studies in Chapter Five, it is worth simply noting here the optical

¹³ See John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), 505-507; John Gage, *Colour and Meaning* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); both Oscar Reutersvard's "The Accentuated Brush Stroke of the Impressionists: The Debate Concerning Decomposition in Impressionism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 10, no. 3 (March 1952): 273-278 and "The 'Violettomania' of the Impressionists", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9, no. 2 (December 1950): 106-110; Richard Shiff, *Cezanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984) and Paul Smith, "'Parbleu': Pissarro and the Political Color of an Original Vision", *Art History* 15, no. 2 (June 1992): 223-247.

'impression' in this context was ultimately not a solely French concern but was one shared across multiple artistic boundaries.

Many of the critical reviews around Sargent use 'impression' in this type of immediate/sensory context, as a way of describing both subject and quality. *The New York Times* calls his *Neapolitan Children Bathing* (Fig. 21) 'a very charming impression'¹⁴ while Jean Mériem says: 'The impression produced by this scholarly sketch of M. Sargent's is very bright...'¹⁵, while Antonin Proust claims that 'M. Sargent here adds great merit without subordinating the received impression through the use of borrowed methods.'¹⁶ See also *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, calling *El Jaleo* 'the impression of a gypsy dance'¹⁷ while *Time*, speaking of the same painting, calls it 'impressionism at its very best' which has a twinned implication of modernity, as the author claims: 'for impressions – new impressions, strong impressions, suggestive impressions – are what everyone is craving for in our age, an age whose children grow daily more impatient of monotony, and whose ghostly enemy is *ennui*.'¹⁸

The material also links these uses of the 'impression' with optical accuracy and vision, so on some level there is a critical attempt to comprehend the new theories of vision and colour influencing the work appearing in their surrounding national exhibitions. *The Aldine*, for example, reviewing the Society of American Artists exhibition of 1879, one of Sargent's earliest contributions to the American art scene, described 'the impressionists' thusly:

¹⁴ "The Academy Exhibition", *The New York Times*, May 2, 1879, 2. This refers to the exhibition at the National Academy of Design in New York, not the Royal Academy.

¹⁵ 'L'impression produite par la savant ébauche de M. Sargent est très vive.' Jean Mériem, *Tableaux et Statues (Salon de 1882)*(Paris: Librairie d'art Ludovic Baschet, 1882), 102.

¹⁶ 'M. Sargent y ajoute ce grand mérite de ne pas subordonner l'impression reçue à l'emploi de procédés d'emprunt.' Antonin Proust, "Le Salon de 1882: Premier article", *Gazette des beaux Arts* 25, no. 6 (June 1882): 551.

¹⁷ "The Fine Arts – Sargent's *El Jaleo*", *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 3, 1882, 5.

¹⁸ Candida, "Impressions of the Salon, 1882", *Time* 7, 40 (July 1882): 363.

[Philip Gilbert] Hamerton designates them [the Impressionists] 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...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.¹⁹

The New York Times some three years later would attempt to make a similar description, relating it specifically to a process refined by Manet. However, the true nature of understanding this new way of seeing seems lost here amidst the derisive tint of the language.

He [Manet] saw it [nature] as a near-sighted person might see it, in masses – it was an impression. What he saw he determined others should see, and not giving them credit for an eye capable of detail, insisted that what he saw was all. He sat down before nature and put down on canvas in crude masses of color the impression it made upon his eye and with simple values of the large masses endeavored to avoid all necessity of detail.²⁰

These reviews bring forth what could be seen as a deeper argument regarding artistic ‘truth’ and ‘work’ as opposed to, again, ‘trickery’ and ‘feebleness’ – a contrast we saw between American and French visual characteristics in the 1878 *The New York Times* article previously quoted. See the clear differences between how these two reviews attempt to define and understand ‘i/Impressionism’ and what it meant for the changes in the way the world was perceived artistically. *The Aldine* appears to understand that in order to capture the world quickly, a new process of brushwork had to be formed, hence the loose nature of the resulting image – this was a method that at its heart chased after truth of vision, and thus the sketchy nature of the finished piece could be forgiven. *The New York Times*, however, seems to wholly miss this point, later stating in the same article that this

¹⁹ J.B.F.W., “The Society of American Artists”, *The Aldine* 9, no. 9 (1879): 278.

²⁰ “Art in Paris”, *The New York Times*, November 20, 1882, 3.

process of Manet's 'must strike one as an evidence of feebleness – the appreciation of only one thing [colour accuracy] to the utter inappreciation of the rest.'²¹

This lack of critical comprehension again follows in Sargent's body of work – they simply did not seem to understand what *The Aldine* attempted to translate for its readers – that the sketchy nature of the piece was a necessary product of the accurate capturing of the artist's vision. When his work is not called an 'impression' it thus disintegrates into a 'sketch.' *La Nouvelle Revue*, quoted at the start of this chapter, hinted as much when 'L'Académicien' stated that he could not 'settle for so little.' However, in Sargent's case, another layer can be added to this 'sketch/impression' qualification – one that hints towards Velazquez and a method called 'tonal mapping' which Sargent's mentor Carolus-Duran taught in his studio. This is most likely the process *The New York Times* was hinting at when describing the practice of Manet – it consisted of the use of capturing the predominant highs and lows of light and shadow before moving towards the final product, in that you take down in broad strokes the highest, brightest values, then the second highest, and so forth, until these masses formulate into a rough shape of the object. Final touches are then added to bring together and 'finish' the work. R.A.M. Stevenson even went as far as to call Velazquez an 'impressionist' for this practice in his monograph on the painter from 1895.²²

Not only is Sargent working in what is considered a decidedly 'modern' process, by capturing the sudden 'impression' of contemporary life, but he is also using an updated version of an Old Master process taken from fellow contemporary artists in order to do this, further complicating the idea of a specifically French or American identity or style for him as an artist. Also, while Velazquez is established as a significant point of influence for French artists around Sargent at this time – Carolus-Duran, in this case, and Manet before him- little point has been made again

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'In this branch of painting the large upright *Avenue of the Queen* at Aranjuez is enough to make us proclaim Velasquez a modern and an impressionist... .' R.A.M. Stevenson, *The Art of Velazquez* (London: G. Bell, 1895), 55.

to connect this resurgent interest in Velazquez to the British art world.²³ Just to make a brief link here, as I will discuss this in more depth in Chapter Three, is that between 1882-83, The National Gallery in London saw the acquisition of two Velazquez works – his portrait of Philip IV (now titled *Philip IV of Spain in Brown and Silver*), acquired from the Hamilton Palace Collection, and a work known as ‘Christ at the Pillar’ (now titled *Christ Contemplated by the Christian Soul*), bought from J.S. Lumley, previous Secretary of Legation in Madrid - establishing a similar thirst for the cult Espagnol to parallel that of France.²⁴ This layer of Sargent’s ‘impressionism’ *again* can be seen to have international connections, not only to Spain and Spanish art, but also to the rising fever for Spanish things occurring in both France and Britain in parallel fashion.

Thus the ‘impression’ and the ‘sketch’ again contain a deeper layer of meaning that points towards a long succession of historical usage, ones the critical body were not immediately primed to understand. Remarkably, when E.F.S. Pattison, in claiming that Sargent’s *Neapolitan Children Bathing* ‘does not pretend to be more than a sketch, and as a sketch it is charming’,²⁵ *The American Architect and Building News* calls his *Portrait of Carolus-Duran* (Fig. 22) a ‘rather sketchy scheme of his work’,²⁶ and in France, *The Pailleron Children* (Fig. 23) is described as

²³ There have been some publications on this in the last five years, see Nigel Glendinning and Hilary McCartney, eds., *Spanish Art in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1920* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2010) and the David Howarth, ed., *The Discovery of Spain: British Artists and Collectors: From Goya to Picasso* (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 2009).

²⁴ See “The New Pictures at the National Gallery”, *The Athenaeum*, no. 2858 (August 5, 1882): 181 and “The New Velazquez”, *The Athenaeum*, no. 2913 (August 25, 1883): 250.

²⁵ E. F.S. Pattison, “The Salon of 1879 – Fourth Notice”, *Academy*, no. 371 (June 14, 1879): 529.

²⁶ “The Last Paris Salon II”, *American Architect and Building News* 6, no. 199 (October 18, 1879): 124.

'sketched greatly, but only sketched',²⁷ it can mean anything along the line of fresh and new, to Old Master, to lazy and unfinished, with the single sweep of the pen.

Much could be said about the surrounding debates present within such differentiated notions of the 'impression' as seen in these reviews, as they hint towards global discussions on issues such as artistic truth, subjectivity, anti-academism, ephemerality and modern life. Though I have touched upon many of these subjects up until this point, the more relevant note to make here is that regardless of intent, a very simple word or set of related words can imply some or all of these things *at once*, so it becomes difficult to try and ascertain what kind of artist Sargent was, or rather was viewed as, when looking at the critical reviews. His identity seems fragmented, but that is merely a result of the fact that he was working under parameters that were themselves not wholly understood. This therefore led the critics to attempt to place him in one genre or another without wholeheartedly attempting to embrace the complexity of his approach.

It is this idea of fracturing that has carried downwards through art historical research, and why even today one can still find Sargent filed under British, French or American archival categories. What this research does show, however, is that Sargent was embracing *everything*, and he was embracing it in line with the trends and interests fluctuating between France and Britain and the United States (the latter most likely borrowing from the former two) during this time. However, none of the critical reviews have ever listed him as significantly playing into what that *The New York Times* claimed was a British 'literary standpoint.' All of this descriptive language is tenuous and obscure – it focuses on sensation, colour, flow of brushwork – never narrative. In this mere respect, it is possible to insist on an Aesthetic programme of focus for Sargent at this stage, as reflected in the sensation-based language of such reviews.

²⁷ 'Esquissés vivement, mais seulement esquissés, et assez mal mis en toile par M Sargent.' Edmond About, *Le Décaméron du Salon de Peinture* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1881), 106. Translations are my own. For further references to the 'sketch', please see Montague Marks, "Art for Artists", *The Art Amateur* 2, no. 5 (April 1880): 90; R.A.M. Stevenson, "The American Salon," 514; Julia Cartwright, "Americans in Europe", *Magazine of Art* 6 (January 1883): 1, 7.

The 'Impression' in Contemporary Movements

With the above being established, it then becomes essential - if only in order to read what Sargent was doing – to look back at how this language connects to core discussions occurring within key Aesthetic texts. That the 'impression' occurs with primacy of place in both French and British aesthetic dialogues insists that it was a debate that was not only cross-cultural, but also a concept highly valuable in late-nineteenth century art's shift towards the artist's subjective sense of beauty. That Sargent is being described verbally by language that has such symbolic intentions points towards and supports this idea of a cosmopolitan Aestheticism. But it also enables us as readers to engage on a level of understanding with these early works that is not immediately evident from the dearth of documentation remaining from Sargent himself.

Thus by looking at how such terms were used in Aesthetic literature, it will be possible to ascertain what exactly they meant when used in an Aesthetic context, and I will use such definitions to inform my later reading of Sargent's art in order to identify him as significantly Aesthetic. However, since the main crux of my visual analysis chapters works on a method of comparison between textual and visual, I must note that I will only make an introductory discussion here limited to two texts in order to exhibit initial key parallels in language usage. More comprehensive analysis of additional textual sources, as well as the multiple facets of specific practices will be explored further in the thematic studies. For now, one text from France and a representative one from Britain will be discussed here, in order to introduce the cosmopolitan aspects of this approach, as well as create an echo of effect back to 1881 and Sargent's explorations between Pater and establishing himself as a nascent 'intrasigent'. These are the texts we know, or at least can highly conjecture, that Sargent was reading during this stage, so while the criticism is undetermined about what the 'impression' meant for them as viewers, such texts will establish more concretely how Sargent viewed the 'impression' in a personal context, later filtering into his art.

In moving first towards a discussion of the 'impression' in French art during this period, it is nearly impossible to do so without working through Jules Castagnary's initial use of the word in his oft-cited review of the first Impressionist exhibit at the Boulevard des Capucines in 1874. Though there is no definitive documentation stating that Sargent read this review, as a new art student in Paris with an interest in the Impressionists - recall from the Introduction that he attended their next exhibition at Durand-Ruel's in 1876²⁸ - he would have been very aware of the dialogues surrounding their new style. Sargent was also highly well read, as evidenced in his discussions of Pater, Baudelaire and other stories from his later life that will appear in this dissertation, so it seems likely he would have devoured the local papers in order to keep himself abreast of contemporary art dialogues, especially considering the Impressionist exhibitions were the talk of the Paris art world during this time.

Castagnary's review is notable for its establishment of the 'accepted' view of French 'impressions' in traditional art historical discussion.

The common view that brings these artists together in a group and makes of them a collective force within our disintegrating age is the determination not to aim for perfection but to be satisfied with a certain general aspect. Once the impression is captured, they declare their role finished. The term *Japanese*, which was first given to them, made no sense. If one wishes to characterize and explain them with a single word, then one would have to coin the word *impressionists*. They are *impressionists* in that they do not render a landscape, but the sensation produced by the landscape. The word itself has passed into their language: in the catalogue the *Sunrise* by Monet (Fig. 24) is not called *landscape*, but *impression*. They take leave of reality and enter the realms of idealism.²⁹

²⁸ See Introduction, n. 24. Sargent arrived in Paris on 16 May 1874. The first Impressionist exhibition had shut the day before, so he would not have been able to attend.

²⁹ Jules Castagnary, "Exposition du Boulevard des Capucines: Les Impressionnistes", *Le Siècle* (April 29, 1874): 3, trans. and quoted in Charles Harrison, Paul E. Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory: 1815–1900* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 572-3.

Taking into account my previous discussions regarding the intersection of certain themes such as subjectivity, 'finish', and sensual experience between British Aestheticism and French Impressionism, it is possible to see Castagnary's review in an entirely new light. There are certain parallels here between the Sargent reviews previously discussed and how French Impressionism is nascently defined here, namely the concern with the lack of 'finish' in the Impressionistic method. However, unlike the previous critics, Castagnary seems to capture the fundamental understanding of their intentions, that finish was not the function of this new art but rather the capturing of the artist's own temperament and their specific view of the world – their *sensations* through the use of light and colour. As Paul Smith states, 'Impressionist vision was meant to result from an intentionality free of interest in a reified world, and instead to be expressive of a more primal and "original" experience of reality... *Sensations* were the basis of a way of painting free from rules.'³⁰ The previously quoted review from *The Aldine* of 1879 seems to grasp the basic understanding of this concept, picking up on the fact that their focus was not object based, but rather to convey the replication of *impressions* which those objects produce on the retina and the mind.

A notable point to make, however, is that Castagnary's review must be viewed in context. As Monet wrote to Sargent's biographer Evan Charteris in 1926: 'the word Impressionism was invented by the satirical newspapers as a mockery, to the great anger of Manet', which certainly implies that it was a phrase at least initially unwanted, or that the movement did not want the personal 'impression' to become their public hallmark, perhaps due to its negative connotations of lack of 'finish' and amateurishness as seen in the critical reviews. This appears to be an issue more with trying to wade through popular opinion, as in private Monet does state that Impressionism doesn't require education or in depth understanding of scientific concepts, but rather 'all it takes was a freshness of feeling,' or 'la fraîcheur

³⁰ See Paul Smith, "Parbleu", 223. For Monet's contextual discussion about the more derogatory intents of the label 'Impressionist' see Charteris, *John Sargent*, 126-133.

de *sensation*’, echoing Castagnary’s emphasis on intuitive interactions.³¹ So while Manet negates the overall term of Impressionism due to the derogatory intent of its inception, he does in some ways support Castagnary’s initial statement about capturing and conveying the sensual experience of the artist.

This is a theme that will carry us quite directly to England and to Pater’s definition of Aesthetic impressions as they were laid out in the Preface to *The Renaissance*. What I would like to point out is that Castagnary is publishing his link between the ‘impression’ and ‘sensation’ in April of 1874, which is within a year of the publication of Pater’s *Renaissance*, and both texts are using the term as evocative of the site of pure individual sensory experience.

“To see the object as in itself it really is,” has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.³²

Castagnary and Pater are both producing, at virtually the same time, and completely independently of each other, major influential writings stressing the importance of ‘sensations’ for artists and visual aesthetics, with the idea of the personal ‘impression’ at the core of their arguments. Whereas Castagnary asserts that the Impressionists did not base their works in reality, but rather in the effect that reality had on their consciousness, so too does Pater in his assertion that the aesthetic critic not render the exact landscape, but rather the ‘virtue by which [objects...] produce this special impression of beauty or pleasure.’³³ These two statements could essentially be exchanged one for the other, establishing a concrete link between aesthetic concerns amidst the Impressionists and members of British Aestheticism. Sargent, then, as an artist who in his early career is actively

³¹‘Le mot Impressionisme a été inventé par les journaux satyriques comme raillerie, à la grande colère de Manet’; ‘J’ai fait beaucoup de mal, car j’ai été un bien mauvais exemple... ce qu’il faut c’est la fraîcheur de sensation.’ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 129. Translations are my own.

³² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1873), x.

³³ *Ibid.*, xi.

straddling and cultivating contacts in both the French and English art markets, and being labelled an 'impressionist' in all the myriad implications such a word has been shown to represent, can be seen as being symbolic of this international blending of Aesthetic concerns. He represents a new, cosmopolitan movement of painters who dealt with aesthetics independently and widely, not separatist in an adherence to the creeds of specific nation-based movements.

Symbols, Ciphers and Codes

In moving forward outside of the clearly established evidence which supports a linked connection between these movements, another, deeper issue needs to be discussed: the complications which arise when a movement attempts to aestheticise a deeply subjective vision, or when they attempt to visualise the 'impression'. In returning to my reading of the uncertain language present in these critical reviews, it is apparent that much of the criticism hints that they believe Sargent is doing something new and bold, but they are not quite sure what it is or if they understand it. They know that it is different from the vast majority of submissions to arenas like the Salon, which was producing a number of 'cookie cutter' type images that cultivated the current penchant for works of sentiment and morality.³⁴ George Moore, looking back in his *Modern Painting* of 1893, calls it an enslavement to literature and 'derivative vices – exactness of costume, truth of effect and local colour' instead of the Renaissance's dedication to beauty, as to be

³⁴ For additional discussion on this and other causes for concern in popular contemporary art, see "Art and Morality", *The Cornhill Magazine* 32, no. 187 (July 1875): 91-101; "The Academy Exhibit", *The Art Journal* 5 (1879): 158-160; Montezuma, "My Note Book", *Art Amateur* 8, no. 6 (May 1883): 122-23; Ernest Chesneau, "The English School in Peril", *The Magazine of Art* (January 1888): 25-28; Sheridan Ford, *Art: A Commodity* (New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1888). For a good overall view of the period, see Michael Florisoone, "Individualism vs. Collectivism in French Nineteenth-Century Art", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 72, no. 423 (June 1938): 270-281; Daniel M. Fox, "Artists in the Modern State: The Nineteenth-Century Background", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1963): 135-148; Julie F. Codell, "Constructing the Victorian Artist: National Identity, the Economy of Art and Biographical Mania in the Periodical Press", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 283-316.

beautiful was the first and last letter of a creed of which we know very little today.’³⁵

If the critics observe then that Sargent is doing something different, something they can’t exactly pinpoint, then this leads me to understand that perhaps Sargent was working on a deeper, more symbolic level than has previously been realised. Considering the circle of figures he surrounded himself with and the texts we know he was reading and discussing, it seems unlikely that he would have chosen certain elements simply because of their shock value – this explanation severely downplays the intellectual approaches Sargent seemed to take with his person and his art. In order to try and understand what this means, I need to step away briefly from the criticism in order to try and work through what I believe the criticism is hinting towards with its use of the language I have described, and how that intersects into my concepts of Sargent’s cosmopolitanism and Aestheticism.

As I have explained, this cosmopolitan Aestheticism was a movement of high subjectivity in its drive to create an art that was subtracted from literary or educational foundations. Thus, if one isn’t going to draw from the public well of knowledge, one must then turn inwards, towards one’s own language. In order to do this, it became necessary for artists to create a specific set of visual codes and signifiers unique to their own experience that would translate into their art. Richard Wrigley, writing on the critic’s understanding of the average Salon visitor in 1765, summed this up quite perceptively through a comparison to language, which again has obvious parallels to the work I have been doing previously in this chapter:

One critic likened painting to a foreign country with which most people were unfamiliar; and the same metaphor was applied to expressions used in the language of art which [Wrigley’s French translation] “is like those foreign languages when one cannot translate them with the precision or the

³⁵ George Moore, *Modern Painting*, 50-53.

totality of the ideas that are expressed". The language of art was in need of translators.³⁶

The Art Amateur in 1880 would again evoke similar comparison, and even some one hundred and twenty years later there is still a distinct notion that artists are working in a specific visual language, or are seeing the world with a special eye, one that needs to be mediated for general public acceptance.

When a common person goes to an exhibition, "he sees in every picture two things, a painting and an interpretation. The language of art is modified for his especial behoof; it is not the direct language, which interests the professional, it is language made smooth with explanations. The stroke of paint which best delivered the color is pummeled into smoothness, lest it should strike his eye *as paint*, and offend him with 'paintiness'; in this sense it is a stroke and an explanation. [sic]³⁷

Thus the confusion in defining the term 'impression' in the critical reviews – be it through a scientific, linear, drawing or distance based approach – can be seen to reflect this, as the writers struggle to make public sense of a very private interpretation. Without the 'literary' element, they had no way of understanding the work's morals or intentions because it did not point to anything within universal knowledge. The wider public, general and critical alike, simply weren't 'in the know' and therefore struggled to comprehend a very private set of visual metaphors. In this way, all of these 'impression' based movements are, at least initially, established as insular or exclusionary, only to be understood by a select few. Sargent suffers from this segregation often in his early career, as in being called an Impressionist in print only to be rejected as one of its own in the private writings of Monet and Pissarro.³⁸

³⁶ '...sont comme celles des langues étrangères don't on ne peut pas rendre la traduction ni la precision ni la totalité des idées qu'elles expriment.' Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 259.

³⁷ Montague Marks, "Art for Artists", *The Art Amateur* 2, no. 5 (April 1880): 90.

³⁸ Please refer to the Introduction, n. 16 and 17.

Richard Shiff, in his discussions on Cézanne's place as 'between' the Impressionist and Symbolist Movements, sees this exclusion of wider society as an 'extreme of subjectivity' present in these movements, as they looked to create an 'art of idealization and fantasy.'³⁹ Both 'impressions' and symbols are again highly subjective, and can carry weight of different meanings depending on personal experience, worldview and temperament. That these words could be fluidly interchanged one for the other seems superficially obvious – colour or line choice, for example, can only refer back to what the artist themselves see, it is a 'symbol' for the artist's own experience. However, in the period in question, the idea of the 'impression' could also be seen to be a coded representation to speak to the experience of others within, as I have mentioned, an intellectual or confined 'elite.' Both French and British facets of Aestheticism were working within these kinds of codes, and since Sargent is textually being placed within these groups, it is important, if only in order to access Sargent's visual performance on a deeper level, to attempt to understand what exactly these codes were speaking of or working towards.

For Pater and many members of British Aestheticism, for example, such 'sensations' and 'impressions' hint towards an attraction to same-sex or more subversive sexual desires. Scholars such as Stefano Evangelista and Linda Dowling, for example, have done much work to assert that the movement carried within it an overarching homosexual subculture, and their arguments are convincing.⁴⁰ If being openly gay was illegal, then such desires needed to be subverted into a visual and textual coded language, and this was done mainly by exploring it under the guise of an interest in Platonism and Greek paederastic relationships. Those knowledgeable of this subculture, and the wider symbolic implications of an interest in such

³⁹ Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 5.

⁴⁰ For additional reading, see two works by Stefano Evangelista: "Lovers and Philosophers at Once': Aesthetic Platonism in the Victorian *Fin de Siecle*", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 2 (2006): 230-244 and "Platonic Dons, Adolescent Bodies: Benjamin Jowett, John Addington Symonds, Walter Pater", in *Children and Sexuality: From the Greeks to the Great War*, ed. George Rousseau (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 206-236.

studies, would have been able to read the true intent hidden in written works like Pater's and, for instance, in the androgynous visuals of Simeon Solomon. Thus to say that British Aestheticism was not only a movement of 'impressions' and 'sensations' but also one of 'codes' and 'symbols' is uniquely relevant.

In returning to Sargent, when he is reading Pater he is potentially attempting to avail himself of hidden Aesthetic mysteries, but also, by later aligning himself and surrounding himself with major Aesthetic figures and mentors, discussed in the next chapter, he is consciously constructing a circle around him which writes and speaks frequently through such a symbolic language. In a linear logicity then, in order for Sargent to not only make a place within both French and British facets of Aestheticism, as I assert he does, but to *thrive* in it, as he does, he would need to be knowledgeable of and work within such figurative parameters.

This covers the British side; but how then does Sargent participate in or seek to understand French Impressionistic symbolism? This concept is more difficult to define, as historically this movement was not associated with the more subversive elements highlighting the British contingent. However, both factions do seem, at least initially, to appeal to and be discussed amongst a small knowledgeable elite. When Monet painted the shadow of a tree using a multitude of contrasting colours instead of simply applying black or grey, he is, in effect speaking to those who had an understanding of colour theory, of Delacroix and Chevreul, and who understood the more ground-breaking aspects of artistic depiction coupled with personal subjectivity present in such methods. Shiff again notes that while Impressionism may have later shifted towards a type of symbolism as it moved towards the end of the century, its original intent was rather one of 'truth':

In this way it should become evident that impressionism, even in its initial form, was never free of concerns later associated with symbolism and that, although the two styles may be opposed in some senses, the extent of their commonly defined ground maybe of equal or greater import. As critics such as Lecomte and Mellerio indicated, impressionism, ostensibly a study of external nature, could lead into more abstract and subjective symbolism. My contention is that impressionist art cannot be adequately understood

without sufficient reference to its own subjectivity, the element of which Castagnary and other early critics were sensitive, and to its own definition of “truth”.⁴¹

So while Impressionism may not be developing a symbolic language out of the needs of privacy or protection, as in the British instance, they are choosing to depict an art that conveyed a highly subjective sense of ‘truth’ that the critical body was not privy to understand, hence the general outcry against the movement when it first began exhibiting in the 1870s.

Sargent then stands as a young painter at the centre of this whirlpool of debates on the impression, sensation and modernity occurring on both sides of the Channel. And in order to appeal to both markets, which he openly attempted to do by exhibiting in the myriad of exhibitions venues present in England, France and the United States during this period, he would need to be knowledgeable of the codes and symbols which dominated the backstage discussions of its major players. As an avid and voracious reader of books, lover of music and general cultural connoisseur, Sargent would have been able to easily amend himself to the coded language as it appeared in Aesthetic texts.

My assertion is that Sargent is taking part in this form of multinational Aesthetic Symbolism by translating these written representations, or themes and symbols, into a specific form of art. His own cosmopolitan style fluidly melts together the symbolic and visual needs of British Aestheticism and Impressionism as well as evocations to the past and the Old Masters. It is an attempt to visualise these international concerns about aesthetics and to serve a twofold intention: first, to expand his appeal to multiple markets, but also, to delineate him as a painter and figure of more avant-garde attractions. That this made his paintings visually complex, in many respects even mysterious and descriptively intangible, is no doubt true, and this appears within the struggle to define him within the critical literature. By combining elements of all, no one was able to pin down exactly what

⁴¹ Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 12.

kind of 'i/Impressionist/ism' he belonged to or wished to convey, an exercise by its very nature exclusionary, and thus working within a form of symbolic rhetoric.

Sargent's participation in this visually coded 'language', or within symbolic intents in general, is more than simply conjecture, as it appears frequently in the literature surrounding him. Andrew Stephenson, speaking on issues of race and imperialism in Sargent's later portraits, proposes that Sargent's programme - at least in his post 1900 years, and I believe perhaps much sooner - intended to be a constructed form of visual symbolism. He never intended to walk along clear lines of photographic representation but rather towards a goal of 'spectatorial engagement and symbolic coding':

Set in opposition to the apparently 'mimetic' reportage of popular photography and the familiar conventions of visual journalism in naturalist paintings and prints of battle scenes and military processions regularly featured at the Royal Academy exhibitions in the 1880s and 1890s, Sargent did not believe that his portraits should be a simple transcription of appearances. Sargent's aim was for a mode of spectatorial engagement and symbolic coding that was not always quickly grasped and resolved, but one that was rather more ambivalent and not *literal*. As the artist declared in a letter of 1894, 'what a tiresome thing a perfectly clear symbol would be'. In many ways, this approach correlated with what Sargent especially admired in his friend Henry James' work, namely a particular facility of expression that captured revealing detail and invested it with significance, yet, at the same time, achieved a subtle sense of ambiguity and complex irony. He declared: 'O for Henry James's faculty of saying something so cautiously that you only know what he meant the next day'.⁴²

⁴² Andrew Stephenson, "'Wonderful Pieces of Stage Management': Reviewing Masculine Fashioning, Race and Imperialism in John Singer Sargent's British Portraits, c. 1897-1914", in *Transculturation in British Art, 1770 - 1930*, ed. Julie Codell (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 235. For the source of the Sargent quote on symbols, see Introduction, n. 40. Sargent's quote about Henry James comes from a letter to Vernon Lee dated 1884 from Orvieto in the Colby College Archive in Maine, but my research shows that Sargent was not in Italy that year, but the previous one, in 1883. I will tentatively date this letter from 1883 due to this, but the documentation regarding Sargent and James's introduction, to be discussed in the next chapter, suggests they did not meet until 1884, so this letter will need to remain tentatively 1883-84 at this stage. John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee, Undated, 1883 or 1884, Collection of John Singer Sargent Materials, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.

Sargent's statement of 'what a tiresome thing a perfectly clear symbol would be,' from his letter to Lady Lewis, discussed in the Introduction, speaks volumes here. The letter itself is a form of praise that Lewis herself accepted the symbolism of the works as a natural element of the artist's expression and did not overly question their content. 'I was delighted to find you got some pleasure out of it through your eyes and were not fidgeting about the obscurity of these old symbols,' he muses.⁴³ Thus if we can read this correctly, Sargent intended art to not only have an aesthetic purposes, to be beautiful, but also to have symbolic content, no matter how 'obscure'. Though this letter appears much later than the period currently under discussion, it is still possible to read this as a later, more overt statement about his visual programme, one which began in the earliest years of his career.

Sargent and the 'Curious, Strange and Bizarre'

The letter to Lady Lewis and Stephenson's interpretation of his war portraits are both outside of the period under discussion, so in order to extend this idea of Sargent's use of Aesthetic symbolism to his early career, it is necessary to look at the material contained in this and the next chapter – the external and internal representations of Sargent's person and his art. In keeping with my exploration of critical language, I wish to hone in on another set of terms used frequently in the critical reviews – that of the 'strange','weird', 'bizarre' and 'clever' and its affiliates, as I interpret these to be the main signifiers of Sargent's a/ Aesthetic based symbolism in the published criticism.

See for example *The Athenaeum* of 1882, calling *El Jaleo* full of 'strength and energy, bizarre as the manifestation of the latter is,' while being designed 'with astonishing energy and in a weird spirit,' while Jean Mériem calls it 'cet étrange milieu' or 'this strange environment' and *The Boston Daily Advertiser* labels it a 'strange and perilous province of art' and an 'artistic grotesquerie.'⁴⁴ *The Daughters*

⁴³ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 144. Please see Introduction, n. 40 for more details on this letter.

⁴⁴ "The Salon, Paris", *The Athenaeum*, no. 2850 (June 10, 1882): 737; Mériem, *Tableaux et Statues (Salon de 1882)*: 103; "The Fine Arts – Sargent's *El Jaleo*", 5.

of *Edward Darley Boit* is 'bizarre, more or less bizarre is the epithet I have on my lips in front of Sargent's portrait'⁴⁵ while *Madame X* suffered a similar fate upon her appearance in 1884, being likened to a 'pitfall of eccentricity [and] bizarrerie'.⁴⁶

In addition to this is another text, one written from a private perspective by Vernon Lee, which may give light to Sargent's more esoteric subject matter during this period, and when taken together may shed light into the repeated use of such descriptive terms in the criticism. Although this chapter is mainly dedicated to exploring the public and published views of Sargent during this period, this text by Lee will help to create associations between Lee's descriptions of Sargent as 'curious' to the critical understanding of Sargent's works as 'bizarre', weaving a web of language that connects significantly back to Aestheticism and its symbolic functions.

Lee implies that Sargent's allure to the secret and obscure was in fact not unknown or, as I am theorising here, mere conjecture, but rather that it was for many years, 'the keynote of John's and my conversation.'⁴⁷ In her introduction to *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories*, published in 1927, Vernon Lee recounts this in depth by describing their combined childhood fascination with the portrait of an eighteenth-century castrato singer named Farinelli:

Mysterious, uncanny, a wizard, serpent, sphinx; strange, weird, curious. Such, at all events, were the adjectives, the comparisons, with which we capped each other, my friend John and I... And apparently continued exchanging impressions of this kind for some time afterwards... Thus in a letter of September, 1874...my friend John returns to the 'serpent, sphinx, wizard,' with the request: "Would it be too much trouble for you to send me a copy of that wild enumeration of the picture's peculiarities that we scratched off one day while driving in Bologna?" And adds with youthful gravity: "I hope you have not entirely put aside the thought of writing on such a curious subject."

⁴⁵ 'Bizarre, pour le moins bizarre, telle est l'épithète qui me vient aux lèvres devant le portrait de Sargent.' Roger Ballu and Guillaume Dubufe fils, "Dialogue sur le Salon de 1883", *La Nouvelle Revue* 22, no. 6 (May/June 1883): 715.

⁴⁶ William Sharp, "Contemporary Art in France: The Paris Salon", *Time* 12, no. 6 (June 1885): 673.

⁴⁷ Vernon Lee, *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories* (London: Jay Lane, 1927), 249.

Curious. That was the dominant adjective in John's appreciations, perpetually recurrent during his youth, pronounced with a sort of lingering undefinable aspiate which gave it well, a *curious* meaning of its own, summing up that instinct for the esoteric, the more-than-meets-the-eye, which plays so subtly through his audaciously realistic work, so that, for instance, in the *Spanish Dancers*, the *Shoeing of the Ox*, the *Smoke of Ambergris*, are turned into incantations, and *Carnation Lily* into some sweet religious vigil before an unseen altar.[sic]⁴⁸

Connect the first line of adjectives in this missive to the language used by the critics I have noted in the previous discussion. There are repetitions certainly in the 'strange' and 'weird' but Lee also adds in more ambiguous terms in the addition of 'curious', 'uncanny' and 'mysterious'. In my perusal of the criticism I have not found a specific use of 'curious' in relation to Sargent, but I have found uses of many of the other words. Lee strings all of these adjectives together, creating them into a verbal family that all applies to Sargent. If the criticism describes Sargent as depicting images that are 'weird' and 'strange' and Vernon Lee indicates that Sargent had a specific interest in such things, even going so far as to describe his contemporary paintings such as *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* as representations of his attraction to the otherworldly, then it is highly possible to read Sargent's works during this period as being visual explorations into a type of deeper symbolism and exploration of an alternative psychological realm. The work of my three body chapters will explore this further in regards to specific painterly works, but this language, as the 'impression' above, is complex and deserves further analysis as it appears in the contemporary literature. My research here will show that use of these terms specifically link Sargent to Aestheticism in an international context, supporting my suggestions of his participation in such a movement but also in the visual symbolism its dialogues explored.

In order to further understand the value of terms like 'strange' and 'bizarre' in the criticism, I want to do a focused study on a term Lee uses which has significant connections to the Aesthetic literature – that of 'curious'. Lee's pulling together of this term with 'strange' and 'weird', as I have stated before, brings such

⁴⁸ Lee, *For Maurice*, xxx-xxxi.

terms into a specific family of intent, and therefore I believe it is possible to see the 'curious' as being interchangeable or closely related to the other terms, even though 'curious' is not a word used outright in the published reviews. In this sense, I see them all as one body of symbolic coding, and a further in depth exploration of this term as it exists in Aesthetic and non-Aesthetic contemporary literature will, when later applied to Sargent, further indicate his Aesthetic interests. Proponents of my self-termed global Aestheticism were frequently attracted to the queer types of interests that Lee attributes to Sargent in her musings, thus such connections will create another thread of intersection in the web of artist, context and movement.

Literary Sources and Referents

In his essay on *Curiosité*, John House initiates three main sources from the 1860s for exploration of the term 'curious' in France: Charles Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* of 1863, Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* of 1869, and Emile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la Langue française* of 1873. Though Littré's entry is substantial, the definitions as used in the first two representative texts will be my main focus, as they apply uniquely to Sargent's case.⁴⁹

In the first instance is the complementary identification of an artist's curiosity with that of their 'genius.' Charles Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* is one of the texts which sets out to create these connections in the statement that 'I would ask you to note at once that the mainspring of his [the artist's, in this case Constantin Guys] genius is *curiosity*.'⁵⁰ John House argues that this text marks a

⁴⁹ The Littré text, however, does have an excellent connection to the word usage in Baudelaire and is a solid source for more textually based discussions. *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* ed. Emile Littré (Paris: L.Hachette, 1873-74), s.v. 'curiosité'; John House, "Curiosité", in *Impressions of French Modernity: Art and Literature in France 1850-1900*, ed. Richard Hobbs (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 33-57.

⁵⁰ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press Limited 1995), 7.

significant transition towards Baudelaire's use of the word *curiosité* as being this 'mainspring of genius,' in contradiction to his previous work in 'Le Salon de 1846,' where *naïveté* was the key element to accessing modern ways of seeing.

Naïveté, as characterised in 1846, is primarily about the artist's self expression, about his capacity to peel off the layers of academic learning and cultural conditioning, on order to realise his own *tempérament*, as fully as possible; Baudelaire associates *naïveté* with Romanticism. *Curiosité*, by contrast, is about a mode of engagement with the external world, and its corollary is not Romanticism but *modernité*.⁵¹

The main separation between *naïveté* and *curiosité* is an emphasis on inner versus outer; Baudelaire's first concern with the idea of the artist's genius seems to be that it was about personal expression and innate vision. However, by 1863, he transitioned towards the emphasis that the artist's genius rather comes from his external engagement with the outside world, presumably with the city, and *modernité*. *The Painter of Modern Life* is a treatise on the different kinds of characters the artist would meet in this environment; the *flâneur* or Man of the Crowd, the military man, the dandy, the painted woman, the prostitute. The artist will thus draw his genius, impressions and sensations from interactions with these figures. When Baudelaire places Constantin Guys on a pedestal as the supreme example of the artist of modern life, he describes among the list of his best qualities the fact that he is a 'great traveller and cosmopolitan... When at least I ran into him on earth, I saw that he was not precisely an *artist* but a *man of the world*.'⁵² Thus, to word it plainly, an artist has genius only through his curiosity with the outside world, and the only way to live and be in the outside world is to travel, to experience other cultures and people and use that experience to inspire your art.

In moving towards a British Aesthetic understanding of the 'curious' is to indubitably return to Pater and *The Renaissance*. A precursory perusal of the text yields a usage of the term upwards of thirty times, and some examples which I will delineate momentarily hint firmly at its importance in Pater's narrative model.

⁵¹ House, "Curiosité", 33-34.

⁵² Baudelaire, *Painter of Modern Life*, 6-7.

Amidst these various treatments, Pater consistently places the term within queer boundaries, using it to describe, amongst others, an interest in the *Doppelgänger*, or in the remote beauty wrought from the attraction between the horrific and the sublime (culminating in Pater's discussion of the Medusa).⁵³ However, much like Baudelaire, Pater also has a supreme figure that embodies this ultimate artistic 'curiosité' – Leonardo da Vinci.

It is in his discussions on Leonardo where the term is used most, and can be read with a number of implications – (homo) sexual, intellectual, and artistic. His art existed within 'curious tricks of design' full of 'curious beauty' possessing 'curious secrets and hidden knowledge' while Da Vinci himself suffered from a 'curiosity' that spoke of 'a life of brilliant sins and exquisite amusements' which frequently found him 'in intimate relations with men of science.'⁵⁴ That such 'curiosity' can be read as a coded term for his own erotic attractions to fellow men is certain in these cases; however, what seems to be the larger point is that Leonardo, for Pater, at the core holds this type of worldly sensitivity which makes him not only open to artistic genius but also to sin and diversion, in many ways linking Pater almost directly to Baudelaire, as discussed below. But, what needs to be connected further here, is that some years later these words are being used to discuss *Sargent*, thus giving him place within this timeline of sensitive, 'curious' and potentially subversive artistic figures.

Vernon Lee implies in her statement about Sargent that his works hint towards a darker attraction to otherness, that his works were 'more-than-meets-the-eye' while performing vigils before some 'unseen altar.'⁵⁵ If Baudelaire sees the eminent artist as a man who travels the world, then it is possible that such experiences would expose him to its more darker and subversive elements, ones that may appear seductive but in reality are *destructive*. Baudelaire calls this state of being a 'convalescence', epitomised by the artist who 'hurls himself head first into the mist of the throng in pursuit of an unknown... countenance... that has

⁵³ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 9; 108.

⁵⁴ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 107-108, 111

⁵⁵ Lee, *For Maurice*, xxxi.

bewitched him,' after which he cries, 'Curiosity has become a fatal and irresistible passion!'⁵⁶ Walter Pater, in his most telling use of the term in *The Renaissance*, states in regards to Da Vinci that 'curiosity and the desire of beauty – these are the two elementary forces in Leonardo's genius'; when these two elements conflicted, it made him 'go too far below that outside of things,' which led to 'agitation,' 'weariness and *ennui*.'⁵⁷

Curiosity then, as presented in these Aesthetic texts, establishes a certain double-faceted identity that holds two essential values: firstly, that the artist/critic have a certain sensitivity to the world, but also that this vulnerability is a state which opens the artist/critic to potential states of dissolution and decay. For Baudelaire, this sensitivity is described as a child-like state, or 'childhood recovered at will' where 'the child [read artist] sees everything in a state of newness, he is always *drunk*,' but which could potentially lead to a 'fatal, irresistible passion!'⁵⁸ It is my assertion that Sargent's early childhood images during this period perform within these kinds of boundaries, connecting the tenuous threads of beauty and innocence to eventual moral corruption and decay, and this will be explored further in Chapter Four. Pater, in *The Renaissance* at least, does not liken this state to childlike wonder, but rather terms it a 'desire for beauty.'⁵⁹ Such desire, Pater signifies, is in constant conflict with 'curiosity' and genius because, as previously quoted, it 'tended to make him go too far below that outside of things in which art begins and ends' and yet could also, when used correctly, generate 'in union with it, a type of subtle and curious grace.'⁶⁰ It is then possible to potentially substitute the idea of 'curiosity' and genius for a type of madness or cleverness, connecting back again to that term that, like curious and bizarre, appears so frequently within Sargent's critical literature.

In returning back to Sargent, when looking again to Vernon Lee's insistence on his 'curiosity,' it is possible to see her description of him as similarly queer or

⁵⁶ All quotes from Baudelaire, *Painter of Modern Life*, 6-7.

⁵⁷ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 113, 116-117

⁵⁸ Baudelaire, *Painter of Modern Life*, 7-8.

⁵⁹ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

⁶⁰ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 113-114.

dual-natured. She certainly implies that it is this embodiment of contrasts – his ‘audaciously realistic work’ coupled with this attraction to the ‘esoteric’ – that gave a certain *je ne sais quoi* quality to his art. However, what is also significant in Lee’s rumination is that he is working through a form of visual that brims beneath the surface and speaks of unknown things, which would again imply heavily that he was working within a type of a/Aesthetic based symbolism- read by those who understood. She certainly did see it, and as this dissertation will work through, so did many others in his circle. But there were hints within the criticism that certain portions of his viewing audience may have seen it as well. Recall, for example, A. Genevay’s review from 1880 quoted in the Introduction, where he brings together discussions of Sargent’s ‘bizarre’ artistic elements as a method that speaks specifically to those within the Aesthetic intelligentsia. His work depicts a figure ‘*bizarre* and original in effect... M. Sargent will have the distinction of having introduced a practice which might become clear to those with *ultra refined tastes*.’⁶¹

This supernatural, darker symbolism of *curiosité* also appears within other texts throughout the century, even those that exist outside of what could generally be termed ‘Aesthetic’. Pierre Larousse, in his four-page entry for the word in the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle* of 1863 covers quite a lot of ground, but he does include a definition that hints at similarly Baudelairean and Paterian interpretations. Curiosity is ‘the ardent and often indiscreet desire to know, to surprise and to penetrate the secrets, and the affairs of others,’ which in the ensuing examples relates more to the quality in children, again calling back to Baudelaire and the childlike state, emphasising its importance as a thematic chapter for inclusion in this dissertation. Secondly, however, is curiosity as ‘taste, amateur passion for original and rare things of any kind whatsoever.’⁶² Larousse is

⁶¹ Genevay, “Salon de 1880”, 14-15. Italics are my own for emphasis.

⁶² ‘Désir ardent et souvent indiscret se savoir, de surprendre, de pénétrer les secrets, les affaires d’autrui; Goût, passion d’amateur pour les choses originales, rares, en quelque genre que ce soit.’ *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle, français, historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.* ed. Pierre Larousse (Paris: Contre-Cxyz, 1869), s.v. ‘curiosité’. All translations from this source are my own.

here working on the similar principle of the child being the site of genuine curiosity, coupled with a desire for that which is singular, or in another word, 'strange and bizarre,' ultimately echoing Lee's sentiments on Sargent, but also Pater's on Da Vinci and Baudelaire on Guys. Again such 'desires' come with a warning, another duality, which Larousse pleasingly names for us as '*curiosité dangereuse*.'

Dangerous, it is the result of weak or incomplete men, whose organization is vicious, the diseased brain or the softened spine; such are those for who spells, magic, miracles, superstitions, turned tables, spiritualism, are acts of faith, and who spend their time in deepening this nonsense, such nonsense, and lies.⁶³

Larousse's mention of the 'curious' as relating to those with interests in magic and the supernatural can again connect directly back to the discussion of art, and even to Sargent. On a perfunctory level is the Romantic notion of the twinning of genius with the supernatural, embodied by the artist's relationship with the invisible muse - a spirit without matter, a zeitgeist - that the artist calls upon to inspire creativity. Such connections do not end with the staunch rationality of the Victorians, and continue to pervade even modern art historical literature. In 1992, for example, Sarah Burns deems Sargent a 'magician of the brush'⁶⁴ in echo of her research into his contemporary critical reviews, who seemed intent on labelling him as one who is able to 'infuse a soul into his model where very little exists.'⁶⁵ That Sargent's 'bizarre' images perform a certain magical ritual, capturing the immediacy of his

⁶³ 'Dangereuse, elle est le fait des hommes faibles ou incomplets, dont l'organisation est vicieuse, le cerveau malade ou la moelle ramollie; tels sont ceux pour qui les sortilèges, la magie, les miracles, les superstitions, les tables tournantes, le spiritisme, sont actes de foi, et qui passent leur temps à approfondir ces billevesées, ces balivernes, ces mesonges.' Ibid., 681.

⁶⁴ See Sarah Burns, "The 'Earnest and Untiring Worker' and the Magician of the Brush: Gender Politics in the Criticism of Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent", *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1992): 36-53 for an in depth look at the discussions of gender in Sargent's critical reviews in the period following that discussed in this dissertation.

⁶⁵ Outremer, "American Painters at the Salon of 1879", *The Aldine* 9, no. 12 (1879): 371.

impressions and infusing them with a mystical life is asserted continuously through the literature that surrounds him, connecting him back circuitously to the discussions present within texts central to Aestheticism's modus operandi.

That I have worked through the most commonly recurring terms surrounding Sargent thus far - which in keeping with the current theme of the discussion can be likened to a verbal incantation or even critical 'spell' - leaves one last term to be dissected, that of 'clever.' As I have mentioned before, this term appears almost as frequently within the critical body surrounding Sargent as words like 'impression' and derivatives of 'strange' or 'bizarre.' In surveying the general frame of usage for this word, what becomes unusually striking is the fact that it is often times uncertain whether being 'clever' is positive or negative. As a modern reader, I am wont to read 'clever' as affirmatory, in the sense that a person that is clever most often refers to someone who is smart and wily with no shortage of wit (*and wits*). This harkens back to discussions of 'genius' previously mentioned, and its symbiotic relationship with madness and creativity. However 'clever', as it appears in the nineteenth-century criticism under discussion, does not always perform in this way, so a closer inspection is needed. This research will prove that being 'clever' on a deeper level could have implied that you were Aesthetically minded, and in Sargent's case, it seems to affirm this emphatically.

Since the intent, positive or negative, of this word's usage is opaque in many of these contexts, it seems logical to begin merely by a method of chronology, to see how the word evolves. In 1879 *The Art Journal*, reviewing Sargent's *Neapolitan Children Bathing*, goes on a lengthy and mainly pejorative discussion of the 'cleverness' of modern artists, claiming that they think that 'surface is sufficient' and that they see 'no character, no force, beyond the cleverness of technique' - such is the case with Sargent's American contemporary, the 'clever artist Mr. Chase.' Sargent is not named clever outright here, but he does follow closely after this discussion, and his work is described as an 'imitation or adaptation of some Spanish-Roman work', terms that are similarly vacuous in intent.⁶⁶ His *Dans*

⁶⁶ "The Academy Exhibition", 158.

L'Oliviers, Capri (Fig. 25) of that same year, however, becomes directly 'clever' and begins a trend of language that would continue nearly every year in question until 1886.⁶⁷ His 1880 *Portrait of Carolus-Duran* is a 'clever portrait of his master'⁶⁸; *El Jaleo* in 1882 is one that 'disdains finish for ostentatious cleverness', or is 'insolently clever' or 'extraordinarily clever, and the effect is sensational'.⁶⁹ *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* of 1883 is a 'clever manipulation of effects [and]... ostentatious proof of the painters cleverness'.⁷⁰ In 1884, *Madame X* is 'something more than artificial cleverness' although his other portrait, that of *Mrs. Legh* (Fig. 26) is 'poorly painted and artificially clever' – both, and indeed all in this case, are insurmountably a product of the 'clever, although always sensationalist' Sargent.⁷¹

Let's break down these two concepts of 'cleverness' here. The majority of these assertions suggest that cleverness is negative, that it implies a sense of intellectual or emotional emptiness, or that it is an artist's use of effects to dazzle the audience and thus distract from their lack of skill. This is most obvious in mentions of cleverness with 'finish', which returns back to the previous discussions about Sargent's work frequently being called 'sketchy'; much like a magician, the artist uses a trick or effect to make the scene appear, but it is not skilled nor does it denote the dedication of training. Such reviews assert that the 'clever' artist is merely reflecting surface but not depth. However, there are some examples here that hint towards something that again brims beneath the surface, represented by those which couple the term with 'sensational' and even 'artificial'. Notice the root word here of 'sensation' and recall its connection to the 'impression' – the sensation as a similar site of the subjective, sense-based experience. If Sargent is 'sensation-

⁶⁷ "American Art Methods: The Society of Artists", *The New York Times*, March 10, 1879, 3.

⁶⁸ Montezuma, "My Note Book", *The Art Amateur* 3 (November 1880): 113.

⁶⁹ "American Art in the Paris Salon", *The Art Amateur* 7, no. 3 (August 1882): 46; Marion Harry Spielmann, "Art Notes", *Magazine of Art* 5 (January 1882): xli; "The Fine Arts: Sargent's *El Jaleo*", 5.

⁷⁰ Margaret Bertha Wright, "American Art at the Paris Salon", *The Art Amateur* 9, no. 2 (July 1883): 24.

⁷¹ William Sharp, "The Paris Salon", *Art Journal* (June 1884): 179-180; "The Eccentricities of French Art", *The Art Amateur* 11, no. 3 (August 1884): 52.

al' then it denotes that his works create a visual experience that arouses the senses, and is pleasure - as opposed to educationally - based.

But what seems more telling is this use of 'artificial' and 'cleverness' is implying a superficial lack of depth. Return again to the link between madness or 'cleverness' and 'genius'. Though they can veritably see through his trick, these reviews do not deny that Sargent's cleverness is a facet of his artistic genius; similar to the way Vernon Lee connects his 'curiosity' to his skill as an artist. However, what the external views of Sargent only see in these reviews is that it is a method that creates a spectacle, as something decidedly against naturalism. It performs under the guise of construction and illusion, to the point where it is 'far too clever, for a decent work of art' and 'there is no real depth to be found in the art, which [he] produces. Its ambition is too often cheap, its achievement too often merely popular.'⁷² However, what is significant is that, at least in the context of Whistler, critically passing an artist off as 'clever' had a distinct connection to 'art for art's sake'. Walter Sickert, in his reviews of Whistler's works in the 1880s, makes a provocative point about the British use of 'clever' in a critical context.

Whether it be for art for art's sake principle on which his [Whistler's] works seem to insist, the utter absence of literature in them, or the true British dislike for anything in which the slightest resemblance to eccentricity or affectation can be traced or imagined, we will not here enquire.⁷³

This 'cleverness' then may simply be a catchall term used when they are unable to process or understand works, like Sargent's, which had an element of 'strangeness' to it. They understand his more abstracted elements of colour and symbolism may come from hidden terms and motivations, but they are unable to process it, thus passing it off as 'clever'. If an artist paints in a method of 'eccentricity or affectation' that the critical audience cannot understand, is that not then a concrete implication of the use of a visual language or code? Sickert seems to suggest so, while also

⁷² Cartwright, "Americans in Europe", 6-7.

⁷³ Walter Sickert, "Mr. Whistler and His Art", *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* (June 1, 1884): 3, quoted in Robins, *Walter Sickert*, 3.

linking use of such language certainly to 'art for art's sake' and Aestheticism at large.

Thus in the critical reviews, it is possible to look at superficiality and its relationship to 'cleverness', I would like to assert, as playing an important role in the discussion of Sargent's 'bizarre' and 'curious' concerns, and also within wider issues of Impressionism and 'art for art's sake.' If many of these reviews denote Sargent as clever due to his lack of 'naturalism' and his use of sensational effects, then 'clever' is not only indicative of his attraction to the esoteric, as described by Lee, but also of a dedication to creating experience and sensation based art. However, again the argument circles back to the fact that these words are appearing in the Aesthetic literature, so not only does 'cleverness' directly connect Sargent to Aestheticism, but it reflects backwards to a uniquely international facet of it.

If Sargent is clever, superficial, and attracted to the 'strange', the supernatural or the ambiguous, and his art is being described this way, then he is creating works that uniquely reflect Aesthetic concerns. Baudelaire associates artificiality and the transcendental with everything from colours and cosmetics, while Pater using the term 'vampire' in relation to that epitome of female beauty in Leonardo's Mona Lisa. If 'art for art's sake' worked on a principle of presenting art simply as a facet of beauty with no general didactic function, then the depiction of depth and soul seems particularly irrelevant. Cleverness rather appears to be representative of an attraction to effects, to the creation of illusion and fantasy, in an echo of Richard Shiff's description of the link between Impressionism and Symbolism as an 'art of idealization and fantasy.'⁷⁴ Sargent's works actively construct a world where dream and reality melt in and out of each other, and while this seems to be widely considered pejorative, it may simply be seen as such because the wider general audience does not actively recognise the dialogue Sargent is attempting to convey.

⁷⁴ Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 5.

Through these pages, what I have argued is that there is an underlying thread of meaning and background which connects the language repeatedly applied to Sargent in the printed media to larger principles on beauty and aesthetics. Denoting Sargent under the epithet of Impressionist, while calling his works certain ‘impressions’ evokes not only the French relationship to the term and the wider movement represented by Monet and Renoir, but also to the experience of the aesthetic critic as defined within Pater’s Preface to *The Renaissance*. But ‘impressions’ also evoke the emerging importance of the artist’s subjective self. In order to convey that personal experience, a separation of intent occurred between using art as a clear, didactic language or as a system of subverted codes meant to speak to the knowledgeable about the truth of modern consciousness. Though we cannot ever definitively know Sargent’s own thoughts on the matter, or what his true intentions were in many respects, the external critical world and their language may provide a clue to his early intent. My next chapter, in discussing his private inner circle, and how Aestheticism was driven forth by their works in both paint and print, will complete the external picture presented here by presenting us with the more intuitive complement to the public façade.

Chapter Two

Sargent's Circle: The Aesthetic Mentorship of Vernon Lee, Carolus-Duran, Henry James and J.A.M. Whistler

It has been impossible to explore the groundwork behind Sargent's relationship with Aestheticism without the archival material and documentation left behind by members of his circle. Sargent's own methods of record keeping were notoriously dubious; Trevor Fairbrother relates that Charles Merrill Mount, when completing research on his 1955 biography of Sargent with the help of the latter's sister Violet, found that Sargent's 'own papers were destroyed in the cleaning out of his studio subsequent to his death,' while Richard Ormond suspects that 'there were hardly any papers left to destroy. I don't think Sargent bothered to keep a thing.'¹ The problem then becomes how to access an artist who went through (potentially) great pains to keep his own private life and thoughts a secret from future prying eyes. It forces one to look outwards, towards those around him, and the aim of discussion in this chapter is to accomplish just that.

In this respect, this chapter will lean a bit more heavily on the biographical, because it is important not only to relate factual details about these key figures in Sargent's life and career during this early period, but to intertwine that material with the literary and visual works being produced by this group in order to establish an atmosphere of Aesthetic culture. This method is key in supporting my assertions from the Introduction regarding the importance of Sargent's atmosphere and relationships, and will establish through documentation the influence that this had on the production of his art (to be explored in the next three case study chapters). This will also set some groundwork for two out of the three major themes explored in this dissertation – cosmopolitanism and Aestheticism, and to some lesser extent, the third, in critical language. Much work has been done to date

¹ Trevor Fairbrother, "Sargent's Genre Paintings and the Issues of Suppression and Privacy", in *American Art Around 1900: Lectures in Memory of Daniel Fraad*, ed. Doreen Bolger and Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990), 48, n. 5.

on the increasing popularity and commodification of Aestheticism from the 1880s onwards, so my goal here is not to argue about the existence of such a culture (as we know it existed) but rather to point towards the facet of cosmopolitanism present within such a climate.²

That Sargent specifically chose (inasmuch as one chooses with whom to spend one's personal and professional time) to surround himself with figures who themselves were well-travelled expatriates living and working outside the culture which gave them birth is a point for deeper intellectual consideration. In retrospect, there is not a figure in this rag tag group who 'stayed put' as it were, except perhaps for Carolus-Duran, who was born in Lille and worked in Paris. However, although Sargent's relationship with him was more professional necessity than personal choice, Carolus-Duran still actively encouraged Sargent's innate stylistic cosmopolitanism. Research will show that although a Frenchman, he preferred to teach methods appropriated from Spain and Velazquez and to adapt the visual traits of the Old Master's culture. This went so far as to even dressing as Kenyon Cox describes, in 'tight pantaloons and little pointed boots and [...] waxing and gesturing with a diamond ringed hand,' no doubt in a nod to his Sevillano mentor.³ That Sargent chose Carolus-Duran's studio above a multitude of others present in Paris during the mid 1870s speaks to the fact that this method of

² For additional work on this, see Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Anne Anderson, "'Fearful Consequences... of Living up to One's Teapot': Men, Women and 'Cultchah' in the Aesthetic Movement", in *Rethinking the Interior, c. 1867-1896: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts*, eds. Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010: 111-129. For an in depth discussion regarding Henry James and Oscar Wilde's role in in the internationalisation and commodification of British Aestheticism, see Michèle Mendelssohn, *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

³ Cox, *An American Art Student in Paris*, 49-50.

stylistic appropriation appealed to Sargent, maybe if only initially on an subconscious, visual level.⁴

Thus by tracing the multicultural natures and backgrounds of these four major figures; Vernon Lee, Carolus-Duran, Henry James and James McNeill Whistler, it will become easier to identify what I describe in the Introduction as a 'cosmopolitan Aestheticism' present in both France and Britain at this time. However, it is not my insistence in this dissertation to proclaim that Sargent founded just such a culture – Whistler, for example, was working within this kind of Franco-British-American framework some twenty years previous to Sargent – but rather to show that Sargent was a principal figure in what could be considered the 'second generation' of the movement. This research will also serve to show that Sargent was taking influence not only from multiple cultures, but also from multiple artistic avenues; this group is not limited solely to painters, but includes authors, critics and artists alike, additionally implying that such a movement was not only visual but also *literary* in nature, the embodiment of an Aesthetic harmonization of the arts espoused by Pater in *The Renaissance*. Thus, as will be seen, by introducing him to texts and arts that were seen to have value, both to themselves and wider Aesthetic culture at large, these figures enabled Sargent to distill the myriad of influences around him into a specific kind of painterly style, to be seen in more depth later in this dissertation.

In order to prevent a heavy reliance on this biographical material, this chapter will attempt to work on a balance between textual and visual analysis. Though some representative works by both Carolus-Duran and Whistler, the two artists in this group, will be discussed, it is also significant to note that Sargent painted portraits of nearly all the figures under scrutiny in this chapter. Whistler oddly remains the only exception, although it is to be imagined that if he had, Sargent would have made it look something like an early 1880s sketch of Paul

⁴ See Sargent's letter to Heath Wilson from 23 May, 1874 in H. Barbara Weinberg's *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth Century American Painters and their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville, 1991), 206 for a more in depth explanation as to Sargent's choice of Carolus-Duran's studio above the other more academic painters available in Paris at the time.

Helleu (Fig. 27), or the free spirit of Giovanni Boldini's later 1897 portrait of Whistler (Fig. 28) which reflects the casual bohemianism of Parisian life – all beards, smiles and cigars. It is puzzling that a portrait of Whistler by Sargent does not exist, considering Sargent seemed to have sketched or painted portraits of everyone in their mutual artistic and literary circles (in England *and* France). However, this will be discussed in due course, as the absence of a portrait of such portraits or early visual documentation of a meeting between the two does point towards the wider question of influence, borrowing and mimicry that pervades the links between the two artists. Though friendly, they were working within the same kind of 'brand' of portraiture at this point, and most likely viewed each other as competitors, which may explain this public and professional distance.

However, in the portraits of the other three remaining figures – Vernon Lee, Carolus-Duran and Henry James - it is possible to ground the discussion at least in part from Sargent's perspective, as even though there is a lack of material from Sargent's own written or 'spoken' hand in regards to these relationships, how he attempted to present them in paint introduces an entirely different method of interpretation. Thus, it will be possible to view Sargent's cosmopolitan and notably Aesthetic or Aesthetically minded influences in a visual field, completing a circle of inspiration that for Sargent reached beyond the limits of page and paint.

Vernon Lee

It seems appropriate to begin this discussion of 'mentors' with Vernon Lee, not only because she met Sargent well before any of the other figures (at the age of eleven), but because it is her surviving letters and writings which provide the most richly informative material on Sargent and his role within Aestheticism. Lee is the one with whom Sargent sits on the grass, as mentioned in the Introduction, and discusses Baudelaire; it is with Lee that Sargent, discussed in Chapter One, brings up Pater. Lee is a definitive connecting factor in Sargent's discussions on Aesthetic texts, as well as an important social contact to Aesthetic figures in Britain, and as

such the primacy of her role in this dissertation, and in Sargent's earlier career at large, cannot be underestimated.

But who was Vernon Lee? And how did this intellectual and platonic bond come about? As children, theirs was a friendship born, like many, out of a traveller's convenience. Both children of nomadic, expatriate parents, Lee (born Violet Paget) met Sargent in Nice in the winter of 1866 and quickly formed a trio with Sargent's little sister Emily. Their roots were similar, but not identical; Sargent's parents were American, and he was born in Italy, while Lee's were English, and she was born in France. An early photograph from Lee's youth (Fig. 29) shows her dressed in frills and ruffles with long, wavy hair, denoting that she was distinctly raised to be as conventionally 'feminine' as a name like Violet would imply. This no doubt created, at least later on, some issues of identity only rectified by her adoption of masculine dress and the 'Vernon Lee' nom de plume at the age of 19.⁵

Early on, as in Sargent, a distinction of difference and intelligence was seemingly evident; a veritable wunderkind, she produced her first published work at the tender age of fourteen, "Les aventures d'une pièce de monnaie" for the Lausanne journal *La Famille*.⁶ Unable to provide the depth of home education suitable for a child of her abilities, her mother Mathilda happily passed along

⁵ In terms of her choice to adopt the nom de plume in 1875, she states in a letter to Mrs. Jenkins on April 6 that "The name I have chosen as containing part of my brother's and my father's and my own initials is H.P. Vernon- Lee. It has the advantage of leaving it undecided whether the writer be a man or a woman." Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 49. It was also most likely an astute career move in order to ease the publication and reception of her writings, because, as she herself stated, 'I am sure no one reads a woman's writing on art, history or aesthetics with anything but unmitigated contempt.' Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 2.

⁶ See Marjorie Shelley, "'Splendid Mountain', a Sketchbook by the Young John Singer Sargent", *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 28 (1993): 185-205; H. Barbara Weinberg and Stephanie L. Herdrich, "John Singer Sargent: In the Metropolitan Museum of Art", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 57, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 1,3-64; Miriam Stewart and Kerry Schaubert, "Catalogue of Sketchbooks and Albums by John Singer Sargent at the Fogg Art Museum", *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1999 – Winter 2000): 16-38 for Sargent's childhood sketches and discussions on his youthful artistic precocity.

Violet's education to her son (Violet's half brother) Eugène Lee-Hamilton. Eugène filled this gap well. His withdrawal from Oxford in 1866 left him ample time to attend to her in this respect, which he did thoroughly until his entry into the Civil Service in 1870.⁷ It was his tutelage of Violet that proved influential to her introduction to the study of aesthetics, specifically Pater, but also provided cause for the use of 'Lee' in her name after 1875, as homage to her beloved brother. Eugène attended Oriel College in Oxford between 1864 and 1866, with Pater being elected fellow to Brasenose in Eugène's first year, so it is highly likely Eugène knew of him, and perhaps had even met him or attended his lectures. Perhaps as a cause of this intersection in Oxford, Eugène's methods relied heavily not only on Paterian influence, but also Pater's mentors in the form of Goethe and Winckelmann. According to Horace Gregory, in his introduction to the 1954 edition of *The Snake Lady and Other Stories by Vernon Lee*:

There can be do doubt that he upheld for her, by demanding that she read to him aloud, the standards of Walter Pater's aesthetics, an admiration for Pater's essays on the Renaissance, that he transfused to her a hatred of war, a distrust of many things which were German and yet reserved for her an appreciation of Winckelmann and Goethe.⁸

Violet also noted another singular influence during this period – Sargent's mother, Mary Singer Fitzwilliam Sargent, who she also remembered fondly from that first meeting in Nice. Lee would later describe Mrs. Sargent as a 'whole jocund personality [who] splashed, as it were, with the indigo of seas and the carmine of sunsets' of her amateur watercolours, a pursuit she foisted upon her children, Sargent especially, which Lee adopted during their times together.⁹ But it was more notably her insistence on exploration which left its permanent mark on Lee; she took the children - John, Violet and his older sister Emily - and 'let them loose' in museums, galleries, and gardens, attended operas and concerts with them, and

⁷ Colby, *Vernon Lee*, 11-12.

⁸ Horace Gregory, *The Snake Lady and Other Stories by Vernon Lee*, (New York: Grove, 1954), 17, quoted in Maxwell and Pulham, *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics and Aesthetics*, 23.

⁹ Lee, "J.S.S. In Memoriam", in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 235.

encouraged them to discuss, draw and interpret together all that they had seen and heard. This instigation of thought and play and its importance was remarked upon in Lee's *The Sentimental Traveller: Notes on Places* (1908):

Let me, before telling what I owed to her in my childhood – owed to her for all my life, whatever its value – speak in the name of all those chance fellow-travellers [... who] have been dotted with light and colour by joyful meetings with... this most wisely fantastic of Wandering Ladies. For all my grateful explanations, she could never guess the benefit bestowed on that small prig who was her children's playfellow. The benefit, in fact, was less a matter of deeds and things definite and tangible than of subtle influences... For what I saw was less potent than what I overheard...¹⁰

This friendship with Sargent, and Lee's wider admiration for his mother as the high priestess of the 'cultus of the Genius Loci'¹¹ in her search for the 'spirit of a place' no doubt instilled in Lee a sense not only of wonder, but of intellectual thought and debate which would form her wider relationship with the world and Sargent particularly. Their correspondence is littered with discussions on various texts they were reading and paintings they were seeing, evoking a kinship based on intellectual reciprocity and reflection, especially in their discussions about the nature and quality of art and aesthetics. An early letter from Sargent to Lee from 12 August 1872 describes in detail his attempts at understanding the beauty of Greek sculptural busts, linking them to the beauty of Tintoretto and evoking what could be considered a nascent form of *ekphrasis*, echoing Pater's use of the practice in his later discussions on 'Tintoret' and Venetian art.¹²

I want to step away from Lee and Sargent's relationship at this point, as it was during their years of separation, while Sargent was in Paris studying under Carolus-Duran (and while their correspondence of this nature was continuing), that Lee began to carve a niche for herself in the discussion of aesthetics in England. In 1880 she published *Studies in the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, dealing

¹⁰ Vernon Lee, *The Sentimental Traveller: Notes on Places*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1908), 10-13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² Please see Appendix B, Figure 9. For two additional letters regarding Sargent's discussions of Tintoretto during this period, see Charteris, *John Sargent*, 18-19.

specifically with the topics of music and drama, which was well received and respected by her peers, a feat at the time for a twenty-four-year-old woman author. John Addington Symonds wrote to her admiringly on the subject, establishing a nascent link to the Aesthetic circle in England:

I found it charming. As an older craftsman, may I speak to you as a younger craftsman, frankly? For I think you have a real literary gift... You have the main thing – Love; which in art of all kinds takes the same place as Charity among the Virtues. You love your subject simply, & you bring to the treatment of it rare qualities – almost too exuberant in their unpruned vigour.¹³

This connection to the British Aesthetic circle would soon become strengthened by her introduction to Walter Pater in Oxford in 1881 at a dinner party given by a mutual acquaintance, Thomas Humphry Ward (then a fellow at Brasenose College with Pater). Though Lee did not find Pater visually or socially remarkable - she called him a ‘heavy, shy, dull looking brown moustachioed creature’¹⁴ - he expressed interest in and praise for her *Studies in the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, which garnered an invitation to dinner at the Pater household two days later for further discussion. This friendship continued, with Pater being the first to remark upon her 1882 collection of essays *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions*, with beautiful, richly textured praise:

As a whole, and almost always in its parts, [the book] has left on my mind a wonderfully rich impression of a world of all sorts of delightful things, under the action of a powerful intelligence. The union of extensive knowledge and imaginative power, which your writing presents, is certainly a very rare one.¹⁵

This relationship started a correspondence, punctuated by Lee’s visits to England and Oxford (she resided in Italy for most of the year) that express an open sharing

¹³ Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters, eds. *The Letters of John Addington Symonds* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), 2, 635-36.

¹⁴ Willis, *Letters*, 78-79.

¹⁵ Lawrence Evans, ed. *Letters of Walter Pater*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 42.

of works and ideas that lasted until Pater's death in 1894. Their correspondence indicates that Lee sometimes also sent drafts and first editions of her publications to Pater for review, perhaps seeking approval before final push to print, an approval he most often gave in genuine warmth and friendliness. On the cause of her collection of essays in *Euphorion* of 1884, heavily influenced by *The Renaissance*, he proclaimed that 'I shall be pleased and proud of you dedicating them to me, and thus in a way associating me with your rapidly growing literary fame. I feel great interest in all that you write and am really grateful for the pleasure thereby.'¹⁶

It was during the same period when Lee first met Pater in 1881 that Sargent sketched his first portrait of Vernon Lee, now in the Tate (Fig. 30). Recall 1881 was the year their discussions turned to Pater in their letters, a figure Lee would later meet in Oxford the following month. Thus this early portrait represents an early 'Aesthetic' Lee, who like Sargent was just starting to make a name for herself amidst the group of cosmopolitan aesthetes that would later populate their shared social circle. Cautious, but not disapproving in its display of Lee's chosen androgyny, it presents her in sober black with white collar, against an unfinished cream and brown background. Though simple, Lee described it as follows:

The sketch is, by everyone's admission, extraordinarily clever & characteristic; it is of course mere dabs and blurs and considerably caricatured, but certainly more like me than I expected anything could – rather fierce and cantankerous.¹⁷

A few things are evident here, and will be contrasted with the second portrait in due course. Firstly, that Sargent does not idealise nor make amends for the type of controversial woman Lee was – he presents her as she is and not as he thought she should be, he does not try to 'pretty her up' or make her more conventionally feminine. This alone is striking – he obviously had no trouble surrounding himself with alternative figures that challenged nineteenth-century conventions on gender

¹⁶ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁷ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 65.

and artistic practice. It also speaks to Sargent's practice of painting 'what I see' which as I will discuss has ties to Whistler and the cosmopolitan Aesthetic mottoes appearing internationally. For now, however, one view is evident; Sargent accepted and had an established bond with an untraditional female writer who had significant ties to Aestheticism, and his method of presenting her not only accepts and embraces that fact, but also establishes him as one who aligned himself with such interests. Lee's pet name for Sargent in her letters and later writings was 'twin' or 'fraternal friend' – showing, as Catherine Maxwell has pointed out - a strong case of 'identificatory mirroring'.¹⁸ If Lee was considered Aesthetic, outsider and attracted to the more queer aspects of life, then as her twin, so too was Sargent, and their literary discussion on Pater supports this.

Such Aesthetic alignments would only increase as the years progressed. After this portrait, Vernon Lee remarks upon bringing Walter Pater and his sisters to a tea party hosted by Sargent in his London studio on 3 July 1884 – a significant fact which has never been addressed in the art historical record. Though there is no surviving documentation showing that Sargent and Pater may have met before this, Lee does insist that this party was socially exclusive, with Sargent only being 'permitted one or two invitations, & with the express stipulation of no married couples. [sic]'¹⁹ Sargent had either met Pater before and was close enough with him to allow him to be one of the few to be invited, or possibly Lee invited him specifically to introduce him to Sargent and his new friend Henry James, who was also in attendance. Lee and James did not know each other well by this point, Lee having only first mentioned him in her letters the month previous, so it is likely she did not know that James and Pater had met before, at a dinner party given by their mutual friend, the American novelist Julia Constance Fletcher, in January 1879.²⁰ This meeting, however, was only brief, and it was not until 1884, when the circle between Lee, Pater, Sargent and James came together that the two were

¹⁸ Maxwell, "A queer sort of interest," 168.

¹⁹ See Appendix B, Figure 10.

²⁰ For this letter, as well as a more detailed description of James's thoughts about Pater, see Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 11-20.

reintroduced. The discovery of this tea party is significant not only because it attests to an initial meeting between this group, connecting Sargent to Pater, art to literature, but that it also adds to the little known material regarding Pater's vested interest in contemporary art. However, for Sargent scholarship, this point of intersection might be even more profound in that it establishes a firm link between Sargent and the British faction of Aestheticism, to which no previous ties have ever been more widely discussed.

This latter point becomes stronger when taking into account my further discoveries of later meetings. Lee remarks that they all met up *again* for tea on 11 July, a group which this time around included our four main figures – Lee, James, Sargent and Pater – but also a coterie of Aesthetic characters in the likes of William Rossetti and his wife, the Madox Browns, Theodore Watts, the Stillmans and the Pennells.²¹ Combine this with the knowledge that Sargent is remarked to have given a lunch for Oscar Wilde and his bride on June 7th, and it becomes clear that in the summer of 1884, as in the summer of 1881, Sargent was surrounding himself with highly Aesthetic mentors, and having intense intellectual discussions with both the first and second generations of Aesthetic leaders.²² As to be explored in my ensuing chapters, Sargent produced a number of significantly Aesthetic images between 1880 and 1884, so this cultural atmosphere is significant not only in light of its potential effects on the productions of his art but also for the information it provides regarding the extent of the intersections between artistic and literary circles in London during the early 1880s.

It was after this early set of meetings, in 1889, that Sargent executed his second portrait of Vernon Lee, a pencil sketch now housed in the Ashmolean (Fig. 31). Some eight years later, both Lee and Sargent seem bolder in their assertions regarding their own unique artistic individualities. Less reliant on a type of Old Master style as in the first portrait, Sargent's hand is looser, freer and more playful.

²¹ See Appendix B, Figure 11.

²² See Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 143; 152. It is also worthy to note that when Sargent moved to London two years later, he chose to take up residence in Tite Street, which counted both Wilde and Whistler amongst its residents.

Instead of cautiously presenting Lee's badinage with gender stereotypes, this work proclaims and emphasises it, showing her in bow tie, with a wide brimmed hat, hair playfully wrapping around its edges. The work has energy and life – it conveys more of a visual impression and persona than an accurate capturing, as in the 1881 image, of the basics of a face. Lee seems more comfortable and more flamboyant in her chosen identity, and so too is Sargent in his artistic one with the looseness and lightness of his lines. The work is a meeting of minds; it shows not only how much both of them have grown into themselves, but also how much aesthetics and the capturing of beauty has shaped the way they wished to convey themselves to the world. The clear difference between Sargent's visual style between 1881 and 1889 here shows, if only on a very small level, the significance that these years played on the development of his style, transitioning from one who captures a figure 'as they are' in typical Old Master succinctness to capturing Pater's evocations of the human essence, its beauty and its soul.

Oddly enough, there is little to no mention of further meetings between this group, although Pater does briefly mention Sargent in a critical review from 1893 which will be discussed later in this chapter. Lee remarks that she did cultivate a relationship with Henry James after this point, united as they were in their concern for Sargent; their correspondence extends at least as far as 1900, though it is not always friendly.²³ However, a circle of friends was established in those nascent years, a trio which approached Aestheticism and the concerns of beauty on vastly different terms. The friendships among James, Lee and Sargent would last throughout their lives, contributing between them works in ink and oil that would redefine the nature of Aestheticism as it transitioned from one generation to the next. Vernon Lee's approach, which would eventually be viewed (at least as it is argued in the Sargent scholarship) as antagonistic to both Sargent and James, centred on the science and psychology of beauty, while James and Sargent adhered to its more traditional narrative and visual forms.

²³ For detailed discussion of their relationship, see Carl J. Weber, "Henry James and his Tiger-Cat", *PMLA* 68, no. 4 (September 1953): 672-687 and Burdett Gardner, "An Apology for Henry James's 'Tiger-Cat'", *PMLA* 68, no. 4 (September 1953): 688-695.

Charles Auguste Émile Durand or Carolus-Duran

The next figure to enter into Sargent's life with notable impact was his Parisian painting instructor Charles Auguste Émile Durand, or Carolus-Duran. Lauded intriguingly by R.A.M. Stevenson along with Léon Bonnat as the 'Millais and Holl of France' for their cosmopolitan influences and stylistic differences, Carolus-Duran's position as one of the foremost portraitists in Paris did not come as easily as it did to Sargent, who won accolades in the Salon as early as his second year.²⁴ Born in 1837 in Lille, he studied under François Souchon, a pupil of David, until 1853 when he moved to Paris. Financial hardship forced him to return to Lille in 1858, where an art prize awarded to him from the local government enabled him to return to Paris to study at the Académie Suisse from 1859 to 1866.²⁵ By that point, his work *The Assassination* had won a medal in the Salon and was bought for 5,000 francs, a boon which he used to continue painting until achieving national stardom in the 1869 Salon with a portrait of his new wife, *La Dame au Gant (Woman with a Glove)* (Fig. 32), which catapulted him into portrait fame.²⁶

By 1874, when Sargent moved to Paris after a very small stint of training at the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence the year before, Carolus-Duran's studio had only been open for two years, and was well known for its cosmopolitan reputation. Albert Wolff, a critic from *Le Figaro* called it 'the most curious studio in Paris,' not only for its eclectic mix of international students, but also due to the

²⁴ R.A.M. Stevenson, "Art in France", *Magazine of Art* 7 (January 1884): 463.

²⁵ Gabriel P. Weisberg, *The Realist Tradition: French Painting and Drawing, 1830-1900* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art : Indiana University Press, 1980), 279.

²⁶ Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris*, 189-193.

master's self-cultivated eccentric persona and non-traditional practices.²⁷ Aside from the previously quoted statement from Kenyon Cox about his pantaloons and pointed boots, various personal accounts of encounters with Carolus-Duran remark upon his *joie de vivre*, epitomized in one story where, while dressed in a velvet coat and surrounded by adoring female models who 'sit all around as if he were a saint,' he called to his students 'as his children, "Ah! Mon enfant," he says, patting one on the shoulder.'²⁸

Sargent's first subsequent portrait of Carolus-Duran, one of his first submissions to the Salon in 1879, depicts the man exactly in this manner. Cane in hand, with glint of gold rings and flounce of ruffled shirtsleeves, he leans on his knee engagingly, as if he is about to recount a story to his pupils. His moustache barely hides the hint of a smirk; it can be said that Carolus-Duran is a man who did not take himself all too seriously. What he did find grave, however, was the influence of Spanish art. Sargent includes in this portrait the red ribbon of the Légion d'honneur in his buttonhole, an honour bestowed upon him in 1872 and a visual flourish that linked him to Velazquez and his inclusion of the red cross of the Order of Santiago in his self portrait in *Las Meninas* (Fig. 33). This emphasis on Spanish art and Velazquez, it can be argued, is one of Carolus-Duran's main stylistic proponents to have had an affect on Sargent's early style. 'His [Velazquez's] name was forever in the mouth of Carolus-Duran, when he spoke of the past,' and 'whose only recognized master was Velazquez.'²⁹ Carolus-Duran was notable for his emphasis on the loose, tonal style of the Spanish Old Master, an approach to

²⁷ 'Mais l'atelier le plus curieux de Paris est celui de Carolus-Duran.' Some of the reasons Wolff gives for this 'curious nature' is that it holds open houses on Thursdays instead of Fridays, is located in the faubourg Saint-Germain, as opposed to le quartier Monceau, and that Carolus-Duran greets his guests on such days in his bizarre 'costume spécial.' Please note, however, in relation to the discussion at hand, the use of the word 'curious' as encompassing more cosmopolitan, avant-garde ideas. Albert Wolff, *La Capitale De L'Art* (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1886), 287-290, quoted in John Milner, *The Studios of Paris: The Capital of Art in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), 45.

²⁸ "Letters from a French Atelier", *Temple Bar* 104, no. 410 (January 1895): 109; 119.

²⁹ Stevenson, *The Art of Velazquez*, 104; 107.

painting that set him apart from the heavily detailed works of his contemporaries. Compare, for example, Carolus-Duran's style here to the finely modelled and intricate style of his fellow portraitist Bonnat in his *Jules Grévy* of 1880 (Fig. 34).

This influence on Sargent can be identified in two main principles relevant to the discussion broached by this dissertation. First, he emphasised a cosmopolitan approach to artistic influence that commanded inspiration not only from varying countries (France, Spain and Holland, for example) but also multiple time periods. Carolus-Duran's early works, *The Convalescent* (Fig. 35) and *The Assassination* (Fig. 36), for example, show influences from David (most likely taken from his mentor Souchon), Courbet, Manet, Velazquez, and Caravaggio (the latter he would have seen on his travels to Italy from 1862-66). However, as Carolus-Duran stated in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1900, while he placed pride of place on Velazquez above all else, adaptation of elements from other periods and sources was also vital to remaining fresh as an artist.

There is a different "aesthetic," you must remember, for each epoch in the history of art. It is misleading, therefore, to place one school above another or to suppose that we ought to imitate the great masters who have gone before us. There are great masters at every epoch... As much as I admire the great masters of former times, I have neither imitated them nor been influenced by them...The painter must go straight to nature; the study of nature along will teach him his business.³⁰

The last statement here segues directly into the second main point of influence: Carolus-Duran's tonal mapping method and his insistence on truth to nature, briefly discussed in Chapter One. To explain further, tonal mapping was a non-drawing based painterly process, learned from the study of Velazquez, which involved training the eye so as to be able to 'paint what you see.' This included taking down in paint the basic levels of light and shadow in a way that evoked 'mosaic work' thus providing a basis into which an image could be quickly captured and later transformed into three-dimensionality.³¹ First, one takes down the

³⁰ Rowland Strong, "Carolus Duran: A Visit to His Studio in Paris", *The New York Times: Saturday Review of Books and Art*, March 17, 1900, 7.

³¹ Stevenson, *The Art of Velazquez*, 105-107.

highest and brightest points, then paints the second brightest, and so on and so forth. The work is then blended together to create the final product. A preparatory oil for Sargent's portrait of Carolus-Duran (Fig. 37) shows this method in progress, where Sargent has laid out in broad, chunky sections the predominant areas of tone. This is more evident in his watercolour sketch *George Hitchcock* of 1880 (Fig. 38), as well as the slightly later 1883-85 image *Judith Gautier* or *A Gust of Wind*, where it appears only Gautier's facial tones have been blended, its smoothness in marked contrast to the ample patches of flat colour present in the rest of the painting (Fig. 39).

The parallel nature of this approach to that of the contemporary Impressionist movement also becomes evident when taking into account Stevenson's description of Carolus-Duran's teaching methods, which focused on training the eye 'so as to report sight [in order to] render the familiar or the unfamiliar [so that one] could communicate directly with what was before him without the intervention of traditional rules or scientific study.' In this respect, Stevenson remarks that 'when, in the present century, truth of impression became the governing ideal of art, Velazquez became the prophet of the new schools.'³² Thus the importance was not to become a slavish follower to academic modelling or narrative, but rather to adhere to truth to nature and personal vision. Ultimately, when Sargent frequently stated later in life in response to his thoughts on his own artistic vision that 'I only paint what I see,' he was echoing the principles he learned from Carolus-Duran, and, to be discussed, also potentially Whistler:³³

One thing to note, however, is that although these teachings proved highly influential in the early development of Sargent's style, his ultimate attraction to the

³² Ibid.,104-105.

³³ Charles Merrill Mount recounts an instance in his biography where Sargent used this in reply to an inquiry from Joseph Pulitzer about his methods. Pulitzer stated that in painting his portrait Sargent would most likely 'study me by talking, conversing, and generally summing up my character,' to which Sargent replied 'No... I paint what I see. Sometimes it makes a good portrait; so much the better for the sitter. Sometimes it does not; so much the worse for the both of us. But I don't dig beneath the surface for things that don't appear before my eyes.' Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 216.

'curious, strange, bizarre' was what eventually set him apart from that of his master. In another interview for *The Contemporary Review* in 1888, Carolus-Duran perhaps alludes to Sargent in a cryptic but provocative statement, invoking my use of previously defined terms in his criticism of this painter's 'cleverness':

There was a pupil working here once, a young fellow of ability, whom I used to tell from time to time to distrust his cleverness. Whilst he continued to consult me about his painting he produced some remarkably fine work. You see what he is doing now, painting slap-dash – like Velazquez he thinks, and from *chic*, whilst Velazquez always followed nature irreverently. [sic]³⁴

Carolus-Duran's descriptive adjectives of this 'student' echo in many respects the language and issues many critics had with Sargent's early style, as indicated in the previous chapter, calling it 'clever', 'sketchy' and 'chic.' In this respect I am wont to read this statement as discussing Sargent, and if that is the case, then Carolus-Duran's acknowledgement of Sargent's style as progressing from a one of 'truth to nature' to something against such, something more subliminal, may support again my assertions about Sargent's early works performing under a rhetoric of symbolism, a certain Aesthetic-based symbolism, to be exact.

In addition to this, Stevenson also states that Carolus-Duran 'had little patience with the aesthete and conventional sentimentalist,' so if Sargent was infusing his works with Aesthetic concerns and symbols, as I argue he was, then it seems logical that his teacher would react against such and critique the practice publicly.³⁵ Carolus-Duran's visual concerns were about nature and purity of vision, not beauty or sensation; presumably he believed that if one adhered to such optical 'truth' then the aesthetic elements would follow. While Sargent's works do involve points of accuracy (hence 'I only paint what I see'), fidelity to perception was not necessarily the overriding factor. The point was rather to create an experience, to convey an impression and its sensation, which required an expert blending of truth, fantasy, and embellishment, an approach which Carolus-Duran ultimately viewed as being duplicitous to the true painter's art. Thus while Sargent's innate

³⁴ Kennedy, "In the Studio of Carolus-Duran", 718.

³⁵ Stevenson, *The Art of Velazquez*, 107.

cosmopolitanism was encouraged and heightened by Carolus-Duran's teachings, and his emphasis on a non-academic painterly process aided Sargent's ability to capture these Aesthetic impressions and sensations, he eventually departed such paths in his search for the stranger things in life – a search, I assert, encouraged by the multinational approaches being taken with the arts within his adjacent circle.

Henry James

After Vernon Lee and Carolus-Duran, it is well established that Sargent was situating himself amidst a circle of writers and painters who viewed art and aesthetics on varied levels of approach and intensity. Their influences in many respects seem wholly obvious – Carolus-Duran had a direct impact on Sargent visually, while Lee's encouragement to read and discuss Aesthetic texts no doubt inspired him intellectually, which eventually filtered to the visual. Towards the end of his time in Paris, however, another major figure would come into play: the expatriate American writer Henry James. The exact circumstances of their meeting varies in the historical documentation; Mount credits Mrs. White, of Sargent's later portrait *Mrs. Henry White*, as introducing them, while James's biographer Leon Edel claims that it was their mutual friend Mrs. Boit (mother of the children in *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*), who had the privilege of introduction.³⁶

While I find the latter suggestion to be more likely, due to Mrs. Boit and James sharing a mutual friend in Henrietta Ruebell, regardless of exact personages involved James and Sargent had definitely met by spring of 1884 – as we have seen he was amongst the few at the Pater/Sargent tea party that summer. James remarks in a letter to his brother from 20 February of that year: 'I have seen several times the gifted Sargent, whose work I admire exceedingly and who is a remarkably natural and charming fellow.'³⁷ The friendship was of enough merit, to James at least by this point, for the writer to encourage Sargent's move to England in March

³⁶ See Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 68; Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Middle Years 1884-1894* (London: Hart-Davis, 1963), 45; Charteris, *John Sargent*, 70.

³⁷ Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 92.

of that year by making important introductions between Sargent and major English painters. They not only visited the studios of Sir Frederic Leighton (then President of the Royal Academy) and John Everett Millais, but James also threw a dinner party for Sargent, where he again met Burne-Jones (Sargent and Lee had first visited Burne-Jones's studio in the summer of 1881).³⁸ James amusingly remarked after a later additional visit to Burne-Jones's studio: 'Burne-Jones was adorable and we had a charming hour... but I am afraid poor dear, lovely, but slightly narrow B.J. suffers from a constitutional incapacity to enjoy Sargent's- finding them "in such want of finish." [sic]³⁹

While from this initial gathering we can ascertain that it was James who helped Sargent with introductions to the Aesthetic painters in England and widened the circle introduced to him through Lee, it is also pertinent to note another, more relevant thread of connection that ran between them. Both men also stood as prominent cosmopolitan figures, representing the label in both literature and art. W. Graham Robertson, in describing their relationship in his memoirs, called them: 'Renegade Americans both, each did his best to love his country and failed far more signally than does the average Englishman: they were *plus Anglais que les Anglais* with an added fastidiousness, a mental remoteness that was not English.'⁴⁰ Born in New York City, James's father, Henry James, Sr., was a well-known intellectual who frequently moved his family between Europe and America (much like Sargent's mother). James the son made an early career contributing to American publications from Paris in 1875 before moving formally to England in 1876, where he would settle relatively permanently (aside from his frequent travels abroad) until the end of his life. Though his works are well known for engaging with the concept of the American abroad, James remarked personally on

³⁸ See Appendix B, Figure 2.

³⁹ Edel, *The Middle Years*, 48. This mention of Burne-Jones as relating Sargent's work to a 'want of finish' is interesting in the context of Sargent's comparisons to Whistler (which I will make in due course in this chapter). For an exploration of Burne-Jones's role as one of the witnesses for Ruskin's defence in Whistler's trial against him for slander in 1878, see Robin Spencer, *James McNeill Whistler* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 56.

⁴⁰ Robertson, *Time Was*, 240.

the concept of his own cosmopolitanism at least twice, first, in a letter to Grace Norton from 9 August 1877:

To tell the truth, I find myself a good deal more of a cosmopolitan (thanks to that combination of the continent and the U.S.A. which has formed my lot) than the average Briton of culture; and to be – to have become by force of circumstances – a cosmopolitan, is of necessity to be a good deal alone.⁴¹

And secondly in a letter dated 29 October 1888 to his brother William, where his concern with being ‘cultured’ and its relationship to his chosen multi-nationalism again appears:

I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing in England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries), and so far of being ashamed of such ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized. [*sic*]⁴²

This repeated blending of ideas of ‘culture’ and being ‘civilized’ seems to form for James the main drive towards a cosmopolitan identity. He echoes in some manner Baudelaire’s concept about the modern artist being a ‘man of the world’ as I have discussed in Chapter One. However, in order to embrace this idea of modernity through travel and cultural influence, James states that it is a choice that requires a ‘necessity to be a good deal alone.’ Both James and Sargent were notably inveterate bachelors, choosing to have female family members or trusted servants run their respective households. Though society frequently attempted to right this ‘wrong’ as it were, with rumours of their respective engagements frequently appearing amidst the society gossip, both men remained steadfastly dedicated to self-cultivation rather than procreation.

It has been rumoured, and even addressed by some art historians, that this was most likely due to their homosexual inclinations, but what I perceive to be a

⁴¹ Leon Edel, *Henry James Letters, Volume II: 1875–1883* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1975), 134.

⁴² Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, eds. *William and Henry James: Selected Letters* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 208.

wider concern running through both Sargent and James is that being cosmopolitan, *as well as* potentially being homosexual, are both indications of ‘outsider’ status. Both men’s drives toward cosmopolitanism set them outside of traditional social norms, of setting up a house and raising a family, for example. This fits in well with their mutual friendship with Vernon Lee, whose status as an outsider was seen in her portraits in her choice to dress in men’s clothing and remain unmarried (because she too was homosexual). Cosmopolitanism, and the choice to cultivate it, was indicative of what could be considered a ‘bizarre’ interest, and if they were attracted to living on a social fringe, then their Aesthetic interests and roles do not seem so unfounded. Graham Robertson was right, at least in theory, in labelling them renegades, but what I would like to focus on is their social and artistic ‘revolt’ as it were, and not their perceived sexual ones.

That they were united in their choice to cultivate their identities as multinational is, however, only a small part of the equation that drew James and Sargent together. James definitely acted as a significant social contact for Sargent’s transition into London society as we have seen, but their relationship, at least in the context of encouraging Sargent’s Aesthetic tendencies, goes much deeper. Though James seemed outwardly and in print to shirk aesthetic culture, he was still deeply steeped within it, of note finding influence in Pater’s *Renaissance*.⁴³ Richard Ellman writes that James came across a copy of Pater’s text while in Florence, writing to his brother William on 31 May 1873 that he was ‘in flames’ about buying it and that it ‘treats of several things I know nothing about.’⁴⁴ ‘Flames’ is a provocative term – if anything it recalls Pater’s renowned phrase in the book’s conclusion, ‘to burn

⁴³ For additional information regarding James’s ‘snubbing’ of Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic culture, and what that might have actually represented, see the first chapter of Mendelssohn, *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture*, 22-89.

⁴⁴ Henry James to William James, 31 May 1873 in Leon Edel, *Henry James Letters, Volume I: 1843-1875* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1974), 390-392; discussed in Richard Ellman, “Henry James Amongst the Aesthetes”, in *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, ed. John. R. Bradley (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 25. Apparently James wrote this letter in response to his brother’s admonition that living in Florence kept him too isolated to review new publications, such as Pater’s, which his sister Alice had already read and called ‘exquisite.’

always with a hard, gemlike flame', but also to colloquial descriptions of an overt or 'flaming' homosexuality.⁴⁵ The latter holds some potential, and may allude to James's lack of knowledge of 'several things' that Pater discusses, namely his more homoerotic subject matter found in the essays on Winckelmann and Leonardo. Another intriguing use of language here is James's crediting of Pater with bestowing upon Botticelli 'the tribute of an exquisite, supreme curiosity,' and that there is no more for him to say as 'Mr. Pater has said it all.'⁴⁶ James seems to be using 'curiosity' in a very specifically Aesthetic fashion here, echoing not only my previous definitions for the term in the first chapter, but also denoting its wider use in Aesthetic texts to allude to same-sex predispositions. Henry James was in the know, it seems, but he didn't really want anyone to know it.

Though James frequently shied away from any overt implications of his own proclivities (and those of the aesthetes), he did thread Pater's influence into his work, especially in *Roderick Hudson* which appeared serially in *The Atlantic* in 1875, a mere two years after his encounter with *The Renaissance*. For example, the titular character speaks frequently of his 'impressions' of people and things of beauty, mentioning that they come 'sweeping along, and they all melt like water into water', finally proclaiming them 'curious things'. This has clear evocations of Pater's insistence in the Conclusion of *The Renaissance* that impressions were like a 'whirlpool' and 'stream', ever flowing and quick moving.⁴⁷ However, his companion, Rowland Mallet, insists that with this emphasis on 'impressions' and living in the moment for pleasure, Roderick has 'faltered and drifted, you have gone on from accident to accident', so while James at least initially seemed to be impressed and moved by Pater's work, his later approach tends openly to reject it, chastise it or subvert it as silly or inconsistent.⁴⁸ This small example shows, at least in part, that

⁴⁵ Pater, *Renaissance*, 250.

⁴⁶ Henry James, "Florentine Notes", *Italian Hours* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 295 -296.

⁴⁷ Henry James, "Roderick Hudson- III", *The Atlantic Monthly* 35, no. 209 (March 1875): 298; Pater, *The Renaissance*, 247.

⁴⁸ Henry James, "Roderick Hudson-VII", *The Atlantic Monthly* 36, no. 213 (July 1875): 60.

Henry James, like Sargent, was open to Aesthetic culture and texts, but unlike his painter friend, he was unable to embrace openly his own attractions to the 'curious, strange, bizarre' for fear of the consequences of its connection.

James's real thoughts about Aesthetic culture may have been easier to express under the guise of an external application to Sargent, as can be seen in his lengthy *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* article on Sargent from October 1887. As an American author writing from Britain for a prestigious American journal, James's essay immediately establishes an international connotation for both author *and* subject, bolstered by the opening paragraph, which first ponders the question of Sargent's 'supposed' nationality.⁴⁹ To briefly summarise the monograph topically, the essay runs through what James calls a 'rapid review' of Sargent's first major Salon paintings, starting with *Carolus-Duran* and ending with the 'recent' *Mrs. Henry White*. Mount recounts that this was written 'four years before' in 1883; however, I consider it was more likely written two years previous, in 1885, due to the fact that James discusses Sargent's 'recent productions' – *Lady Playfair* and *Mrs. Henry White* – and their exhibition at the Royal Academy of that year.⁵⁰ However, publication in October of 1887 would have been a very opportune time for this article to appear in an American journal – Sargent had just received one of his first major American commissions, a portrait of Mrs. Henry Marquand, and left for Newport, Rhode Island in August of that year. This portrait, in combination with the press provided by this essay, marked an entry point into the wealthy American circles that would dominate his career for the next twenty years. So while it has been established that James was key for his nascent foundation in England, so too did he provide his services again in order to do the same in the United States.

James's text works through a method of picking apart, as this dissertation seeks to do, the minutiae of names, styles and movements to which Sargent is being associated in his early career, significantly that of 'Impressionism.' Recall the quote from Chapter One regarding his initial labelling of Sargent as an 'Impressionist',

⁴⁹ James, "John S. Sargent", 683. Please see pg. 1 of my Introduction, where this quote is repeated.

⁵⁰ Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 107; James, "John S. Sargent", 691.

reproduced here: 'From the time of his first successes at the Salon he was hailed, I believe, as a recruit of high value to the camp of the Impressionists, and today he is for many people most conveniently pigeon-holed under that head.'⁵¹ *Conveniently pigeon-holed* is a striking turn of phrase here, implying hidden knowledge that Sargent's own agenda was not widely comprehended, so he was labelled in certain ways in order to provide a modicum of social understanding. This label was also convenient because it passed his work off as *chic*, of the now and avant-garde, or more notably for British and American purposes, French and thus 'bad', as earlier discussed. What is important here, however, is that James's ensuing discussion on Sargent's relationship to the 'impression' walks a fine line between the British and French delineation of the term set forth in previous chapters, signifying for my purposes a point towards the wider concept of a global Aestheticism.

To start with the facts, in an article that is only nine pages long, James uses the word 'impression' or 'Impressionist' nine times; a word more often repeated than any other in the article, implying at least a basic level of significance through common usage. The majority of these appear after the earlier mentioned 'pigeon-holed' quote about Sargent being an 'Impressionist'. But what does that mean for James? His concern seems to lie less on objects and more on artistic vision; rendering an impression is only deemed 'fruitful' if the impression is valid (James does not quantify this validity). Later on he equates the 'impressionist' practice as one of simplification, a solution to an artistic problem which he oddly he does not define for the reader.

However, when stating that Sargent is involved in this process of impressionistic 'simplification,' as in he 'simplifies... but he simplifies with style, and his impression in most cases is magnificent', James could be referring to the concept of the 'impression' as a quick method of capturing a scene, evoking again the tonal mapping method of Velazquez and the loose brushwork of the Impressionists.⁵² Sargent 'simplifies', perhaps meaning that he pairs down his movements for maximum efficiency, in order to capture sudden events. However,

⁵¹ Ibid., 684.

⁵² Ibid.

this literal 'impressionistic' method is then shifted back to a discussion regarding experience and subjectivity. *Lady with a Rose* (Fig. 40) leaves a 'remarkable impression' on him, a term used more to delineate its beauty, while *The Boit Daughters* is defined as a 'comprehensive impression.' *El Jaleo* expresses the 'latent dangers of the Impressionist practice' which is previously defined as a 'want of finish' while finally, that the 'impression' left on many by Sargent's later portraits was one of the 'cleverness', in that he deals adroitly with conveying a complex scene of sensation and movement.⁵³

In these examples are usages of the 'impression' ranging from one of artistic perception, or how the artist sees the world - his 'impression'- to a description of loose brushwork, i.e. 'Impressionistic', implying a scene of beauty that evokes emotion. James runs the gamut of the optical impression, the method-related impression, as well as the sensual, experience-based impression. He also uses terms I have defined in the previous chapter as relating to aesthetic-based art – 'sketch' and 'cleverness'. In a small article, James uses one word to imply what eight years of critical review data have previously represented, and he's doing it all, again, in relation to Sargent. What this reads for the purposes of the current argument, and what James acknowledges at the outset from the quote in my Introduction, is that Sargent and his art, and the 'impression' at this stage are all consistently defined on multiple levels, and carry varied meanings depending on context, nation, and temperament. Sargent is at once an Impressionist, but being an 'Impressionist' is not what the public generally thinks it means, just as James's own 'impressions' are not consistent throughout the essay, linking Sargent to everything from Whistler, and 'want of finish' as discussed pejoratively in his trial against Ruskin, to the French Impressionists, and purifying the viewed image down to one of optic 'simplicity' to Pater and the 'impression' of the senses. Such connections support the assertion not only of a cosmopolitan a/Aesthetic based focus for Sargent, but also, as close friend and within his circle, denote James as a confident source for these kinds of readings.

⁵³ Ibid., 686-88.

One last facet of this text deserves attention, and it is James's repeated linking of Sargent's impressions (which can be used interchangeably with the word 'paintings' or 'works' in many of their contexts here) as relating to non-normative expression. He describes them alternately as of 'an admirable peculiarity,' 'interesting,' 'uncanny' 'odd and charming,' and that they 'stand for more artistic truth than it would be easy to declare.' However, the most significant statement comes when James asserts the following:

The language of painting – that is the tongue in which, exclusively, Mr. Sargent expresses himself, and into which a considerable part of the public, for the simple and excellent reason that they don't understand it, will doubtless always be reluctant and unable to follow him. The notation of painting, as they call it – the signs by which objects are represented – is a very special affair, and of the special the public at large has always a perceptible mistrust.⁵⁴

This passage evokes parallels with Walter Sickert's comment quoted in the previous chapter regarding Whistler and the audience's general mistrust of any artist who works under a guise of 'eccentricity', or 'affectation'.⁵⁵ James appears to be saying that Sargent is indeed young, 'clever' and quite talented, and it is just this kind of bravura that alienates the public at large. But there is also something deeper to be read beneath James's discussions of painting as a 'language', which again recalls the discussion of symbolic language from Chapter One. There are two potential ways this could be understood; the first is that as an artist, trained in drawing and painting, Sargent contains the skill to translate three-dimensional objects onto a flat surface, and this idea of 'translation' connects back to painting as a 'language'.

However, in that discussion from the previous chapter, I put forth that in regards to a specific relation to Aestheticism, the language of painting is also a vehicle for the Aesthetic artist to convey and translate his impressions and subjective experience, one which revolved around a defined sets of codes and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 686.

⁵⁵ See n.75 in Chapter One for reference.

parameters not privy to the general public. It is possible to read James's quotation here as working within the latter parameters. He openly acknowledges that Sargent's works are not understood by the general public, and calls this language one of 'signs' and 'notations' – things which, at their very definition, need to have a signifier to which one can refer back. Coupling this discussion of 'language' and 'signs' in an article on Sargent, which repeatedly discusses 'impressions' can thus be read to bolster my argument here about Sargent's symbolic Aesthetic programme. James, as one within the inner circle, knew Sargent was working within an Aesthetic agenda, and by acknowledging that the public would not be 'in' on what he was trying to do, he thus supports my insistence that Sargent's works were meant not as flashy examples of his own bravura, but as rather composed treatises on contemporary Aesthetic subjects and concerns.

Again, it was most likely easier for James to be so blunt about such matters because this article deals not with his own identity, but that of his friend, who through his open relationships with Aesthetic figures did not necessarily shy away from such associations. But I would like to point to one last interesting connection between James, Sargent and Aestheticism, one that I think will solidify my point. I insisted at the outset of this chapter that I would base my discussions in some respect on visual works, and Henry James is no exception. Sargent executed, as with Vernon Lee, two portraits of the man from life, one a pencil drawing and finally a later, more formal portrait in oil (of which there is also a preparatory study in pencil). Oddly enough, the first image, executed in 1885, was later reproduced in the highly Aesthetic *Yellow Book* in July 1894 (Fig. 41) in a contradictory manner to James's seemingly (public at least) insistence that he had a distaste for Aestheticism as a whole.

The first James drawing was executed at Broadway in 1886, presumably while Sargent was painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. Charteris remarks that this is the second of a round of James portrait sketches executed during this period, the first being destroyed because, as Sargent amusingly proclaimed, it was 'impossible

to do justice to a face that was all covered with beard like a bear.⁵⁶ This second and final image first appeared in *The Yellow Book* some seven years later, and was also later used as the frontispiece for Percy Lubbock's 1920 edited collection of James's letters. It is a simple line drawing, done in profile and cropped close to the face, his eyes wide and intense and his head already balding, complete with 'impossible beard'. As a drawing it has little Aesthetic implications or allusions, and is sober in comparison to the more dandified portraits of Sargent that Giovanni Boldini was executing around this period (Figs. 42&43), which might have been more at home in this type of publication. It was most likely used more as a simple illustration to show the face of the author, as it appears in the middle of the journal, some hundred pages before James's short story *The Coxon Fund*, which is printed at the end. What is striking however is that although there was a sort of public distance between James and Aestheticism, as I have argued earlier, perusal of all journal editions shows that James submitted five stories over the span of the journal's mere thirteen volumes.

The question then appears as to repetition, reputation and implication. If James is contributing repeatedly to *The Yellow Book*, does it hint that he was secretly highly Aesthetic? If Charteris's description of the journal's dual appeal is to be believed, not necessarily: he implies that the extent of 'decadence' depended often upon which volume you opened, and that many times the reader 'might have been reassured by finding contributions from Henry James, Edmund Gosse, Arthur Benson and Sir Frederick Leighton, P.R.A.' [sic]. Sargent's response to a request from Beardsley in 1894 asking permission to reprint his portrait of Gosse in the journal also further complicates the reading, as Sargent states that his refusal was due to his thought that 'from an artistic point of view I dislike that book too much to be willing to seem a habitual contributor.'⁵⁷ If this side is to be believed, both James and Sargent did not necessarily view their inclusion in *The Yellow Book* to be one that publicly announced their own Aesthetic leanings.

⁵⁶ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

However, as both Chapter One and Two have established, there is always an external and internal view of things, and these can be quite often contradictory. James clearly had a 'flaming' attraction to Pater and *The Renaissance*, as previously mentioned, and while Sargent here seems to balk at any connection with *The Yellow Book*, Charteris does also mention that Sargent had a certain affinity for Beardsley, often 'linger[ing] delightedly over [his] illustrations, commending their rhythm and line and the invention of their composition.'⁵⁸ Both men's connection to Beardsley and his art through this portrait and *The Yellow Book* allude greatly to their deeper Aesthetic affiliations, and though both men may have not openly stated support for the movement, these actions quietly speak volumes as to their true alignments.

In flashing forward to 1912-13, on the occasion of James's seventieth birthday, we find Sargent's last depiction of James: a sketch, done in preparation for the portrait (Fig. 44), and its resulting oil, now in the National Portrait Gallery (Fig. 15), the latter of which was given in private to King George V in March 1916 upon the occasion of the author's death. Looking much older, weathered in part by his abhorrence to the Great War, Sargent's depiction of James shows a man refined and well dressed, with all the accoutrements of a London gentleman. By this stage in their lives, both men had passed forwards out of their youthful aesthetic leanings; the twentieth century presented more pressing matters to their careers than the capturing of beauty and the camaraderie between men. James here lacks the intensity of his early portrait from 1885, but his remarks upon viewing it showed that it depicted exactly the identity he wished to convey, similarly to Lee's comments regarding her own Sargent portrait. To Miss Rhoda Broughton: 'it is nothing less evidently, than a very fine thing indeed, Sargent at his very best and poor H.J. not at his worst; in short a living breathing likeness and a masterpiece of painting.'⁵⁹ W. Graham Robertson, ever astute, remarked thoughtfully upon this work, implying perhaps that the understanding between Sargent and James was one kept in private: 'His portrait by Sargent, one of the true men who really knew

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Henry James to Miss Rhoda Broughton, 25 June 1913, quoted in Percy Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1920), 2: 317.

him, should have supplied a clue to the true Henry James that no one else could have found: perhaps the artist intentionally withheld it.⁶⁰

If Carolus-Duran has been marked as one of the earliest figures to encourage Sargent's innate sense of a visual cosmopolitanism, then it can be said that it was Lee, and then James who continued this work after Sargent had long left Paris. Aside from transplanting him directly into the artistic and Aesthetic circles in London in the mid-1880s, James's own struggles to comprehend and come to terms with Aestheticism and its sexual and social implications no doubt formed discussions and deeper connections with Sargent, and, significantly, Vernon Lee, who dedicated her first novel, the notorious *Miss Brown*, to him in 1884 (though apparently much to James's distaste). Her relationship with James in a way paralleled that of her relationship with Pater; their correspondence notes that she often sent him drafts of her writing for criticism and review. A letter from 1 December 1886 encourages their intellectual discussions; 'Your letter is full of interesting remarks, of food for future conversations,' while a letter of May 23 1887 thanked her for her suggestions 'all so courteous and cordial – or rather, I should say of many of the latter, intellectual.'⁶¹ If Henry James was struggling with Pater's texts in the early 1870s, as evidence has suggested, it was mostly likely his later friendship with Vernon Lee, and also potentially Pater, who helped him sort out his thoughts. Thus, at the end juncture of Sargent's early career, with which this dissertation ends, it is possible to establish a triangular link between these three figures, establishing an intellectual, forensic, and at often times combative atmosphere of knowledge from which Sargent, no doubt, drew inspiration.

James McNeill Whistler

The last figure to be discussed in this circle is, it could be argued, its most controversial. Calling Vernon Lee combative, at least in the context of her relationship with Henry James, who once called her a 'tiger-cat' seems to pale in

⁶⁰ Robertson, *Time Was*, 240.

⁶¹ Weber, "Henry James and His Tiger-Cat", 677-78.

comparison to the public persona of antagonism James McNeill Whistler created for himself. Indeed D.G. Rossetti, in a limerick regarding Whistler's double arrest for assault in 1867, remarked amusingly upon the painter's aggression.

There's a combative Artist named Whistler
Who is, like his own hog—hairs, a bristler:
A tube of white lead
And a punch on the head
Offer varied attractions to Whistler. [sic]⁶²

Unlike Sargent and James, and to some extent Vernon Lee, Whistler continuously craved attention by the public eye, frequently giving lectures, correcting critics, and in the most extreme case, attempting to prosecute certain individuals for libel. Though the latter eventually bankrupted him, he was never one to forgo the opportunity to capitalise on the free publicity it brought, broaching the subject again in his not so subtly titled *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* of 1890. Whatever Whistler's overriding intentions for remaining in the public consciousness, be it money, fame, or simply to satisfy his own sense of ego and self worth, one thing is clear. The constant media buzz surrounding him ultimately signified him as a titular figure of the Aesthetic Movement, a laurel which would pass to Oscar Wilde and the second generation of aesthetes when the latter, including Sargent, began following in Whistler's footsteps in the 1880s.

To be associated with Whistler, in form or another, was to be associated with Aestheticism, and, as Walter Sickert stated in the previous chapter, the 'impressionistic' movement in art. However, Whistler's brand of Aestheticism was significantly multicultural, much like Sargent's, but it was an approach that Whistler established long before Sargent ever entered onto the art scene. On a perfunctory level, both Whistler and Sargent's early careers ran somewhat parallel after their training in Paris began – when Whistler arrived in 1855, he studied at the *École Impériale et Spéciale de Dessin* before entering the studio of Charles Gleyre, who taught a method similar to Carolus-Duran's tonal mapping method –

⁶² W.M. Rossetti, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Ellis, 1911), 274.

emphasizing the placement of tones without the need for detailed preparatory drawings.

He taught that, before a picture was begun, the colours should be arranged on the palette: in this way, he said, difficulties were overcome, for once the work was started, attention could then be given unreservedly to the drawing and modelling of the subject on the canvas in colour. It was the system Whistler endeavoured to follow his whole life.⁶³

In addition to this, it was Gleyre's studio, again like Carolus-Duran's, which was populated by a predominantly English grouping of students. It was here that Whistler met George Du Maurier, Edward Poynter, and Thomas Armstrong, while also befriending Alphonse Legros and Henri Fantin-Latour, a friendship epitomised by Whistler's inclusion, in the centre of the composition, in the latter's 1864 group portrait *Hommage à Delacroix* (Fig. 46), a work which could be categorised as a visual manifesto of an early French Aestheticism with its inclusion of figures like Baudelaire and Manet. Whistler moved to England formally in 1859 to cultivate his contacts there, but his focal placement amidst a collection of such major figures in the French Realist movement showed that even after his departure, his ties to France and French art remained significant.

Whistler's career in London in the 1860s and 70s show his most consequential interactions with major Aesthetic figures; his exhibition in 1862 of his 'Thames Set' of etchings earned the praise of Baudelaire,⁶⁴ while in 1862 he met A.C. Swinburne, who helped introduce the 'art for art's sake' philosophy to him, and who also provided an introduction to D.G. Rossetti. These connections occurred simultaneously while Whistler was being painted into Fantin's *Hommage* and

⁶³ E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), I: 50.

⁶⁴ Baudelaire remarked on Whistler's work twice in regards to this series, once in "L'eau-forte est à la mode", *Le Revue Anecdotique*, (April 2, 1862) and the second entitled "Peintres et Aqua-fortistes", in *Le Boulevard* from September 14, 1862 (both printed in the source cited below). For the English translation, see Charles Baudelaire, "Painters and Etchers", quoted in Charles Baudelaire, *Art in Paris: 1845-1862, Salons and Other Exhibitions*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1965), 220.

painting seascapes with Courbet in Trouville.⁶⁵ Thus the period between 1860 and 1870 shows Whistler, as Sargent would do later in the mid 1880s, encompassing both a French and British Aesthetic identity, using the influences of writers and artists from both countries to inform the more Aesthetic elements of his art.⁶⁶

Whistler's relationship and the later extent of influence he would have on Sargent comes in a wholly different respect to that of Carolus-Duran, the only other painter in this group, and James and Lee. Sargent did not meet Whistler until the middle of the period under discussion, in Venice in the fall of 1880, but he most likely would have known of him and his art through their mutual circles in Paris. Whistler had travelled to Venice under commission by the Fine Arts Society in 1879 to produce a series of etchings; virtually bankrupt after his trial against Ruskin, Whistler was happy to oblige, not returning until November 1880. Though historians have long argued about the exact nature of their meeting, Sargent did take a studio in Venice from September until March 1881, leaving a potential period of two months for them to meet in so close in an artistic colony. Sargent also took studios in the Palazzo Rezzonico⁶⁷, one of Whistler's rumoured studio locations, although the Pennell biographies call this into question, and Otto Bacher, in his

⁶⁵ Fantin-Latour also painted a second group portrait entitled *Le Toast*, which he submitted to the Salon of 1865 but which he later destroyed. The Louvre holds preliminary sketches of the work, which included a group of eight to ten figures, including Whistler and Rossetti, surrounding a nude female model (or statue perhaps) with the word 'VERITE' circled above her head (Fig. 47). If Fantin-Latour did intend to mix Rossetti and Whistler with major French artistic and literary figures, this concept of a cosmopolitan Aesthetic group becomes much more significant. See Robin Spencer, "Manet, Rossetti, London and Derby Day", *The Burlington Magazine* 133, no. 1057 (April 1991), 228-29 and Douglas Druick and Michael Hoog, *Henri Fantin-Latour* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1983), 176.

⁶⁶ See also Richard Dormont, "Whistler and British Art", and Geneviève Lacambre, "Whistler and France", both in *James McNeill Whistler*, eds. Richard Dormont and Margaret F. Macdonald (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 23-28; 39-48.

⁶⁷ Emily Sargent to Vernon Lee, 22 September 1880: 'He expects to remain on here [in Venice] indefinitely, as long as he finds he can work with advantage & has taken a studio in the Palazzo Rezzonico, Canal Grande, an immense house where several artists are installed...' Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *Figures and Landscapes: 1874-1882*, vol. 4 of *John Singer Sargent: Complete Paintings* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 133. See also Sargent's *Venetian Women in the Palazzo Rezzonico* (Fig. 48).

With Whistler in Venice insists on a location of the Casa Jankovitz for 1880.⁶⁸ If this is the case, it is not altogether unlikely that Whistler either frequently moved studios, with one of them being in the Palazzo, or often borrowed space from fellow artists there, a habit of his even in London.⁶⁹

Regardless of whether or not they did share a building, documentation does exist recounting Whistler's awareness of Sargent's imminent Venetian arrival. Bacher elusively states 'John Sargent he [Whistler] looked upon as a clever man, but had no method of gauging him as he now stands.'⁷⁰ The Luke Fildes biography recounts that while in Venice, sometime between August and September 1880, he did discuss Sargent's forthcoming appearance with Whistler, with Whistler expressing apprehension about being potentially usurped by his American compatriot. Henry Woods, the English Neo-Venetian painter, reportedly retorted to Whistler that 'One sergeant doesn't make a battalion any more than one whistler makes an orchestra,' a statement Whistler often liked to repeat at public receptions.⁷¹ In addition to this, the conflux of their social circles also contributes to a likely meeting between the two. Sargent's friend Ralph Curtis, fellow pupil of Carolus-Duran, arrived in Venice to study under Frank Duveneck. Duveneck's 'boys' were frequent friends and followers of Whistler, including Curtis, who painted Whistler in his *James McNeill Whistler at a Party* (Fig. 49) around the winter of

⁶⁸ 'Some say that Whistler first took rooms at the Palazzo Rezzonico, the palace now owned by Mr. Barrett Browning. Mr. Ralph Curtis, who lived in Venice, thinks that 'for a time Whistler had, as many did, one of the rooms on the second floor of the Rezzonico as a studio.' His only etching in the immediate neighbourhood is *The Palaces* made, not from an upper window, but from a *traghetto*, or the end of a near *calle*. Had he had rooms or a studio in the upper stories, there would most likely be some record of it from the windows. Mr. Brooks, also in Venice at the time, assures us that Whistler never lived there.' Pennell, *James McNeill Whistler*, 265-266. I have been in contact with Margaret McDonald, who runs the Whistler Archive in Glasgow, and she notes that there is no documentation regarding specific locations of Whistler's studio to her knowledge, but thinks it again likely due to the small nature of the city. She also confides that Ralph Curtis is mostly likely a 'reasonable source'.

⁶⁹ See L.V. Fildes, *Luke Fildes R.A., A Victorian Painter*, (London: Michael Joseph), 65.

⁷⁰ Otto H. Bacher, *With Whistler in Venice* (New York: The Century Co, 1909), 25.

⁷¹ Fildes, *Luke Fildes*, 67.

1880. All these elements most likely colluded in producing a meeting between the two cosmopolitan painters during this period, a friendship that would extend well until the end of Whistler's life.⁷²

Let's return to Sargent and the context of 1880-81. Aside from meeting Whistler, he is also reading Pater and discussing his writings with Vernon Lee, visiting Burne-Jones's studio with Lee, and, as it will be discussed in further depth in Chapter Four, viewing Millais's more Aesthetic works in London. All of this is occurring at exactly the same time that Lee ascribes Sargent as going 'in for art for art's own sake.'⁷³ Meeting Whistler during this period of overt Aesthetic exploration would not only have magnified his identity as Aesthetic, but would also have provided him with a type of mentorship with a figure who was performing under a similar brand of cosmopolitan 'impressionism.' The works Sargent produced after this meeting with Whistler show striking parallels of something one could call mimicry, influence or 'borrowing' with major Whistler works, significantly in the concept of singular tonal and colour studies, which will be explored in more depth in Chapter Five. Compare, for example, *Dr. Pozzi* (Fig. 50) to Whistler's *Harmony in Red, Lamplight* (Fig. 51), or Whistler's now destroyed *Lady Colin Campbell* (Fig. 52) to *Mrs. Henry White*. One comparison that is actually documented from Sargent's own lips is that between Sargent's later 1894 portrait *W. Graham Robertson* (Fig. 53) and Whistler's 1891 *Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac* (Fig. 54). Robertson recounts in his memoir that upon arriving to Sargent's studio, Sargent appeared disturbed.

"I say," he began, "did you ever see Whistler's portrait of Comte Robert de Montesquiou?" "No," said I. "They never would let me see it while it was being painted. Why?" "Well I've never see it either," said Sargent, "until I

⁷² The Whistler Archives in Glasgow have letters between Sargent and Whistler beginning with a loosely dated draft from 1889 until at least 1901 - Whistler died in 1903. As evidenced by the casual and familiar tone of the letters regarding Sargent's nationality at the start of the Introduction, these letters show a relationship of genuine warmth and friendliness, often punctuated by Whistler's eccentric and jovial style, one which mostly likely was only reserved for close confidantes.

⁷³ See Appendix B, Figure 2.

came across it just now in the Champ de Mars. It's just like this! Everybody will say that I've copied it!"⁷⁴

This would not be the first time comparison between Sargent and Whistler had been made. In the summer of 1884, Vernon Lee compares Sargent's *Portrait of T.W. Legh* at the Grosvenor to Whistler's *Lady Archibald Campbell* (Fig. 55), finding praise for both, while the following year insists that the hanging of Sargent's *Portrait of Madame Vickers* (Fig. 56) and the *Portrait of Misses Vickers* (Fig. 57) next to the same *Lady Archibald Campbell* is 'beating John into fits,' most likely due to her assumption that 'John is getting rather into the way of painting people *too* tense. They look as if they were in a state of *crispation de nerfs* [nervous twitching].'⁷⁵

Whistler's importance to Sargent does not lie in the encouragement of a subversive Aesthetic symbolism, as I have asserted, to which Henry James points in his essay on Sargent. Whistler, as a person and an artist, worked decidedly against such metaphors, claiming on so many levels that his work was to be accepted 'as it was' and not 'as it could be.' This is apparent in his remonstrance regarding *Symphony in White No. 1* when he stated that instead of being indicative of a story, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, it 'simply represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain,' a bit like Sargent's own motto 'I only paint what I see.'⁷⁶ Whistler is even known to have offered similar advice to his 'Whistlerites.' In a conversation with Sidney Starr, Whistler told him to follow his own example and 'always paint things exactly as I [see] them,' which Sickert later translated as painting 'exactly what the eye sees,' i.e. what was included in a specific

⁷⁴ Robertson, *Time Was*, 236.

⁷⁵ See Vernon Lee to her mother, 13 June 1884; 25 June 1885 in Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 145; 171.

⁷⁶ "Our Weekly Gossip", *The Athenaeum*, n. 1810 (July 5, 1862): 23.

field of vision. In Sargent's oft used 'I only paint what I see', he was also potentially connecting himself again to Whistler, and British 'Impressionism.'⁷⁷

Though this is undoubtedly important, as it is the closest thing we have to a type of 'Sargent visual doctrine', for this discussion the value of Whistler lies more in the idea of Sargent as an i/Impressionist, and Whistler's contribution as the figure most representative of the first generation of my cosmopolitan Aesthetic Movement. It has been established that Whistler was frequently called an Impressionist; recall from the previous chapter Walter Sickert's assertion that to the English, the term Impressionist only meant one person, and that was Whistler, who repudiated it as a label.⁷⁸ But what exactly does being an Impressionist mean in Whistler's context? We've seen it in Sargent's, but in order to draw certain parallels, it is essential to view it in Whistler's.

An excellent starting point here is a review of Whistler's etchings at the Fine Art Society in 1883, an exhibition shown alongside a Millais retrospective that I discuss in Chapter Four as being influential on Sargent's Aesthetic depictions of children. Whistler's works are named 'impressionist' at the outset, and what this implies is described in the ensuing paragraphs. To paraphrase, the impressionist is concerned with the 'values' of nature, not her detail; Whistler's work is chastised for using an etching medium that has no sympathy with inaccuracy, or the recording of 'informal impressions of the eye.' The critic expresses that since he is not privy to Whistler's private language, i.e. the 'evanescent aspects of the city he knows well,' he is unable to find pleasure in the works. The final conclusion, however, is the critic's main point:

The impressionist should rather breathe upon a glass, and on that vanishing medium transcribe a fleeting vision, than make indelible harsh scratches with the diamond which, corresponding to no distinct image in the mind,

⁷⁷ Whistler quoted in Sidney Starr, "Recollections of Whistler", *Atlantic Monthly* 101 (April 1908): 531. For an in depth discussion on Whistler's Impressionism in London in the 1880s, see "Whistler and his Impressionist Followers at the Royal Society of British Artists", in Robins, *A Fragile Modernism*, 33-66.

⁷⁸ See n.15 in Chapter One for details.

will be a torment to the eye almost before its sudden impression has died away.⁷⁹

I am intrigued by this unnamed critic's distaste for the fact that he views Whistler's works to convey too 'personal' an impression, one to which he does not feel privy. Recall, again, Henry James's mention of the audience not understanding Sargent's work because they were 'peculiar impressions' in the 1887 Harper's article. Aside from this linking to Sargent, there is also the implication that the 'impression' or 'impressionist' is capturing subjective sensations, a delineation which specifically relates to Pater and his definition of 'impressions' as defined in *The Renaissance*.

What is even more crucial, however, is my discovery of Pater's insistence that the work of Whistler and Sargent specifically aligned with these views of the subjectivity of experience as it relates to the i/Impressionist label. In my recent discovery of an un-discussed published review from *The Daily Chronicle* in 1893, Pater responds in print to George Moore's allegations in his recent publication *Modern Painting* that the Impressionist method of painting, insofar as it derives from scientific advances regarding colour and optics, is the downfall of French art.

It is only needful to tell the reader that they fail most conspicuously at the very point where it was their mission to succeed. Instead of excelling in the brilliancy of colour in pictures painted in the ordinary way, they present the most complete spectacle of discolouration possible to imagine.⁸⁰

Pater's need to respond to Moore, publicly no less, is intriguing considering Pater by this point had mostly retired from the public eye, and he would die from a heart attack in July of the next year. According to Moore's publication 'Avowals' in *Pall Mall Magazine* from August of 1904, Moore had pursued an intellectual relationship with Pater around this period, but Pater was seemingly too shy or was

⁷⁹ All quotes from this review are from "The Impressionists and the Values of Nature", *Artist* 4 (1 May 1883): 69-70; reproduced in Flint, *The Impressionists in England*, 62-63.

⁸⁰ See George Moore, "Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, and the Decadence", in *Modern Painting*, (1893): 94, quoted in Flint, *Impressionists in England*, 122-129. Flint notes that this was originally printed under the title "Decadence" in *Speaker* (September 3, 1892).

possibly not interested enough to reciprocate, and perhaps it was this exchange which may have fuelled Pater to respond to Moore in writing considering he had known of him personally.⁸¹

The relevant portion of Pater's response to the subject of Sargent here deals directly with Pater's disagreement against Moore's assertions about the perceived lack of an understood language in contemporary art, one he sees implied by artists such as Reynolds and Constable. Pater instead defines the artist's impressions and language as critical to their execution of a visual i/Impressionism, and defines it as follows:

The secret of both his [the artist's] likes and dislikes, his hatred of what he thinks conventional and mechanic, together with his very alert and careful evaluation of what comes home to him as straightforward... whether in Paris or in modern England; with Mr Whistler, for instance, and Mr Sargent; his belief in the personal, the incontrollable.⁸²

Pater's discussion of the personal 'impression' solidly places Whistler *and* Sargent in the British Aesthetic use of the term; however, what is also significant is that Pater is using this definition in a response to Moore's discussions on French Impressionism. Pater on one hand refers to the movement as 'Impressionism' and in the outset of the second paragraph refers to Moore as a 'lover of French art,' it is this love that has inspired his critical passion on the subject. However, he then makes reference to Constable and Reynolds and British art, before concluding the discussion by mentioning contemporary artists in the form of Whistler and Sargent.

By 1893, these issues of French versus British aesthetics and the hierarchical validity of one over the other were still of relevance – enough so that the usually private Pater felt he had to speak out. That he names Whistler and

⁸¹ See George Moore, "Avowals.vi. Walter Pater", *Pall Mall Magazine* 33 (August 1904): 527-533; reproduced in R.M. Seiler, ed., *Walter Pater: A Life Remembered* (Alberta: University of Calgary, 1987), 107-117.

⁸² Walter Pater, "Review of 'Modern Painting'", *The Daily Chronicle* (10 June 1893): 3, quoted in Flint, *Impressionists in England*, 130 and Walter Pater, *Sketches and Reviews* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 149-150.

Sargent as being the main artists who are representative of this international discussion on the impression, in both a French *and* British context, fully supports the main assertions of this dissertation, giving weight to my argument that Sargent was acting as, or at some point became, the leader of the second generation of this widespread Aesthetic culture, enough so that Pater clearly links him with Whistler on the subject. In one small page, Pater brings together the flux of issues present in the discussions on Sargent, Whistler, and the impression in art, giving support to a new generation of artists that he felt, at least, deserved public support and merit.

The aim of this chapter, and Chapter One before it, is to provide and set the scene not only of the aesthetic culture, relationships and mentors Sargent encountered in his early career, but also to place Sargent squarely into late nineteenth-century discussions on the 'impression.' Each of these four figures were engaging with this concept in their own right; Vernon Lee was writing about it and discussing it with Pater; Carolus-Duran was teaching his students how to capture it correctly by his insistence on Velazquez and the tonal mapping method; Henry James was reading Pater and infusing it into his works, while also critiquing the varied uses of the 'impression' to describe Sargent's art in publication, while Whistler, as the titular artist of the 'impressionistic' method earlier in the century, forged a relationship with Sargent that saw them linked to international impressions by Pater before his death.

While it is true that we will never know exactly whether Sargent spoke about the impression with any of these figures – conversations in the nineteenth-century are sadly unrecorded in this respect, and we also have Sargent's zeal for destroying letters to thank for that – the question arises as to how to determine his own leanings by looking through alternative angles. By establishing that Sargent was surrounded by figures who made the 'impression' and Aestheticism a forefront to their own artistic and literary explorations, it can be widely assumed that it was a concern which united them, and we can hope at least, as historians, that it encouraged a few spirited, perhaps alcohol fuelled, debates.

The burden of proof that lies now at this juncture will be to extend this to the discussion and analysis of Sargent's art. In my next three chapters, I will explore

very closely three themes which appear in both the French and British Aesthetic literature during this period – foreign exoticism and Orientalism, the child, and colour (specifically black, white and red). My close analysis of how these themes were used in Sargent's works during this period, and close readings of these visual characteristics in relation to French and British Aesthetic texts, will work to prove that Sargent *did* find visual inspiration in the circle which surrounded him. These four figures will appear with striking frequency throughout these case studies, proving that Sargent drew influence from both the animate and inanimate, melting it all together into a sometimes controversial, but always unique, blend of artistic impressions.

Chapter Three

'The Dirty Picturesque': Sargent's Orientalism and Exoticism

In the late- nineteenth century, many of those active in the cult of Aestheticism were driven by an intense desire to travel abroad to the farther reaches of the globe. Exotic skin tones and scents, the sounds of foreign tongues, and the crisp colour and decoration of the art of the East all had a seductive effect on those who looked and longed for beauty. Sargent was no different. However, inasmuch as he found Oriental and exotic cultures as playing into his taste for the 'strange,' he expressed an altogether alternative opinion when discussing his travels with a friend, Miss Popert from a letter of 7 April 1908¹:

My hatred of my fellow creatures extends to the entire race or to the entire white race and when I escape from London to a foreign country my principle is to fly from that species. To call on a Caucasian when abroad is something I never do.²

Sargent had a great flare for sarcasm, so it is possible that he meant such a statement in jest. However, perusal of his more 'exotic' images produced during this early period does suggest that there was a grain of truth in his disavowal of foreign Caucasian interactions. There are never any white European figures present in many of these paintings, not even Sargent himself. Such a fact implies that when Sargent travelled abroad, he may have indeed suffered from what Jules Castagnary quoted in his review of the Salon of 1864 as the Orientalist drive to 'flee Paris, to abscond from the world around them, to escape from the obsession with the real

¹ See three letters from Sargent to Miss Popert, all reproduced in Mount's biography and reproduced in Appendix B, Figures 12, 13, 14. Charlotte Ida Popert (1848-1922), according to Richard Ormond 'studied in Weimar, Rome and with Léon Bonnat, in Paris'. Bonnat's studio ran concurrently to Carolus-Duran's, so it is most likely that Sargent met her during his studies in Paris. For reference to her work as a printmaker, see "Dix Eaux-Fortes par Charlotte Popert", *La Chronique des art et de la curiosité, supplément a la Gazette des Beaux Arts*, n. 18 (3 May 1902): 143. Ormond, *Figures and Landscapes: 1872-1882*, 149, n. 33.

² Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 224.

and present. There is nothing they would not prefer to what is.’³ Though Sargent may not have been wishing to escape modernity in the sense that he wished to live in a fantasy world, far from the strictures of European society, it is possible that when abroad Sargent wished to fully immerse himself in an exotic culture without external influences. In effect, he wanted to have a full *aesthetic* experience without the constant reminders of home. Trevor Fairbrother shares such an interpretation, noting that: ‘He [Sargent] was driven less by the tourist’s urge for recreation than a personal hunger for imagery and experiences to satisfy his personal psychological needs.’⁴ Orientalism, for Sargent at least from the perspective of this letter, appears not to be about the fetishization of non-Western cultures, but rather about a true desire for an alternative a/Aesthetic education.

This idea of Sargent as an ‘embracer of culture’ is not far off from the oft-used cosmopolitan term used to describe him in both a contemporary and art historical context, and being multicultural was as natural to his own identity as that of being an artist. But what I intend to explore in this chapter is the concept that being ‘cosmopolitan’ may have meant something a bit more far-reaching and multifaceted for Sargent – I perceive here that he cultivated an embrace of *all* forms of culture as opposed to solely European ones. This, it will be shown, is in marked contrast to a large majority of Orientalist writers and painters of this period who seem to make an explicit and imperialistic separation in their respective arts between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

It is telling that in the letter to Miss Popert, Sargent appears to almost want to negate this separation and become a part of something else, to the extent that he does not want to be reminded of his European identity when he goes abroad through the interaction with other white friends. This negation belies an

³ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, “Salon de 1864”, from ed. Eugène Spuller, *Salons*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliotheque Charpentier, 1892), I: 1857-1870, 211. This sentiment is also quoted in Flaubert’s *November of 1842* and Baudelaire in “Le Voyage” from *Fleurs du Mal*. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 417.

⁴ Fairbrother, “Sargent’s Genre Paintings”, 47.

interesting attraction to escapism and identity reconstruction that forms an important facet of Aestheticism's visual intent – to create an impressionistic world of the senses either outside of, or in direct inspiration from, contemporary life. In this respect, we can see Sargent making a distinct separation between the two types of environments from which he drew stimulus – those typical and common to the modern cosmopolitan artist, places like Paris and London – and those more far reaching, like Morocco and Spain, which appealed to the deeper aesthete in him in his quests for alternative culture and sensual experience. Though discrete, as I perceive it Sargent did not necessarily find them conflicting, but rather used both backgrounds as a wider complementary pool from which to draw for his images.

In terms of Aestheticism, or even more simply the drive towards aesthetic experience and appreciation of the beautiful, it is possible to connect Sargent's participation in such as contributing to his own sense of a more all-encompassing cosmopolitan identity. If one combines Sargent's attraction to the beautiful in all its forms – the 'strange' and 'bizarre' which the Orient certainly presented to a European artist - with his natural penchant for travel and experience of other cultures, then it is possible to see a potential dissolution of visual boundaries. If Sargent only 'paints what he sees', then he appreciates beauty wherever he finds it, and in this respect it has no limitation to cultural or racial hierarchies. Beauty is 'cosmopolitan' in a wider sense of the word, because beauty appeals to everyone and can be found everywhere. In Sargent's effort to extract the beautiful from the cultural or hierarchical, he created an art that was cosmopolitan in a more distilled form, as one that embraced all kinds of culture, not just the implied European ones. It is this feature of wholeness in Sargent's early art I wish to extract and discuss here by focusing on how he uses the exotic as a complementary source of inspiration to his European methods, exhibition venues and styles.

This method of approach is in some ways more broadly reaching than that taken by some art historians currently exploring the intersections between Aestheticism and Orientalism, of which there is unfortunately a select few. Orientalism is a vast topic to address, as Edward Saïd himself notes in the Introduction to his highly influential *Orientalism*, that in regards to discussions on

late Victorian artistic Orientalism the works are often parcelled into smaller delineations of nationality in a quest to work out the differences between cultural approaches and styles. Two examples of such in recent art historical literature can be seen in the work of Tim Barringer and Nicolas Tromans and their recent exhibition catalogues relating to British Orientalism. Barringer argues that ‘the character of British Orientalism was long regarded as being that of a hard-won realism’ while Tromans echoes that it was also ‘accepted in its own day as a particularly truthful form of art, inasmuch as it disavowed flagrant fantasy.’⁵ This differs markedly from Raymond Schwab’s succinct description of the French approach to an aesthetic based Orientalism:

Art for art’s sake again demanded an Orient appreciated less for itself than as a diversion... . Here the essential concerns come under two headings: local color and the German taste for the fantastic.⁶

To point out a basic dichotomy here is to look at the connections between British Orientalism as being ‘factual’ or ‘realistic’ and the French as being aesthetic and sensually driven, in its preference for ‘local colour’ and the ‘fantasy’. I will return to this separation in a moment in more depth, but a larger issue arises here when an attempt is made to place these kinds of binaries on an artist like Sargent who does not specifically wish to align himself with a particular national identity, inasmuch as the critical reviews seek to do so. The lines becomes blurred when his Orientalist paintings seem to delve well into both ‘types’ of art, or what these men have aligned with French Orientalism’s created fantasy and a British ‘reality’ and ethnography.

As it will be shown, Sargent’s expert blending of the ‘realist’ and ‘fantastical’ in these early works support more a drive towards aesthetic symbolism and

⁵ Tim Barringer, “Orientalism and Aestheticism”, in *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism*, eds. Zeynep Inankur, Reina Lewis and Mary Roberts (Istanbul: Pera Museum Publication, 2011), 243. Tromans quote is cited by Barringer, but comes from the Introduction in ed. Nicholas Tromans, *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 10.

⁶ Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 412.

experience as opposed to a factual or photographic representation. Because of this type of thematic synthesis, the straightforward British/realist and French/artificial binaries cannot function here, and my intent is to instead step outside of these traditional art historical limitations and place Sargent within the open realm of a cosmopolitan Aestheticism, which as I have previously argued attempted to negate such dichotomies. With additional relevancy to Sargent is also a little discussed facet of Aesthetic Orientalism in its attraction to the subconscious and the exotic 'other', evoked by the latter part of Linda Nochlin's statement in her influential "The Imaginary Orient":

If for painters like Gérôme the Near East existed as an actual place to be mystified with effects of realness, for other artists it existed as a project of the imagination, a fantasy space or screen onto which strong desires – erotic, sadistic, or both, could be projected with impunity.⁷

This idea of projection and fantasy also created a distinct separation between culture and painter, a specifically defined sense of 'otherness' that Jonathan Freedman sums up as a form of Aestheticism's 'longing' and 'completion':

British aestheticism's fascination with the Other structures its second major duality. On the one hand, British aestheticism habitually denies the existence or the importance of any phenomenon beyond the confines of the self. Yet for all this polemical praise of solipsism and selfishness, British aestheticism also spends much of its time lamenting the absence of a significant Other whom, it hopes, might somehow be able to complete or reunify the fragmented, isolated self.⁸

For the aesthete then, longing for the other, for the exotic, was a core part of the desire for beauty and strangeness, but it was also a form of magnification of the self in that interaction with the 'Other' allowed personal exploration and growth. Foreign cultures, as weird and wonderful as they were (and still are) intensified the stream of 'impressions' and engaged the Aesthete's inner sense of the appreciation

⁷ Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient", in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 41.

⁸ Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, 35-36.

of beauty. Such travel, it could be said, was part of an ideal Aesthetic education, even though many of its members were not so fortunate or inclined enough to pursue it.

This brings up another core point to make in analysis of Sargent's exotic works here – an understanding of what defines this 'otherness'. In connecting Sargent back to Freedman's statement above is to acknowledge that Sargent was most likely not immune to this sense of Aestheticism's incompleteness. As a true 'man of the world', wandering since birth throughout the reaches of Europe and beyond, a sense of 'belonging' and 'home' most likely eluded him in one form or another - a point conveyed, for example, in the Introduction regarding his labelling as an 'Impressionist' only to be excluded in private by the members of its group. Being cosmopolitan in a way meant being 'other' and 'outsider' because you don't fit into any one specific categorisation.

Sargent did not approach the Orient like many other artists of his time – men like Manet and Renoir who travelled to Spain and the East only reluctantly, or as Raymond Schwab calls them 'chamber naturalists' – because travel for him was a lifestyle as opposed to a temporary cultural experience.⁹ This affected the way he produced art in foreign countries, and in many cases there is a noted sense of distance between Sargent as the painter of these scenes, in the view that he wanted to remain an impartial observer as opposed to dominant participant. Such distance only magnifies his separation between the subject and his experience, and it could be said that his attraction to 'otherness' in these places was a mirror of his own feelings as an outsider. In any respect, all of these elements brought together – aesthetics, strangeness, otherness and cosmopolitanism – all result in a body of works that are significantly different to the Orientalist images being produced at the time, denoting Sargent as an altogether different type of Orientalist painter than the ones that are discussed largely in the art historical record.

In a brief note of background before I turn to the subsequent images is to mention that a significant portion of his education during these early years in Paris

⁹ Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, 411.

came from Carolus-Duran's encouragement to travel abroad and see and experience multiple cultures and types of art for himself. Carolus-Duran's notable passion for Velazquez and Hispanism, inspired by his early viewings of Manet's Spanish pictures in the early 1860s, no doubt planted the seed for Spain and further travels within Sargent's nascent artistic subconscious.¹⁰ This came to fruition in the fall of 1879 when he began a two year on-and-off period abroad, visiting Spain, Morocco, Tunis, and Tangiers, returning to Paris in February 1880, and then traveling further to the Netherlands and Venice, with a final return to Paris in February of 1881. In the majority of these locations, documentation exists indicating that Sargent copied directly from the Old Masters in situ. In Spain the *Libros des copistas* indicates that he was granted permission to copy Velazquez in the Prado, where he spent a record of thirty-seven days making nine copies, seven of which were inventoried in his estate after his death in 1925.¹¹

In the Netherlands, he made copies from Frans Hals and Rubens; in Venice, there was Tintoretto and Tiepolo. These were the artists whom he would later point out to Vernon Lee in an undated letter from 1884-85, noting that 'But some day you must assert that the only painters were Velazquez, Frans Hals, Rembrandt and van der Meer of Delft [Vermeer], a tremendous man.'¹² This was a fertile period of influence for Sargent; before he left, he was submitting highly Impressionistic works like *Oyster Gatherers at Cancale* to the Salon. On his return, he shifts almost completely to *El Jaleo*, earth tones and chiaroscuro, in an obvious homage to the Old Master works he had experienced abroad. Though these experiences did not change his quest to search for aesthetic imagery, it did change the way in which he chose to capture and convey it, shifting his methods from the modern and

¹⁰ Carolus-Duran was said to have viewed Manet's *Le Chanteur Espagnol* in the Salon of 1869. For the full encounter, see Gary Tinterow and Geneviève Lacambre, *Manet/Velazquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), 285.

¹¹ Richard Ormond and Mary Pixley, "Sargent after Velazquez: the Prado Studies", *The Burlington Magazine* 145, no. 1206 (September 2003): 633.

¹² John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee, undated, presumably 1884 or 1885. Collection of John Singer Sargent Materials, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.

straightforward to something a bit more historical and potentially enigmatic. This period between 1881 and 1884 is marked in this dissertation as being the most Aesthetic point in his early career, and it is significant that such a shift occurs *after* these travels, indicating that they had an effect on the type of visual identity he looked to cultivate publicly.

In broader observation, these travels were a defining point in his fostering of his own cosmopolitan Aestheticism. His experience of other cultures at this fertile point in his visual explorations had a significant impact on how he would later bring together elements of multiple national styles and sources to create his own visual signature in the first half of the 1880s. But what is also relevant, and nods towards the more esoterically Aesthetic, is that his attraction to the foreign also plays significantly into his penchant for the strange and bizarre, and this period enabled him to cultivate certain Aesthetic tastes in visuals, providing him with the life material to fuel the Aesthetic interests he was exploring in print. This could also have been true in the reverse, as when he returns in 1881, he begins writing to Lee on Pater and claiming himself as an 'intransigent'. The aim here is then to go back to the works he produced during these trips to attempt to ascertain how exactly he was cultivating a cosmopolitan Aestheticism before it was more openly acknowledged by the hints in his letters and actions.

In order to do this, it was essential that I ascertain a contemporary understanding between Aestheticism and Orientalism during this period, if only in order to reach a greater understanding of the context in which Sargent would have found these dialogues in Paris and London in the 1870s and 80s. In a similar method to the criticism, I evaluate the use of certain repetitions in descriptive language as these works discuss Oriental art, and in many cases it will be seen that such language echoes back to Sargent's criticism during this period, and also into his drive towards the 'strange' and 'bizarre'. Use of material from both French and British contexts, as seen in the works of Eugène Fromentin, John Ruskin, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, will also establish that Aesthetic interests regarding the foreign were occurring simultaneously, establishing again the potential of viewing of this as a singular cosmopolitan movement. In this practice, my work wades

through the difficult process of not only establishing a definition for a key aspect of Aestheticism that is not often been discussed academically – it's Orientalism – but also by attempting to work through how Sargent himself fit within this paradigm. Comparisons to other Orientalist works from both French and British artists will also aid in rounding out this exploration, providing clarity to my understanding that Sargent was not exhibiting typically imperialist Orientalist tendencies in these works, which give deference to his quest for the beautiful over the social or political.

The Textual Orient: Fromentin, Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde

It is difficult to peruse the contemporary documentation regarding nineteenth-century Orientalism without coming across the works of the painter and author Eugène Fromentin. Sargent was no different; according to a posthumous recollection of Sargent by Hamilton Minchin in *The Contemporary Review*, Sargent praised the two Fromentin works I will discuss here because 'like Delacroix, he [Sargent] had been there himself.'¹³ What is pertinent to the discussion of a cosmopolitan Aestheticism in this dissertation is a few key points made by Fromentin regarding the aesthetic and visual qualities of Oriental art and their unique relationship to Aestheticism and its 'of its own sake' drives. What is also relevant to Sargent here is Fromentin's further understanding of the Orient as being something that is 'exaggerated, violent and seemingly excessive', as one that 'speaks directly to the eyes' that arouses human 'curiosity', which can be seen to translate directly into Sargent's attractions to the aesthetic and the 'bizarre'. Certain parallels can be made between Fromentin's understanding of the strangeness and otherness of the Orient to the way in which Sargent chooses to depict its more untraditional aspects in the works under discussion, and the textual basis discussed here will help to inform my later visual analysis in this text.

¹³ Hamilton Minchin, "Some Early Recollections of Sargent", *The Contemporary Review* 127 (January 1925): 738.

As evidenced by Sargent's above interest, Fromentin was one of the earliest artists to physically travel to the Orient in the mid-nineteenth century, and thus in some respect has slightly more credibility in his visual processing of the Orient than one of Schwab's 'chamber naturalists'. He visited Algeria thrice – in 1846, 1847 and 1852 - all the while exhibiting corresponding Orientalist scenes in the Salons of 1847 and 1850-51 respectively. Around 1852 he began writing travel journals drawing on his North-African experiences, publishing *Un Été dans le Sahara* in 1857, and *Une Année dans le Sahel* in 1859. Fromentin's description of Oriental art as an art of pure aesthetics comes from the latter text.

The Orient is very special. Its great drawback for us is that it's unknown and new. To begin with, it arouses a feeling alien to art, curiosity, which is most dangerous and that I'd like to ban. The Orient is exceptional, but history attests to nothing beautiful or durable having been created with exceptions. It disregards the basic laws, the only ones worth following. Finally, it talks directly to the eyes, less to the intellect. Not do I think it capable of moving us, meaning those of us – and that's the greatest number – who haven't lived there. In order to understand it they haven't a close familiarity with its customs or perhaps fond memories of it. Even when it's very beautiful, it retains something that resists us, that's exaggerated, violent and seemingly excessive. This is an order of beauty without precedents in either ancient literature or art and which strikes you as bizarre at first.¹⁴

There are two what could be termed early 'Aesthetic' statements here. First is Fromentin's emphasis on the Orient containing a type of beauty that is wild, inaccessible, uncontrolled and decidedly 'unnatural'. Secondly, that this type of non-normative (in the sense that normative was European) beauty 'talk[s] directly to the eyes', parlaying directly into 'art for art's sake' and bolstered again by the fact that this art is described as being without 'precedent,' i.e. textual or didactic basis. Fromentin also uses many previously defined terms here, namely that of 'bizarre' and 'curiosity'. Even though he states that such new feelings of 'curiosity' should be 'banned', he still acknowledges his own uncanny attraction to it, establishing the

¹⁴ Eugène Fromentin, *Une Année dans le Sahel* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1858) quoted in *Between Sea and Sahara: An Orientalist Adventure*, trans. Blake Robinson, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 144.

basis for the Aesthetic penchant for doing the same. These words create a nascent connection to my discussions regarding the language of Sargent's critical reviews in Chapter One, some of which will be discussed again momentarily.

Yet Fromentin was not the only one to understand Oriental art as one that spoke 'directly to the eyes.' John Ruskin, speaking a year before Fromentin's work was published, comes to similar conclusions around this same period. In his "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art Over Nations," delivered at the South Kensington Museum on 13 January 1858, he speaks of Indian art, similarly exotic or 'Oriental' as '*never represent[ing] a natural fact*', and in that vein:

if you chose to investigate the subject more deeply and with other examples, you will find enough to justify you in concluding – that art, followed as such, and for its own sake, irrespective of the interpretation of nature by it, is destructive of whatever is best and noblest in humanity...¹⁵

Ruskin's motives here, however, must be placed contextually, as this statement comes amidst a lecture obviously tainted with his own distaste against India and their role in the Indian Rebellion the previous year, and is perhaps the reason why he labels their art as being 'destructive'. However, I wish to bypass the racial implications of this statement at present to focus instead on Ruskin's linking of Indian art within 'for its own sake' terms, creating a parallel with Fromentin's assertions of the same, and even within the same year. There are also connections to this art being 'anti-naturalistic' which, as I have discussed in Chapter One, links back to Sargent and issues of 'cleverness' and showmanship. Such language grounds Oriental art in a realm outside of classical forms of art and into one of the mystical, exotic, beautiful and artificial – all notably Aesthetic in language and implication.

¹⁵ John Ruskin, "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art Over Nations: A Lecture Delivered at the Opening Meeting of the Architectural Museum, South Kensington Museum, January 13, 1858", quoted in John Ruskin, *The Two Paths: Being Lectures on Art and Its Application to Decoration and Manufacture* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1859), 15.

Yet neither Ruskin nor Fromentin are able to wholly extract Oriental art from the taint of nationalism and imperialistic identities. Ruskin's work hints at the political turmoil between Britain and its sovereign nations, while in *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois Belgique – Hollande* of 1876, Fromentin would later go on to state:

Distant journeys have tempted the painters and many things about painting. The motive for these adventurous excursions was at first that need of new ground proper to all populations grown in excess in one spot, a curiosity for discoveries, and a sort of necessity of changing place in order to invent. It was also the consequence of certain scientific studies whose progress was obtained only by travels around the globe, among climates and races. The result was the style you are familiar with, - a cosmopolitan painting, rather novel than original, very slightly French, which will represent in our history (if history remarks upon it at all) but a moment of curiosity, uncertainty, and unrest, which is really only a change of air tried by people in not very good health.¹⁶

Fromentin makes a traditional statement here that the Oriental art was something that was the product of European discovery, or the 'consequence of certain scientific studies whose progress was obtained only by travels around the globe'. And regardless of how much time an artist spends amidst these cultures, there always needs to be something that is 'slightly French' about the visual result. Oriental art required an element of 'home' in order to be accepted by the viewing public at large – it was not meant as a pure mirror reflection of a foreign culture but rather a 'filtered' view.

Edward Saïd remarks on this in relation to the early Orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy and his approach to Arabic poetry: 'the Orient on its own could not survive a European's taste, intelligence, or patience. Sacy defended the utility and interest of such things as Arabic poetry, but what he was really saying was that Arabic poetry had to be properly transformed by the Orientalist before it could be appreciated.'¹⁷ This seems in direct opposition to Sargent's motto of 'I paint what I see', but rather

¹⁶ Eugène Fromentin, *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois Belgique – Hollande*, (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et C^{ie}, 1876) quoted in *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland*, trans. Mrs. Mary C. Robbins, (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1883), 212-213.

¹⁷ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 128.

that the Orientalist painter more wants to 'paint what I want to idealise.' But what I do find pertinent to Sargent here is Fromentin's descriptions of the Orient as a place of breaking forth, of the painter's searching for new inspiration and new visual ground. In his description that this drive produced an art that was 'cosmopolitan' can relate directly back to Sargent, as not only does the Orient evoke an artist's curiosity and appreciation for different kinds of aesthetics, but it also cultivates their sense of the foreign, the international, enabling them to blur boundaries in their pursuit of the new.

Up until now, the Orient is thus something that is highly aesthetic and for the eyes, exaggerated, violent and new, and encouraging of artistic cosmopolitanism – all elements which Sargent is described as or seen to be participating in in the criticism. Through language there are nascent links here between Aestheticism and one who paints or is attracted to Orientalist imagery. Walter Pater, however, makes a further link in his discussion of oriental art to the realm of symbolism, which is also relevant to my understanding of Sargent's motives during this period as discussed in Chapter One. Pater too, like Fromentin and Ruskin, also sees Oriental art as needing a type of European filter, as he places this statement within a work focusing solely on European artists. In his discussion on the symbolism of Fra Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* in his essay on Winckelmann:

Something of this kind [Angelico's form of symbolism] is true also of oriental art. As in the middle age from an exaggerated inwardness, so in the East from a vagueness, a want of definition, in thought, the matter presented to art is unmanageable: forms of sense struggle vainly with it. The many-headed gods of the East, the orientalised Diana of Ephesus, with its numerous breasts, like Angelico's fresco, are at best overcharged symbols, a means of hinting at an idea which art cannot adequately express, which still remains in the world of shadows.¹⁸

¹⁸ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 216.

However, in the later pages Pater seems to fall into the imperial penchant for marking the 'Orient' as inferior, in his case not to Britain but rather to the humanistic rationality of the Greeks:

In oriental thought there is a vague conception of life everywhere, but no true appreciation of itself by the mind, no knowledge of the distinction of man's nature: in its consciousness of itself, humanity is still confused with the fantastic, indeterminate life of the animal and vegetable world.¹⁹

In placing Oriental art and thought as antagonistic to Classicism, and defining it as something that 'remains in the world of shadows', this only serves to further highlight this art's status as 'other' in his Aesthetic mindset. However, in considering this in the wider context of *The Renaissance*, which repeatedly discusses that attraction to the subversive was one of the driving points in the genius of its great men, an intuitive point needs to be made. Curiosity and attraction to such things, while balanced with a stoic rationality, is what makes great art and artists. Walking ambiguous or queer lines of inspiration open the artist up to new impressions, and if oriental art exists within these realms, then the great artist would be open to these experiences, making them a key part of a/ Aesthetic driven stimuli.

Another note of interest here is Pater's discussion of Oriental art as working within the realm of 'symbols.' Presumably the implication here is that Oriental art must function figuratively because it lacks the developed language for human expression, thus reinforcing racial primitivism and hence needing a 'superior' European filter. However, it is possible to read this in a way that sees Oriental art, in its lack of limits or acknowledgement of natural law, as being more open to the supernatural, or that which is unknown or which 'cannot be adequately expressed'. That the Orient itself is seen as a place wholly in shadow or in symbol has wider links to my discussion of Sargent working within a similarly symbolic Aesthetic visual language. By travelling to the Orient and depicting Oriental subject matter, he too was conveying a language of cultural symbols and preferences for certain

¹⁹ Ibid., 216-217.

types of strange beauty that was appreciated only by a select Aesthetic few. This will become more evident in my discussion of Sargent's images, specifically in his translation of the language of music and dance into the visuals in *El Jaleo*, but what I wish to establish here is that we know Sargent was reading Pater, and perhaps even *The Renaissance* at this stage, so it is possible in a way he saw a deeper symbolic value for Oriental subject matter in his quest for the esoteric and the Aesthetic, and my eventual visual analysis will support this.

Oscar Wilde, as follower of Pater, also spoke of Oriental art and its symbolism and the richness such imagery had for the Aesthete and his own experience. Wilde frequently encouraged his followers to cultivate a taste for non-Western art and objects, a facet of his public persona which Curtis Marez intriguingly argues was a way for him to mediate his own status as an 'outsider' Irishman.²⁰ Outside of the frequent use of Oriental objects and travels to foreign locales as a representation of excess and decadence in *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, Wilde does also mention it briefly in "The Decay of Lying" from 1891:

The whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit. Wherever the former has been paramount, as in Byzantium, Sicily and Spain, by actual contact, or in the rest of Europe by the influence of the Crusades, we have had beautiful and imaginative work in which the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions, and the things that Life has not are invented and refashioned for her delight.²¹

In a manner, Wilde's statement is in itself imitative to that of Pater's without the indicative use of the word 'symbols.' He sets up the essential dichotomy, echoed even in recent art historical discussions, of seeing British Orientalism as a movement of naturalism and realism versus an allegedly 'authentic' native

²⁰ See Curtis Marez, "The Other Addict: Reflections on Colonialism and Oscar Wilde's Opium Smoke Screen", *ELH* 64, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 257-287.

²¹ Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", in *Intentions and The Soul of Man*, vol 4 of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Robert Ross (Boston: The Wyman-Fogg Company, 1908), 25-26.

Orientalism as one without direct referents to life or nature. Yet there is something bubbling under the surface here in Wilde's allusion to European translations of Oriental art and culture, i.e. 'the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions.' Whether or not this 're-interpretation' is viewed as positive or negative Wilde does not explicitly say, but perhaps there is an inner thought that European appropriation of Orientalist elements is not always justifiable. It does, however, link us back to Sargent's initial statement at the start of this chapter, in that though the allure of the exotic is normal, human even, it is difficult to mediate those attractions with a significantly white, European identity. Both Sargent and Wilde's status as 'outsiders' may provide an additional, deeper link here, united as they were within the exclusionary confines of Aestheticism.

To summarise, as seen within these texts, Aesthetic Orientalism is a conflux of three major themes – symbolism, truth (or authenticity) and beauty. What is clear is that European art, or its interpretation of the Orient, is one of transparency – it has a clear language, and is based on natural beauty. Oriental art on the other hand is uncertain, violent, bizarre and 'for the eyes only,' thus necessitating a European translation or framework in order to correct its perceived lack of didacticism. Sargent's form of Orientalism seems to be an amalgamation of all of these elements, oscillating between ethnography and naturalism to fantasy and movement, loose brushwork to factual detail, between realistic colour and pure tonal studies. This approach, it will be seen, always focuses essentially on *beauty* and aesthetics, not nationalistic politics or the imperialism entrenched in such debates. In this way, by being cosmopolitan and *not* 'school' based, his works enable the viewer to engage with and contemplate the beauty of the Orient without having to participate in a dialogue about the rampant ideas of imperialism and scientific superiority. Extraction from narrative - nationalistic or otherwise - enables a purer viewer experience, one rooted more firmly in the sensual, the subjective and the Aesthetic.

Before dealing specifically with Sargent's images, however, a moment of clarity in defining the term 'Oriental' seems necessary. Many of the texts I have previously quoted use the term as an overall blanket phrase to denote anything

non-European; Pater states the 'East,' or pre-Classical antiquity, Ruskin uses it in relation to India, and Fromentin is referring to North Africa. As my visual explorations of Sargent will eventually reveal, while his early travels took him to parts of Africa, the majority of his images during this period are executed in what today is mostly considered European locales, Capri and Spain for example. For purposes of this chapter, when I make reference to Sargent's 'Orientalist' works, I am more using this term not as one to delineate location, but rather to indicate depictions of the 'foreign other' which will also encompass Spain and Italy.

Although many of these works show people of European descent, Sargent hones in on figures that are decidedly ethnically different (i.e. non-white). In Spain, we see the dancing 'gypsy' and Romani peoples, while in Capri he uses models like Rosina Ferrara, whom Sargent indicated to be of an 'Arab' type even though she was of Greek and Italian descent. This appropriation of 'otherness' under the umbrella term of 'Orientalist' and its derivatives echoes Saïd's description of the late nineteenth-century's penchant to turn the topic's 'chameleon-like quality called adjectively "Oriental" [into a kind of] free floating Orient.'²² Thus Sargent's images are not 'Eastern' in the standard delineation of the Orientalist tome, they may still be considered 'exotic' and 'oriental' in the wider definition of a non-Caucasian context. Orientalist will then be used to describe these technically 'European' images because they create a distinct separation of 'otherness'.

Rooftop Rosina: Capri and Naples

Sargent's Orientalist works, in perusal of those presented in his catalogue raisonné, seem to be split into two major camps; architectural studies and scenes of women and/or children in action, i.e. dancing or taking part in local customs. For his part, Sargent oddly shies away from depicting scenes of masculine culture in these foreign locales, relegating the Orient, like many painters before him, to an arena dominated by women and their quiet participation in native life. This was a notably 'sensitive' subject for a male artist when taking into account that none of

²² Saïd, *Orientalism*, 119.

these images of women are overtly sexualised or fetishistic – there are no harems present here – an aspect of his imagery that is also remarked upon in regards to his images of children in Chapter Four. Outside of general themes, many of these images all contain elements that can be categorised as falling within typical French/British paradigms – realistic in their capturing of scenes of Oriental authenticity, and artificial, in that they manipulate perspective, colour, and light in order to capture something ‘beautiful’ as opposed to something ‘factual.’

An excellent starting point is to look at Sargent’s earliest exotic works produced from his 1878 travels to Capri and Naples, which focus on his model and muse Rosina Ferrara. *A Capriote* (Fig. 58) and the rooftop series encompassing *Capri* and *View of Capri* (Figs. 59&60), as well as *Stringing Onions* (Fig. 61) and *Rosina* (Fig. 62) all use her as a model, presented in an odd array of styles and situations. If British Orientalism is, as Barringer states, ‘a hard won realism,’ then the *Capri Peasant – Study* (Fig. 63),²³ a closely cropped side profile view of Rosina’s face, could be considered an ethnographic ‘documentation’ of ‘an Arab type,’ a term which Sargent used to describe her in his letters home.²⁴ This was widely considered Sargent’s intent when the image was shown at the Society of American Artists in 1881.

The head of a Capri peasant-girl, by John S. Sargent, is firmly and neatly painted, and is in itself an interesting profile. One regards it with the curiosity of an ethnologist rather than the pleasure that one expects to get from a work of art. Is this a type from that distinct race settled in Anacapri which is said to have been introduced from Greece? It has the look of the Phenician, and may be profitably compared with the busts at the Metropolitan Museum which were found in Cyprus. [sic]²⁵

²³ Sargent chose to exhibit this work as a stand-alone image, but the similarity between Rosina’s profile and the shape of her hairstyle here to that of his 1879 Salon submission *Dans Les Oliviers Capri* suggest that the later SAA work was either a facial study executed while he prepared for the 1879 work, or a later close study executed to flesh out his submission portfolio.

²⁴ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 48.

²⁵ “Some American Artists. Various Notable Pictures in the Exhibition”, *New York Times*, April 15, 1881, 5.

Scientific exactitude here is considered to be something far from ‘a work of art,’ which seems contradictory to the wider appeal of the highly detailed British Orientalist art of the period, as seen, for example, in the works of John Frederick Lewis. His 1871 *Lilium Auratum* (Fig. 64), an image of a harem woman and her servant in what appears to be a palace garden, could have easily passed for early PRB Millais. In veritable Ophelia-like fashion, each flower can be identified by its species, while the details on the women’s clothing can be followed by their individual decorative stitches. There seems to be a disconnect between what British critics and later art historians are defining as ethnography/realism and something more akin to a kind of higher level of capturing elements, which functions along a more ‘art for art’s sake’ rhetoric in its overwhelming conveyance of sumptuous beauty through intense detail.

Tim Barringer claims that Lewis *not* Aesthetic due to this vested interest in detailed realism; he instead makes a distinct separation between Lewis being an ‘Orientalist’ while someone like Leighton, whom he calls ‘the Aesthete’ was different because ‘he felt no need to evoke with crystal clarity the details of the world evoked in his painting, not to ensure even a superficial coherence of historical period or geographical setting.’²⁶ I do not agree with this view that detail automatically negates a/Aesthetic purpose, and viewing Aestheticism as a cosmopolitan movement aids in better embracing the complexity of what conveying beauty actually represented during this period. Perhaps Sargent’s aim, like Lewis’s, in taking down this amount of detail was not to convey scientific exactitude, or to objectify foreign women into ‘objects for study’ but rather to present beauty through close focus. Michel-Eugène Chevreul, the French colour theorist whom I intend to discuss in further depth in Chapter Five, stated in his *Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and their Application to the Arts*:

It is certain that, in warmer climes, there are brown, bronzed, copper complexions even, endued with brilliancy, I may say beauty, appreciated only by those who in pronouncing upon a new object, wait until they have got rid of habitual impressions, which (although the majority of men do not

²⁶ Barringer, “Orientalism and Aestheticism”, 248.

know it) exercise so powerful an influence upon the judgment of objects seen for the first time.²⁷

Sargent himself certainly appears to be one who frequently ‘got rid of [his] habitual impressions’ when going abroad, as seen in his letter at the beginning of this chapter. His intention then, in executing these studies, was perhaps not to capture the scientific ‘type’ for the European market, but rather to challenge that market’s forms of accepted beauty by blurring the lines between what was considered documentary and aesthetic. A highly detailed image did not have to be a scientific study, but rather could convey the beauty of form through the capturing of even its smallest details.

However, this discussion of realism and ethnography falls by the wayside temporarily when confronted with the remainder of Sargent’s Capri works, which rely heavily on what Barringer would categorise as belonging to Leighton’s form of Aestheticism; soft facture, lush, dreamlike atmospheres, rich colours and gentle forms, although in Sargent’s case it may have been more closely inspired by Delacroix, as in his quote from Minchin. See, for example, Sargent’s 1878 Salon submission *A Capriote* and its reworked copy *Dans Les Oliviers, Capri*. Whereas Rosina’s profile appears clear in the centre, the rest of the composition relies heavily on loose brushwork and tonal earthly colours. Sargent manipulates the landscape in order to emphasise the flowing lines of Rosina’s arms as they drape languorously over the trunk of a tree, negating what one reviewer called ‘any Pre-Raphaelite exactness.’²⁸ The rest of the landscape: the trees, grasses and crumbling stonewall are all painted in a hazy blur, with Rosina as a clear and focused centre. The beauty of the ‘Arab type,’ placed in a dream-like landscape, does little to provide the viewer with the authenticity of a foreign locale. This is more significantly true when comparing *A Capriote* to *Dans Les Oliviers, Capri*, as in the previous image Sargent included varying tones of greens to allude to the

²⁷ Michel Eugène Chevreul, *Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and their Application to the Arts*, trans. Charles Martel (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman’s, 1855), 120.

²⁸ “American Art Methods: The Society of Artists”, 3.

composition of the grasses, whereas in the Salon work the field has been reduced to a single shade of yellow, bringing up the contrast against the tall dandelion stalks.²⁹ This change creates a clearer separation between the ground and trees behind Rosina, carving out a horizon line in the stonewall, but also sets to focus the eye more squarely on Rosina's detailed face in the middle.

Sargent's other images of Rosina all continue well with this trend of using loosely brushed, fantasy-like worlds with soft colours and blurred lines. His series of oils depicting Rosina and a friend dancing on a rooftop, *Capri Girl on a Rooftop* (Fig. 65) and the aforementioned *View of Capri*, and *Capri*, seem more concerned with aesthetics – architectural lines versus bodily curves lines, dark skin versus white walls – than an attempt at any kind of detailed depiction of native dance or dress (even though Rosina does wear traditional clothes and is dancing the tarantella, a native folk dance). Instead of executing something like the works of Lewis, who would have filled the scene with minute details, Sargent instead gives us the essence of exotic life - its *impression*. It is a world full of sensuous pleasures: colour, light, women, fabric and music, but on a completely different scale to Lewis. His later $\frac{3}{4}$ image *Rosina* dissolves further into this mass of dark hair and skin against white walls and light clothing, performing a remarkable contrast to the highly detailed *Head of a Capri Girl*.

Sargent's images straddle this line of contemporary Orientalism and how it is defined by nationalistic standards. On one hand he is depicting 'truth' and 'nature' to the extent that *The New York Times* compares one Rosina to a museum object, and then in the next instance another Rosina is described as being 'without any Pre-Raphaelite exactness.' If we are to work on the categorisations of British Orientalism's focus on detail, and French Orientalism's emphasis on fantasy and atmosphere, then Sargent in this method is both a French *and* British Orientalist; thus by ascribing to him the name of cosmopolitan, he becomes a combination of

²⁹ These are basically the same image, with slight detailed differences that I list above. Sargent made a second one presumably to send overseas to the Society of American Artists exhibition in May of 1879. The first version, *A Capriote*, was exhibited in the Paris Salon at the same time, so thus could not be sent.

both, united through their desire to capture beauty in all its forms – through detail, quickness of hand, or some amalgamation of both.

Yet what is also at play here is a potential reaction against the typical views of what Oriental art *should be*. One on hand, Fromentin and Pater define it as one that is ‘exaggerated, violent and seemingly excessive’, and both Lewis and Sargent’s capturing of it in such high detail contributes to this view of such locations as areas of ‘excess’.³⁰ But in his later works Sargent *also* purifies scenes down to simple contrasts and colours in an embrace of the opposite, conveying Oriental locations and beauty as places of pure and simple pleasures, to be appreciated for its own sake. His capturing of both ‘types’ of views of the Orient also blurs the boundaries of these separate categorizations, indicating that Sargent is an artist seeking visual beauty, regardless of whether or not that beauty or a specific view of it fit into prescribed national standards on how one ‘should’ capture such people and spaces. If Sargent didn’t align his person or his art to one specific exhibition venue or country, as exhibited in Appendix A, why then would he choose to depict a scene through similar filters? In this view, Sargent’s Orient becomes, like Sargent himself, all things at once, in a way a more accurate embrace of the ‘truth’ of a culture than any espoused by ethnography, science or realism.

‘Strange Fiorituras and Guttural Roulades’: Spain and *El Jaleo*

After Capri and Naples, Sargent then travelled to Spain, no doubt at the insistence of Carolus-Duran, to study Velazquez directly from life at the Prado. Even though Spain was well within the European continent, artists traveling there considered it akin to visiting the East, with Spanish culture exerting a type of exoticism, brutality and sensuality significantly ‘other’ from the cultures of Britain and France. Kenneth McConkey accurately termed it a ‘country at the margin of

³⁰ Fromentin, *Between Sea and Sahara*, 144.

Europe in which an old, exotic culture turned temptingly away from the stranger.’³¹ This may have found root in Napoleon’s eastern campaigns earlier in the century, as Napoleon considered Africa to being ‘south of the Pyrenees,’ while Victor Hugo, in his introduction to *Les Orientales* (1829), lists the Orient as encompassing ‘Greeks, Persians, Arabs, as well as Spanish, because Spain is also in the East; Spain is half African, Africa is half Asiatic.’³² Sargent had travelled to Spain before as a child in 1868, visiting Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Córdoba, Seville, Cadiz and Gibraltar with his family so this exploration some ten years later marked a sort of ‘returning’ for him, albeit with fresh Parisian-tinted eyes.

Though his youthful trip most likely left an early imprint on Sargent, it was the decidedly Hispano-obsessive atmosphere in Paris which most likely pushed Sargent to reconsider Spain as an ‘oriental’ topic for visual consideration. The French fascination with Spain, which McConkey calls *hispanolisme*,³³ had been a continuous theme throughout the century, beginning with Napoleon’s occupation of Spain during the Peninsular War (1808-1813), reaching from 1838 to 1848, when the Galerie Espagnole was opened in the Louvre.³⁴ Though brief, the Galerie Espagnole inspired a wide array of painters later in the century, notably Manet, who’s early Spanish work *The Spanish Singer (Le Guitarrero)* (Fig. 66) appeared in the Salon in 1860. Manet’s Spanish pictures in turn roused the next generation of impressionable young artists including a young Carolus-Duran and in turn Sargent. Manet’s method in his Spanish paintings, directly or through this trickle down effect, may have had the additional benefit of encouraging Sargent to incorporate

³¹ Kenneth McConkey, “The Theology of Painting – the cult of Velazquez and British Art at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”, *Visual Culture in Britain* 6, no. 2 (December/Winter 2005): 190. See also his “A Thousand Miles towards the Sun: British Artist-Travellers to Spain and Morocco at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”, *Visual Culture in Britain* 4, no. 1 (2003): 25-43 and Enriqueta Harris, “Velázquez and Murillo in Nineteenth-Century Britain: An Approach Through Prints”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 148-159.

³² Edward J. Sullivan, “Mariano Fortuny y Marsal and Orientalism in Nineteenth Century Spain”, *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 8 (April 1981): 97; Victor Hugo, *Les Orientales*, (Brussels: E. Laurent, 1832), 14.

³³ McConkey, “The Theology of Painting”, 189.

³⁴ Tinterow and Lacambre, *Manet/Velazquez*, 49.

historical and modern styles, or as Juliet Wilson-Bareau calls Manet's 'double game', where he is 'both pastiching the past and engaging it. And in relation to specifically 'Spanish' subject matter, he was both Hispanicizing French subjects and addressing real-life Spanish persons and themes.'³⁵ Such an approach certainly contains elements of the cosmopolitan, and Sargent continued to cultivate this kind of method when executing his own Spanish works for the Salon.

In returning to Sargent's own Spanish works of this period, there is a continued approach, as in *Capri*, of capturing scenes that veer strangely between factual replication and sensuous invention. Again the work is split clearly into two distinct groups: in depth architectural and object studies or images of women engaging in cultural practices, mostly dancing, culminating in his 1882 major Salon submission *El Jaleo (Danse de Gitanes)* The architectural and object studies; see, for example, *Santa Maria le Blanca, Toledo* (Fig. 67) and multiple works titled under *Alhambra, Patio de los Leones; An Archway* (Figs. 68-70) are mysteriously void of any human figures at all, implying that these were perhaps notations of appealing shapes, colours or patterns documented for later use. Since most of images were never exhibited during his lifetime, and were sold in the Christie's auction after his death in 1925, such works seem to belong to a type of personal ethnographic collection, accumulated in what Richard Ormond mentions as a scrapbook of photos, postcards and drawings of Spanish architecture and locations – now in the Metropolitan Museum collection – that provided a type of reference book for Sargent throughout his later career.

In light of this idea of the 'private Orient,' i.e. one which the artist kept to himself and never exhibited, another facet of Orientalism comes to light – a form of Aesthetic decorative ethnography, if you will. Sargent's detailed copying of these exotic elements, in works like *An Alhambra Vase, Sketch of a Spanish Crucifix* and *Sketch of a Spanish Madonna* (Figs. 71-73), are all seemingly executed not in any specifically scientific or didactic function but rather as a collection of eccentric embellishments. This practice, in a way, certainly mimics Fromentin's statement on

³⁵ Juliet Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and Spain", in Tinterow and Lacambre, *Manet/Velazquez*, 224.

the Orient's 'appeal to the eyes'; Sargent is collecting the elements he finds most visually 'exaggerated, violent, and seemingly obsessive,' in order to support his production of an art that is evocative of non-normative forms of beauty.

However, this practice manages to distil the exotic down to an amalgamation of attractive elements as opposed to embodying a real live and thriving culture. In one respect it is a form of extreme Aestheticism, not only in that it represents an attraction solely to the aspects of foreign culture seen to be most visually or sensually pleasing, but also that it subtracts those elements from their contextual and cultural narratives or usage, as objects presented 'for their own sake'. Sargent also seems to be participating in this kind of focused Aestheticism in some of his images of Spanish dancing figures, where the subjects are presented in dark, abstract surroundings that could represent any number of locations. This works on a similar method to the closely cropped facial images discussed earlier. Such an extraction of person from atmosphere participates in what I would call a 'flattening of culture' as it shifts a native participant of that culture from its involvement in a complex environment to its value only as a single piece, or a moveable, interchangeable part whose values lies in its beauty and not its function. Such a practice echoes Nochlin's words that the Orient was often placed 'in a category of obfuscation, masking important distinctions under the rubric of the picturesque, supported by the illusion of the real.'³⁶ This approach highlights Sargent's dedicated emphasis not to an imperialistic or critical visual regime, but one that focused more distinctly on the capturing or conveyance of the 'picturesque', however he found it, for the musings of both his private self as well as his public audience.

The rest of these Spanish works all continue along this method, honing in intently on the theme of Spanish dance and music, something akin to a fascination and maybe even obsession for Sargent. He writes to Vernon Lee on 9 July 1880:

You wished some Spanish songs. I could not find any good ones. The best are what one hears in Andalucía, the half African Malagueñas & Soleàs,, dismal,

³⁶ Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient", 56.

restless chants that it is impossible to note. They are something between a Hungarian Czaradas and the chant of the Italian peasant in the fields, and are generally composed of five strophes and end stormily on the dominant, the theme quite lost in strange fiorituras and guttural roulades. The Gitano voices are marvellously supple. If you have heard something of the kind you will not consider this mere jargon.³⁷

I do not need to point out here the sensual nature of Sargent's language, with descriptive terms like 'guttural,' and 'supple,' and their epicurean nature, evoking sounds, bodies, speed and movement, and this certainly translated into Sargent's Spanish figural images. His first series of dancers, which may have been done as oil sketches for *El Jaleo; The Spanish Dance* (Fig. 74) and the multiply named *Study for 'The Spanish Dance'* (Figs. 75&76) show a profound negation of detail, almost to the point of abstraction. At first glance, these works seem to be an overt nod to Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (Fig. 77), as the images are nothing but a completely black background with dots of white arbitrarily interspersed in the night sky, conveying either stars or, as in Whistler's piece, fireworks.³⁸ The viewer, amidst the darkness, sees only the flesh tints of the women's arms as they raise them above their heads in dance, and the brief tints of white and red of their skirts and shawls. Purifying the image down to the most basic of elements – sky and skin – uniquely presents the work as a scene depicting a specific 'impression,' the exact optical response Sargent (or anyone for that matter) would see when watching dancers in the dark. This simplification forces the viewer, if only for a moment, to think less about the technicalities of the observation and more the auditory sense of it – without the distraction of detail in

³⁷ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 49. Also reproduced more fully in Ormond, "John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee", 229 See Appendix B, Figure 19.

³⁸ The Ormond Catalogue states that 'Critics have made comparison with the works of James McNeill Whistler, in particular with *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, which is markedly alike in mood and atmosphere.' However, the listed literature on the piece shows that Sargent gave the painting to Alma Strettell, who sold the piece through a dealer to the Hispanic Society of America in 1922. It was only after this date that it was then publicly exhibited, so any comparisons to Whistler would not have been contemporary. Ormond and Kilmurray, *Figures and Landscapes: 1874-1882*, 250.

clothing, face and setting, the viewer is content to simply hear the 'guttural roulades' of the gypsies in the night. The main goal here appears to be to convey a rounded 'experience' and not a slavish documentation of factual detail – an approach decidedly Aesthetic in its emphasis.

Abstraction and the senses, a visual connection to Whistler, optical impressions – all these elements place this set of paintings within both an 'art for art's sake' and highly cosmopolitan programme in that it blurs the boundaries between the intended 'goal' of such works outside of traditionally British or French Orientalist intentions. This transition from works of high detail down to images of mere essence and allusion mimics the approach Sargent took with his images in Capri, establishing a type of method or pattern in how Sargent artistically worked through the inspiration his travels provided. The key point to make here is that he embraced *all* approaches, not just one, in a drive towards experiencing and capturing everything. Sargent would continue to play with these boundaries of paint and sensual experience in the remaining Spanish images, but the transition between two large scale works of this period – the recently discovered *Spanish Dancer* (Fig. 78) and the final *El Jaleo* – will exhibit his Orientalist Aesthetic expressions more acutely.

Spanish Dancer and *El Jaleo* seem to move both forward and backward in comparison to Sargent's methods in the previous paintings, both in a return to the detailed conveyance of ethnic dress, movement and skin tone, as seen in the earlier *Capri Peasant – Study* and a jump towards the loose abstraction of *The Spanish Dance* and its studies. I would like to approach these paintings together as a pair, even though little is known about *Spanish Dancer*, because I feel that in viewing *El Jaleo* as a reworking and extension of the first work, we can see more closely how Sargent is blending multinational elements in order to create what could be considered an 'authentic' fantasy, or blend of British and French painterly elements. His fusion of ethnographic detail gives the scenes a sense of realism, grounding the viewer's encounter with the painting in a form of reality (this is something you could *actually* see in a dance hall in Spain, for example). However, by also adding in highly sensual, fantastic and exaggerated elements and blurring his brushwork to

heighten these aspects, he is also able to appeal to the more Aesthetically minded viewer.

Spanish Dancer is a bit of an art-historical conundrum because there was no recorded documentation that the work even existed until it appeared in a private collection in the late 1980s. Standing at a large 222.9 x 151 cm, it can only be assumed that this work was meant for the Salon, but the Ormond catalogue offers no explanations as to why the work was abandoned, presumably for *El Jaleo* since the image includes two very lightly traced outlines of musicians behind her right shoulder, present in the later work. When the painting came to light in 1988, the current owner provided a letter from Sargent to his great-grandfather, Isaac Val, from 1897 where he confirmed its authenticity and its relationship to *El Jaleo*:

‘The painting of which you sent me a photograph is indeed by me, and it a study for my picture *El Jaleo*. It is a painting which was done quite a number of years ago and which I had lost sight of.’³⁹ While the true history of the painting will be obscure until further evidence is uncovered, it does provide an excellent comparison point in showing original Sargent’s intentions for his most famous Orientalist work, as it transitioned from an image of ethnographic focus (a singular dancer against a solid background) to a fully sensory experience.

Spanish Dancer continues well within the timeline of Sargent’s exotic figure studies of the period, being a larger extension of works like *Head of a Capri Girl* and *Neapolitan Boy* (Fig. 79), which focus solely on the figure and their features set against a blank ground. Without any kind of atmospheric or locational context, a specific image of an obviously ‘ethnic’ woman, in what is presumably a form of native dress, complete with shawl and flower in her hair, becomes another documentational ‘type’ of what the viewer could assume real Spanish dancers looked like. So on one hand, the work is in a sense ethnographic, but on the other hand the limited composition focuses the eye on the beauty of a dancer’s movement, evoking links to Degas’s painted and bronze works of the period as well

³⁹ Ibid., 262.

as to larger, more modern Impressionistic subject matter.⁴⁰ Sargent's visual link to Impressionism is intriguing, if only for the fact that it seems to imply that Sargent found Spanish dance and culture to be something very modern and *of the now*, as opposed to one that was 'primitive' or 'backward' and thus necessitated a more 'advanced' European (white) filter.

However, there are some areas where Sargent's study here has fallen into modes of exaggeration. He embellishes the outward swirl of the tassels on the dancer's shawl in order to emphasise active movement, but he has also chosen to capture a barely perceptible split second of activity that contorts the woman's body into an unnatural, but more visually striking, position. The backward bend of her right arm and its seemingly contrived bearing mimics what Sargent would later do with Virginie Gautreau's right arm in *Madame X*, which, by its uncomfortable twisting, forces both women's profile into visual dominance. In *Spanish Dancer*, this twisted arm further visually mimics the unnatural line of the her body as it bends backwards in order to raise her left arm upwards, thus containing the eye within the lines of the figure's movement. Sargent could have chosen to depict the dancer in a more aesthetically organised or visually pleasing position – as Degas does with his dancers, who line up more naturally along the stage – but he does not, highlighting further not only his attraction the 'strange' and 'bizarre' but also the Orient's seductive notions of difference and wildness.

However, by placing the dancer in a vacant space and focusing the body into a contained composition, the dancer becomes an exotic 'symbol' and a 'type'. In keeping with the previously noted Aesthetic views about Oriental art being undefined and therefore needing a European translation, it is possible to view this work as participating in this kind of adaptational rhetoric. Sargent pares down the

⁴⁰ See Degas's *Spanish Dancer*, *Spanish Dance* and *Dancer with Tambourine* in this series, begun in 1884. The first is housed in the Met, the second in the Guggenheim's Tannhauser Collection and the third in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. See "Edgar Degas: Spanish Dancer", *Heinbrunn Timeline of Art History*, October 2006, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/29.100.395> (2 September 2013).

complexity of the dance to a single scene, even a single movement, negating its more complex elements in order to distil it into a 'bite sized' image easier for European consumption. However, another potential reading is to see the image as one of beauty through simplicity, as in the night-time *Spanish Dance* images. In keeping with the embrace of multiple avenues upon which this dissertation thrives, I am not apt to see any one of these approaches as more relevant than the other. Rather I wish to emphasise that he was doing *all of them*, hence the difficulty in trying to definitively pin him down as a certain French or British Orientalist, because he was clearly neither and in many ways both.

But these interpretations focus merely on method and labels, and are lacking understanding of the deeper symbolic nature of Aesthetic visuals and language. Considering his lifelong love of music, and his passionate discussion of Spanish culture and dance as evidenced by the letter to Vernon Lee from July 9th, it is possible to view these works as also putting defined focus on the *body* as symbol. If, for example, Oriental art was seen as lacking a civilised or educated language, as Pater mentions, or as Fromentin expresses, one that speaks 'directly to the eyes and less to the intellect', then other forms of communication are needed.⁴¹ Thus the language of the body becomes, in a way, a primitive means of exchange, a method of communicating visually or sensually. Sargent's presentation of a simplified image of a Spanish dancer can represent this form of nonverbal Oriental language, a symbol of the beauty of one of the Orient's non-normative ways of expression.

Sargent was highly attracted to the strange and the exotic, and it was this desire for the new that drew him to Spanish music and culture. These images bear the potential to convey the cultural complexity of Spanish dance as a form of language or communication – a form of language that tells a story directly through the body, which, if we make the wider connection here, appeals directly to the main drives of Aesthetic-based movements as those rooted in the corporeal or sensual. Sargent's work would have spoken to the aesthetes of the use of the body to convey

⁴¹ Fromentin, *Between Sea and Sahara*, 144.

experience and strange desire, supporting my insistence that these early works perform under a type of symbolic Aesthetic rhetoric.

Spanish Dancer, then, can be interpreted as a celebration of foreign culture, and the beauty found in how that culture uses its body to express and connect with its own people in the cultivation of its own non-verbal language. Sargent's limited composition, presented without setting or narrative, forces the viewer to make associations, to create a story which can only be ascertained through the movements of the body. If we can interpret this earlier work as a representation of this, then the transition from sole figure to complex scene, complete with supporting cast, begs the question of how this symbolism translates when it is placed within a wider visual context. *El Jaleo* combines *Spanish Dancer's* visual elements into a larger experience that is decidedly fantastical, but also clearly rooted enough in reality that it could be considered a realistic depiction of Spanish dance hall life. David Scott, in his discussion of the connection between the literary and visual Orient, calls this blending *suggestive synthesis*:

The moral of this for Orientalist literature- as also for Orientalist painting – becomes clear: the aim should not be the impossible one of complete documentation or of exhaustive description but the creation of a suggestive synthesis one in which the manner of the telling or the style of presentation become as significant- and evident – part of an experience as the object itself. Authentic Orientalist art - whether in literature or painting – is thus not that which tries to create an illusion of objective reality... but that which invents a *suggestive equivalent* in which the medium and forms used by the writer or artist become part of the truth of the experience communicated.⁴²

The intention here, then, becomes not about a discussion of symbolic Oriental language, but about creating a wholly Aesthetic and sensory *experience* and conveying the artist's personal impression to inspire or cultivate the impressions of others.

⁴² David Scott, "The Literary Orient", in *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered*, ed. James Thompson (Dublin: The National Gallery of Ireland, 1988), 8.

With respect to the latter, many reviewers remarked that the work successfully transported the viewer to another world, complete with all the sights, sounds and smells of the Spanish concert, conveying what Captain Richard F. Burton termed the 'dirty picturesque.'⁴³ Jean Mériem's description upon viewing it at the 1882 Salon vividly describes this visual 'journey' as the critic experienced it:

M. Sargent paints his dancers, singers and this strange scene where the delirium of the persons is agitated through the vibrant memories of troubles and emotions in a sort of fantastic dream that the work of Goya never failed to exaggerate. The artist is forced to reproduce his subject such as he has felt it, while intoxicated by the mad and lascivious dance, the eyes are veiled by the smoke of the café and the dust that rises from the dry heels of the dancers, the head weighed down by the smells of the sweat of the women and the rose perfume that wafts from their black hair. I have never had, so to speak, more of a real perception, and assisted by this strange scene, become an accessible poet of all sorts of mysterious sensations of the real colour of things that has concerned a uniquely simple painter.⁴⁴

El Jaleo shifts the scene from the solitary focus of *Spanish Dancer* almost completely with its addition of 'authentic' details; the dirty handprints on the walls, an orange sitting lonely in a chair, and the contorted faces of the singers as they belt out their

⁴³ In describing the 'Wakálah' - as the Caravanserai is called in Egypt - he labels it an 'office, hotel, lodging house and store'. Burton goes into depth recounting the high levels of dirt, poverty and decrepitude he witnessed firsthand. He ends on the note 'This is not a tempting picture, yet is the Wakálah a most amusing place, presenting a succession of scenes which would delight lovers of the Dutch school - a rich exemplification of the grotesque, and what is called by artists as the 'dirty picturesque.' Scott, "The Literary Orient", 5. See Captain Sir Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Meccah*, 2 vols (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1883), I: 42.

⁴⁴ 'M. Sargent a peint ses danseuses, ses chanteurs et cet étrange milieu où s'agite le délire de ses personnages, à travers ses souvenirs vibrants d'émotion et troublés par une sorte de rêve fantastique que l'oeuvre étudiée de Goya ne faisait qu'exagérer. L'artiste s'est efforcé de reproduire son sujet tel qu'il l'avait senti, alors que, grisé par cette danse folle et lascive, les yeux voilés par la fumée du bouge et la poussière que soulevait le coup de talon sec des danseuses, le tête alourdie par les senteurs des femmes en sueur et les parfums capiteux des tubéreuses qui se mouraient dans leurs noirs cheveux, il n'avait, pour ainsi dire, plus la perception du réel, et, assistait à cette scène étrange, bien plus en poète accessible à toutes sortes de mystérieuses sensations qu'en simple peintre uniquement préoccupé de la couleur vraie des choses. Mériem, *Tableaux et Statues*, 102-103. Translations are my own.

guttural cries. Such details are decidedly against the sanitised images of the Orient typically associated with Aestheticism at the time. If we want to return to Barringer's example of Leighton as being a prime example of an Aesthetic Orientalist, then one of his images of Spain, for example, as in the 1874 *Moorish Garden; A Dream of Granada* (Fig. 80) provides a solid ground for comparison. The title in itself gives away much of Leighton's intent, it is a *dream* and a *fantasy*, even though the other descriptive half tries to tie the image to a specific location – the Alhambra palace in Granada. Leighton executed what appears to be a preparatory oil sketch for this work on site in 1870, sold at Christie's posthumously in July 1896, under the title of *Garden of Generalife, Granada* (Fig. 81),⁴⁵ so there is some modicum of accuracy present in the use of the historical grand vista in the background and its picturesquely arched manicured shrubs.

However, the little girl in the image is decidedly not authentic to her Spanish location. Uncommonly clean (indeed, she is walking barefoot through a garden without a speck of dirt on her), European, pink cheeked and sumptuously dressed in a turban and silk, Leighton's vision of Spain contrasts wildly to its presentation given to us by Sargent some eight years later. In Leighton, we have the fantasy, the 'dream' of the Orient, cleaned up for European consumption, amalgamating historical location with a decidedly British sentimental penchant for fresh faced children. In Sargent, we also have a fantasy, but one that appeals to an alternative side of Orientalism – the Occident's desire to experience a culture so decidedly contradictory and 'un-civilised' as their own, returning again to Castagnary and his admonishments on those who 'escape.'

⁴⁵ Richard and Leonée Ormond mention this work briefly in their *Lord Leighton* catalogue as entry #212, but they do not give a corresponding image, only denoting that the work was used as the background for *Moorish Garden: A Dream of Grenada*. The image included is reproduced from a black and white copy found in Ernest Rhys, *Frederic Lord Leighton: An Illustrated Record of His Life and Work*, London: George Bell & Sons, 1895), 28. Both Rhys and Ormond state it was sold at the artist's auction in July 1896, with Ormond following it into the collection of a Mrs. Lucie Pomeroy. However, I have not been able to locate any contemporary photographs of this work, so presumably it is still in private collection. See Richard and Leonée Ormond, *Lord Leighton* (London: Yale University Press, 1975), 12.

Sargent's presentation of the 'dirty picturesque' in *El Jaleo* was ultimately well received, and the critical reviews of this work were decidedly positive in their scope. But why did Sargent choose to depict an image of Spain that, in comparison to other Hispanist works of the period, is unequivocally subversive in its eroticism? This again can return back to Sargent's aforementioned attraction to the bizarre, but it also works within the wider discussion of Aestheticism's redefinitions of beauty within alternative contexts. Genius and beauty, as in Pater and Baudelaire, come from queer boundaries, for 'beauty is always and inevitably of a double composition.'⁴⁶ The true aesthete and man of the world must embrace a dual attraction to creation and decay in order to fully experience all aspects of life. In these works, Sargent is definitively presenting the 'decayed' or 'unattractive' aspect; the French critics remarked upon this and praised it as 'originality' in its accurate reproduction of life, repeatedly linking it to the works of Goya and his dark *Caprichos*.⁴⁷ He is showing beauty in the dirt, grime and sweat, enabling an Aesthetically minded audience to release their inhibitions and experience the messiness of a more underground Spanish life.

However, there is another link to be made here to wider Aesthetic symbolism, one outside of the unspoken language of the body and the 'dirty picturesque' – that of the importance of music in Aesthetic texts. This is epitomised often by methodical reference to Pater's statement from "The School of Giorgione":

... [A]nd all the arts in common aspiring towards the principle of music; music being the typical, or ideally consummate art, the object of the great *Anders-streben* of all art, of all that is artistic or partakes of artistic qualities.

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other works of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and

⁴⁶ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 3.

⁴⁷ For references to Goya, see Henry Houssaye, "Le Salon de 1882: La Grand Peinture et les Grands Tableaux", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 51 (May 1, 1882): 583; J.-K Huysmans, *L'Art Moderne* (G. Charpentier, Paris, 1883): 272; Joséphine Péladan, "L'Esthétique Au Salon de 1883", *L'Artiste* 1, no. 53 (May 1883): 385; Mériem, *Tableaux et Statues*, 103; "The Paris Salon", *Art Amateur* 7, no. 1 (June 1882): 3.

the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.⁴⁸

In discussion of the *Spanish Dancer* and viewing the dancer's body as a way of typifying the Orient's symbolic non-verbal language, (which could also be applied retroactively to Sargent's images of Rosina dancing in Capri to a lesser extent), it seems obvious to twin the discussions on Sargent's dancing bodies to Pater's focus on music as the 'ideally consummate art.' In clearer terms, I would like to suggest that Sargent's images can be viewed as uniquely synesthetic or ekphrastic. They attempt to depict a visual representation of the physical attributes of sound, to describe, in optical form, the visceral qualities of Spanish music and to convey that experience to a white, European audience. This accomplishes two main goals, as summarised by Andrew Eastham, that 'painting overcomes its own limits by rendering a three-dimensional acoustic space, whilst sound overcomes its evanescence and is "fixed... forever" within the conditions of painting.'⁴⁹

In returning to the previously mentioned letter from Sargent to Vernon Lee from July 1880, there is an attempt on Sargent's part to describe the sensuality of the acoustics of foreign music: 'the theme quite lost in strange fiorituras and guttural roulades. The Gitano voices are marvellously supple...'⁵⁰ Within the year, an image appears of just such gypsy voices, with men's faces contorted in the background in 'guttural roulades' while the S-shaped curve of the dancer's body translates the 'supple' effects of the music into corporeal form. Pater, in discussing Giorgione's *Concert*, describes 'the skill which has caught the waves of wandering sound, and fixed them forever on the lips and hands' while Sargent's gypsies mouths are similarly caught open, their hands forever on their guitars, echoing the

⁴⁸ Pater, *Renaissance*, 140. Italics are Pater's.

⁴⁹ Andrew Eastham, "Walter Pater's Acoustic Space: "The School of Giorgione"", Dionysian 'Anders-streben' and the Politics of Soundscape", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 40, no. 1/2, *The Arts in Victorian Literature* (2010): 197.

⁵⁰ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 49. See also Towheed Shafquat, "'Music is not merely for musicians': Vernon Lee's Musical Reading and Response", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 40, no. 1/2 *The Arts in Victorian Literature*, (2010): 273-294.

skill of the Old Master in capturing sound in silence.⁵¹ This also contributes to Aesthetic thoughts on the interdisciplinary nature of the arts as they 'lend each other new forces,' with painting strengthening our perceptions of music and the acoustic space, and music giving more tangible, material feeling to purely optical illusion. Sargent thus achieves a form of Pater's *Anders-streben*, transcending the limits of the pictorial plane.

If Sargent did indeed approach the image of exotic dancers as an interpretation of Pater's process, what then does this imply for larger discussions on Orientalism and the presentation of the exotic? In one sense, Sargent does convey an image of the Orient as one that intriguingly and successfully combines a multi-layered experience of the senses – sight, sound and smell – into a rich and varied culture. Their experiences of music are not passive; the viewer does not arrive at a theatre, for example, and sit quietly and observe, but rather is encouraged to participate by clapping, throwing flowers, dancing, and singing along. It is a release for both performer *and* audience. This charge of emotion is decidedly antithetical to the musical experience, for example, conveyed in Impressionist images of Paris and the theatre. Wagner, however, was challenging this passive reception of music during this period with his immersive operas, creating a significantly Aesthetic experience of sound, lights, and movement. The *Revue Wagnerienne* in 1885 noted that the aim of Wagnerian painting was to 'signify the natural, necessary alliance of three forms of art; plastic, literary and musical, and in a communion towards the same unique end: to create life and to incite the soul into creating life.'⁵² Sargent, being a lover of Wagner and attendee at the festival in Bayreuth in August 1886, can be seen to be bringing together the sensual traits of both his painting and musical interests, and what better subject matter than the subversive exoticism of foreign climes?

The experience of the foreign, at least insofar as Sargent presents it, is thus the ultimate apex of Pater's statement about all arts constantly aspiring towards

⁵¹ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 150.

⁵² Teodor de Wyzewa, "Peinture Wagnérienne", *Revue Wagnerienne* 1, no. 5, (June 8, 1885): 154.

music, or that creative expression can generate a product that effects and stimulates subjective experience. I argue that Sargent does this successfully, as seen by the reactions of some of the critics in their reviews, which begin with notably *personal* responses, be it to travel, Spain or the painting itself.⁵³ It inherently elicits an emotional and sensual response, a personal *impression*, which was the ultimate goal of the arts, to translate and convey individual impressions to a wider audience. These impressions, then, become the symbolic language of the Orient. Since the European viewer was so far removed from this exotic context, the Orient had to be conveyed in a way that would appeal to a non-native. By using music and dance as that inherent dialect, Sargent bypassed limitations of language and education by appealing directly to the body and the senses. It doesn't matter that one does not know the story that the *Jaleo* tells, nor the history or cultural significance of its performance for native peoples. The viewer can instead appreciate the total immersion, like a Wagnerian opera, into a world appealing to all senses. Thus art becomes corporeal instead of intellectual, carnal instead of didactic, and cosmopolitan instead of local in its appeal.

Atmospheric Contrasts: Morocco and Venice

Sargent's visual language of the Orient seemed to find its apex in *El Jaleo*, but upon the continuation of his travels to Morocco and then Venice, these explorations revert back to the standard scenes of architecture and women that haunt many of the works coming out of Capri and Naples. Morocco appears within Sargent's oeuvre as a location seemingly visited for its whiteness and light, which was in keeping with other Aesthetic painters of the period and will be discussed momentarily. The majority of the images are again void of people, focusing instead

⁵³ See the previously quoted Mériem text from n. 43, but also Louis Énault, *Paris Salon 1882 - II* (Paris: E. Bernard et Cie, 1882), page numbers not given; Houssaye, "Le Salon de 1882", 583; "Sargent's *El Jaleo* At the Schaus Gallery", 5; Candida, "Impressions of the Salon", 369; John Forbes Robertson, "The Salon of 1882", *Magazine of Art* 5 (January 1882): 414.

on the angular shadows thrown by white walls at varying times of day, an experiment predating the approach later popularized by Monet in his images of the Rouen Cathedral in the early 1890s. The concern here certainly appears to be on an Impressionistic capturing of light, but this also has ties to British art during the period, as painters were seemingly seduced by this ‘whiteness’ on both sides of the Channel. Renoir remarked upon visiting Algeria that ‘In Algeria I discovered white. Everything is white, the burnoose, the minarets, the streets...’⁵⁴ Leighton translated the sensuality of this colour experience in a letter to his mother from Algiers in 1857:

Fancy, in the midst of all this gleaming white, the gorgeous effect produced by the varied colours of oriental costumes and complexion: the copper coloured Arabs, the sallow Jews, the ebony negroes, and the frequent display of every kind of fruit – crimson tomatoes and purple aubergines, emerald and golden melons, glowing oranges, luminous green grapes, and to relieve the blaze of the ardent colour, the tend ivory tones of the tube rose and the soft milk-white jasmine.⁵⁵

Travels into the Orient were revolutionary for the palette of the Impressionists, brightening their colours towards greater heights and supporting the increasingly popular scientific theories of Chevreul, Rood and Field. Sargent’s fascination with light and architecture, devoid of human interference, similarly places such works in the realm of Impressionistic light studies. This intersection between light, singular colour tonality and the Orient would reach greater heights in Sargent’s 1880 Salon submission *Fumée D’Ambre Gris* which will be discussed later in Chapter Five.

This leaves only the analysis of Sargent’s images of Venice, a vast body of watercolour and oils, which, in the context of Sargent research, has been greatly

⁵⁴ Christine Peltre, *Orientalism in Art*, trans. John Goodman (London: Abbeville Press, 1998), 242.

⁵⁵ Barringer, “Orientalism and Aestheticism”, 251.

explored and discussed.⁵⁶ Inasmuch as his images of Morocco noted the absence of figures in preference for his focus on light, Venice acts as the foil; most of these images are remarkably dark, filled with (mostly female) figures that, as in *The Daughters of Darley Boit*, are defined by their emergence or absorption into the shadows. Perhaps Sargent tired of the brightness of Morocco and looked to retreat to a city filled with shade. Regardless of intent, the contrasts in light versus dark did provide an excellent painterly exercise into the capturing of scenes in extremes of chiaroscuro.

In returning to the discussions on fantasy and/or ethnography, Sargent seems to return again to a space that is wholly undefined along either of these lines. Many works, like *Venetian Bead Stringers*, *Venetian Water Carriers*, and *Venetian Glass Workers* (Figs. 82-84) attempt to capture a sense of common life in their depictions of typical 'women's work.' Then there are scenes such as *The Sulphur Match*, *Street in Venice* and *The Wine Shop* (Figs. 85-87) that become ambiguous in their status as direct presentations of local culture.⁵⁷ The latter grouping presents couplings of women and men amidst dark streets and alleyways, speaking quietly and furtively amidst the shadows. The indeterminate nature of these titles, as opposed to a specific reference to a work or action, as seen in *Bead Stringers*, begs the question of allusion. A man and woman alone in an alleyway would most certainly have been seen as indicative of the relations between prostitutes and their clients, and Sargent does not present us with information to dissuade this interpretation – again he seems to be hinting at, if not capturing outright, the dark and seductive 'dirty picturesque'.

Empty scenes of architectural space also appear in this collection, many in watercolour in order to capture, again, an Impressionistic focus on optical colour as

⁵⁶ See Richard Ormond and Warren Adelson, *Sargent's Venice* (London: Yale University Press, 2007); Barry Maine, "Picture and Texts: Venetian Interiors by Henry James and John Singer Sargent", *The Henry James Review* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 136-156 and Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *The Venetian Hours of Henry James, Whistler and Sargent* (New York: Bullfinch Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ This one is also listed in the catalogue as *A Street in Venice*, but I have called it by its alternative title here to differentiate from the previous painting.

it split into prisms by reflecting sunlight on the water of the canals. Thus, in a body of work that encompasses nearly forty-five images in oil and watercolour, there exist shifts from Impressionist colour studies, ethnographic representations of local life and the Venetian 'race,' as well as amorphously symbolic genre scenes that may or may not represent moral assumptions about the ethics of poverty and the Venetian people. As a group, it is decidedly variegated, both in intent and style. However, this is not antithetical to the approaches I have been discussing in the course of this chapter. As it has been seen in the other images, Sargent's depiction of the exotic never stayed within one specific boundary of style, nation or subject, and the Venetian images are no different.

However, the wider question at hand is rather the symbolic nature of these variations. My assertions have been that these works were done for purposes of Aesthetic beauty and 'impressions' and this still applies. His approaches to Venice, and indeed to any of the countries discussed here, have been varied in order to capture these multiple impression-istic layers, but also, I assert, to insist on exotic beauty in multiple locations, forms, genres and people. Sargent worked on a program of inclusion and wholeness, and his exotic works attest to this.

Sargent's lack of conformity to a unified painterly concern, however, makes trying to ascertain his own opinions about the Orient quite difficult. Did he view it, as remarked upon in the letter at the beginning of this chapter, as a place from which to escape a significantly modern, urban culture? If this was his intent, it also seems notable that he does not present himself in a single one of these works, even in the oil sketches and drawings executed for the later Salon pieces. He is decidedly *outside* of the landscape, observing quietly and lacking participation, and in turn the viewer themselves is also relegated to the same. Many of these paintings commonly use a considerable amount of distance between the action and the viewer's location. *El Jaleo*, for example, places a stage in front of the audience, blocking their direct view and involvement. The rooftop images from Capri show the women dancing *as seen from the point of view of an adjacent building*, not as it would be seen if the viewer were in the same general space.

It is also significant in this discussion, that Sargent rarely, if ever, presents any of the native figures in these works as engaging directly with the viewer. In Lewis's *Lilium Auratum* the woman to the right looks directly at the observer, smiling openly and directly; this is repeated in his previous work *The Coffee Bearer* of 1857 (Fig. 88) and the presumed 1860 self-portrait *The Carpet Seller* (Fig. 89). Lewis makes a direct attempt at engaging the audience with foreign peoples, forcing them to acknowledge them as human and not as passive objects set amidst a jewelled and decorative landscape. In this respect the Orient, its culture and its people are not quiescent objects to be absorbed and commoditised by a 'superior' culture, but rather are seen as vibrant, active, reciprocal and representative of their own feelings and interests.

Granted, it could be argued that Lewis presented the Orient in this way because foreign culture was more than just a visual motif to him - it was his chosen way of life. Lewis lived for 10 years in Cairo between 1841-1851, adopting local dress and mannerisms, as seen in *The Carpet Seller*, where, save for his white skin and beard, he could have easily blended in amongst the other vendors. Sargent, though an avid traveller himself, never actively chose to live amongst these exotic cultures, spending only enough time there to gather sketches and concepts for later paintings. This may explain the sense of separation pervading throughout his exotic works; though he preferred to immerse himself in a foreign culture, evidenced by his 1908 letter, he never chose to become a permanent part of it, hence the feeling of separation present in this oeuvre of his early career. This nods distinctly to his cosmopolitan roots - as a traveller and man of culture, the world was his home, but he was also always significantly *outside* of it. In a way, this may have encouraged his attraction to Oriental subject matter - they were similarly just as 'other' as he was in many of the cultures he visited, and his presentation of the exotic may have been a way for him to exercise visually his sense of exclusion, in that he represents the viewer (and/or himself) as distinctly apart from the action of the scene.

Perhaps this sense of separation also acted as a wider influence for the erratic and varied approaches he takes on the subject of visual Orientalism. Never a part of one movement or nation, he embraced them all, and the art reflects this.

This body of work, it has been shown, glides fluidly through Impressionistic emphasis on light and colour, towards detail and ethnography, to pure abstract 'impressions' and simplistic colour 'studies' and back again. Each one of these practices has been linked to visual aesthetic methods used by French, British and significantly cosmopolitan artists, like Whistler and Lewis, thus establishing a similarly mixed, international method for his approach.

However, such a far-reaching approach certainly had its benefits, specifically for the depiction of foreign cultures. Since Sargent never aligned himself with a specific group, and that group's programme in how they approach foreign imagery, then he was free to approach the concept on whatever ground he saw fit on that day. Such cosmopolitanism, I would like to argue, gave him a wide berth of independence in how he was able to capture the foreign. Aestheticism and its writings all stress that the human experience was infinitely varied; being neither good nor bad, one or the other, oftentimes both; and so too was Sargent's own sense of the Orient. The vast complexity of his methods in this body of work all convey this – it is truly a view without national, academic or 'movement' limitations, but rather Sargent's own personal conceptions of his own experiences. This method also served as a way for Sargent to extract his images from the implied imperialism present in many images of the Orient at this time. By focusing instead on beauty, and using that as his driving force, he manages to shift the discussion away from politics towards one that focuses on aesthetics. Even when his works are analytical, as in the profile heads, they still manage to capture the beauty present in olive complexions and dark hair – a beauty decidedly different from that of his audience. This is a beauty in *difference*; it begs the viewer to consider that such profiles had their own artistic and aesthetic merits. The Spanish and Venetian works, in their presentation of a 'dirty picturesque,' still successfully manage to convey an elegance and handsomeness, even in the contorted faces and bodies of its singers, dancers, and working-class women. There is grace in the disarray, and Sargent, being of a mind and trained with an eye to see such beauty within the 'abnormal,' was able to translate such commonality into the sublime.

Though his works are not usually addressed when discussions of British or French Orientalism appear in the art historical realm - often brushed aside in favour of Delacroix, Fromentin, Lewis, and Leighton - they do stand as significant contributions to Exoticism as an artistic development. By representing neither one stance nor the other, and presenting a view that was both factual and fantastical, he presented the Orient as a place to be considered for its own merits, and the depths and richness of its own culture, but also one capable of limitless possibilities of influence for the artist. This may be why he decided to keep such photo books of exotic peoples and locations for later reference; he knew it would provide a wealth of source material for continued explorations into non-traditional forms of art, epitomised perhaps by his exotic and heavily symbolic images in the Boston Public Library. Sargent embodied Castagnary's view of those who 'flee' and escape Paris, not to escape the 'real and present,' but rather to find the beauty of the 'present' through his artistic reality.

Chapter Four

Portraits D'Enfants: The Aesthetic Child

After Sargent had returned from his foreign travels in early 1881 – a trip that included experiments with the ethnographic and the ‘dirty picturesque’, copies of Velazquez in Spain and an introduction to Whistler in Venice - perhaps he needed a social break. In June, he visited Lee and his family in London, and it was there in the last half of the month that he most likely wandered (or made his way with haste, we will never know) into the Fine Art Society to view the works of his recent acquaintance, James McNeill Whistler, whose *Venice Pastels* had been on display since January. This exhibition gave Sargent a chance to view the ‘impression’ in an artistic context, something most likely in his thoughts on his travels abroad, but also more concretely in his mention of Pater in his letter to Lee a mere month later.

However, at the FAS Sargent would have also had the chance to view the works of an altogether different kind of artist, one whose style was in high contrast to the controversial Whistler – that of the later Baronet and President of the Royal Academy, John Everett Millais.¹ Millais’s works, of which there were nineteen, were exhibited as part of a ‘masterpiece’ retrospective that ran concurrently with Whistler’s pastels from February to July.² We can only imagine the artistic cerebral machinations that occurred within Sargent as he walked from picture to picture, thinking of his readings on Pater and viewing, in

¹ The Pennell biographies note that Millais ‘was one of the first to see the pastels. “Magnificent, fine – very cheeky, but fine!” he was heard to say in his big voice, and afterwards he wrote to Whistler to tell him so, and the letter pleased Whistler.’ Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, I: 293.

² Cosmo Monkhouse, “Art Notes and Reviews”, *The Art Journal*, (April 1881): 125-126. This article does not mention the specific length of the exhibition, but subsequent editions of *The Art Journal* mention the work up until their June 1881 publication. The FAS’s minutes for their July 6th, 1881 meeting note that these two exhibits attracted ‘42,830 visitors who paid £2,141 in admissions fees’, so its popularity must have reached Sargent’s knowledge. See Deanna Bendix, “Whistler’s 1881 Venice Pastels Exhibition: An Arrangement in Olive Green and Venetian Red”, in *Twenty First Century Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg*, eds. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Laura S. Dixon (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp, 2008), 143.

the flesh, the work of the older generation of Aesthetic ‘impressionists.’ One painting, I would like to argue, struck him more deeply than the others; Millais’s 1856 ‘picture full of beauty without subject’ *Autumn Leaves* (Fig. 11), an image of four girls raking and burning leaves in a garden at sunset. The next year, in 1882, Sargent would produce a similar work depicting four girls in the enigmatic *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*. The connection, for now, seems tenuous, but let us explore the facts.

In 1856, while working on *Autumn Leaves* in Perth, Millais wrote philosophically to his friend Charles Collins, concerned with the subject of beauty:

The *only* head you could paint to be considered beautiful by *everybody* would be the face of a little girl about eight years old, before humanity is subject to such change. With years, features become so much more decided, expressive, through the development of character they admit of more or less appreciation – hence the difference of opinion about beauty. A child represents beauty more in the abstract, and when a peculiar expression shows itself in the face, then comes the occasion of difference between people as to whether it increases or injures the beauty...³

In the context of his career up until this point, Millais’s shift towards pursuing more purely ‘aesthetic’ subjects was a notable departure from the narrative and symbolic works of his earlier Pre-Raphaelite days, a phase which Liz Pettejohn describes as ‘transitional’ both for its departures from Pre-Raphaelitism on one hand and ‘as adumbrations of Aestheticism’ on the other.⁴ Indeed, the work sits teetering on this brink between movements, uncertainly leaning to one side, while potentially acting as a point of unification between seemingly disparate artistic principles. Was *Autumn Leaves* an experiment in a grown up Pre-Raphaelitism, one that threw forth the narrative crutch in favour of artistic expression? Perhaps so, and at any rate, Millais’s attempt here was the first in a long series of works he subsequently executed for the sole exploration of beauty.

³ Malcolm Warner, “John Everett Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*: ‘a picture full of beauty without subject’”, in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. Leslie Parris (London: The Tate Gallery, 1984), 137. See Appendix B, Figure 15.

⁴ Elizabeth Pettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 13.

But what is notable here, and connecting back to his statement to Collins, is that this emphasis on beauty frequently involved the presence and depiction of female children: see *Leisure Hours* of 1864 and *Sisters* and *Nina Lehmann* of 1868 (Figs. 90-92) for examples in this vein, a practice which later influenced his co-exhibitor at the FAS. Whistler himself is thought to have often used Millais's portraits of children as inspiration; his *Cicely Alexander* of 1872-74 (Fig. 93), for example, evokes visual similarities to *Nina Lehmann*. Sargent, perhaps taking a cue from Whistler, and I would like to argue Millais, also began painting a series of portraits of children around this time period, beginning with *The Pailleron Children*, submitted a few months before to the 1881 Salon. So in the context of that fateful day in June 1881 we know for a fact that Sargent had children, impressions, Pater and Whistler on the brain; he would leave with another addition to this mix, that of Millais and children.⁵

In returning to *The Boit Daughters*, however, and *Autumn Leaves*, the visual connection remains striking.⁶ Multiple girl children of differing ages, both acknowledging and looking away from the viewer's gaze, in similar but not identical clothing, depicted in scenes that manipulate light and shadow for potentially symbolic intent – these connections are all immediately discernible. But Sargent's work I argue is just as enigmatic, if not more so, than Millais's. Yet the elusiveness of his works does not exist solely in their attempt to capture childish beauty and innocence, as Millais insists to Collins, but rather to convey an alternative type of symbolism. Though thirty years apart, both Millais and Sargent's works actively engage with a discourse on visual beauty prevalent in Aesthetic texts during the last half of the nineteenth-century – and these texts

⁵ Sargent's relationship with Millais would not formally begin until 1884, when Sargent visited Millais's studio with Henry James. A letter from Sargent to Millais, undated but presumably before July 1887 (the letter lists the address as 31 Tite street, but it had been changed to 33 Tite Street by mid-1887) shows Sargent's comfort with reaching out to the veteran painter to help him solve some issues with one of his works – potentially *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. If this was the painting in question, it would make sense that Sargent would request aid from Millais due to his status as one of Britain's foremost painters of children. See Appendix B, Figure 16.

⁶ I will refer to *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* as *The Boit Daughters* from now on for brevity.

repeatedly stress the importance of the child as the site for the pure reception of 'impressions'.

Many of the texts I will explore in this context were published after Millais executed *Autumn Leaves*; however, Millais's work does initiate a discussion on the relationships between artistic impressions and vision, beauty, children and modernity that would permeate the works of Baudelaire and Pater printed later in the 1860s and 70s, works which influenced artists working within what I am calling a cosmopolitan Aestheticism. The Impressionist response to these textual discussions on the child would appear in their myriad explorations into the theme as it related to the city or family, as seen in works by Cassatt, Manet, and Renoir, linking the concept of modernity with one of youthfulness, freshness and awe. While little has been explored to date on the concept of the child as it was conveyed visually in British Aestheticism, painters ascribed to this part of the movement, Millais, for our discussions here, and Leighton, seem to use the child within a specific program of beauty, i.e. as aesthetically pleasing subjects (or objects one could argue) who fit well into scenes complete with sumptuous fabrics, colours and patterns. Sargent, however, sits oddly between these two endeavours, depicting the child in a way that holds both the symbolic intent of the Impressionists, and the pure beauty of the British aesthetes. In order to translate and seek out Sargent's potential intentions as they related to this cosmopolitan and highly Aesthetic view of the child, a return to the primary documents is essential. What exactly does it mean to depict the 'Aesthetic child'? This chapter endeavours to answer the complex response to such a question.

Sargent painted a significant number of children in his career, so in order to preserve focus and create a close visual analysis, this chapter will look specifically at three representative images from this early period. This will show not only a type of stylistic and symbolic evolution, but will also indicate that Sargent's 'Aesthetic' children were not indicative of a certain 'type' – like Millais's – which insisted on a heavy dosage of beauty and ornament, evocative of modern penchants for overt sentimentality and commodity culture. While his previously mentioned 1882 *The Boit Daughters* will be closely examined, this work is situated uniquely between two vastly different interpretations of the

child in his art – his 1881 *The Pailleron Children* and the 1886 *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, the latter of which is the end point for the overall discussion presented in this doctoral thesis. What is also significant for my purposes, however, is that the first work can be defined as definitively ‘French,’ executed in France for the family of a celebrated French playwright, while the latter was done in Britain, using British children, and was bought for the British nation under the auspices of the Chantrey Bequest. The middle work, much like Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*, then can be described as sitting somewhere on the brink between French and British factions, depicting the expatriate daughters of an American, in a Parisian apartment, with Japanese vases. Not only does this oscillation impart a strong sense of my argument about Sargent’s cosmopolitan Aesthetics, but it also provides a unique case for us to observe, in specific examples on a united theme, how Sargent was using Aesthetic motifs and concerns to convey this international program.

The Pailleron Children and the ‘Frankly Individual Being’

The first image, Sargent’s 1881 *The Pailleron Children* was executed as part of a trio of portraits depicting the family of the French poet and playwright Edouard Pailleron, whose portrait Sargent painted, along with a second of his wife, in 1879. The somewhat devilish look of the children here has long been interpreted as a result of Sargent’s boisterous and quarrelsome relationship with little Marie-Louise, who remarks in her diaries she had to sit eighty three times for this painting, due mostly in part to her own lack of cooperation.⁷ Marie-Louise and her brother Edouard are depicted against a predominantly red background, evocative almost of flames, and might I venture, hell, while seated on a bench covered by a carpet. Marie-Louise, dressed all in white, and her brother, dressed all in black with white cuffs and collar, do not interact, and Edouard is presented in three quarter length view, while both children stare aggressively at the viewer.

⁷ For a detailed account of this sitting, see Marie-Louise Pailleron, *Le Paradis Perdu: Souvenirs d’enfance*, (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1947), 153-166.

Their chilly presentation is remarkably different from Sargent's earlier child images, such as *Robert de Cévrieux* (Fig. 94) and *Jeanne Kieffer* of 1879 (Fig. 95), which give the audience the more traditional, sickly sweet view of the child, complete with big bows, floppy dogs and pink cheeks. The former, with the small boy holding the dog, follows in many respects directly from the overtly sentimental 'child with dog' images of Greuze, Chardin and Drouais in the eighteenth-century, placing Sargent as acting within the Victorian penchant for images of emotion.⁸ However, Sargent's shift in his representations of children, from sentimental to enigmatic, does come at a formative time - in 1881 - when he is both reading Pater and viewing Millais's works in London. That he may have produced *The Pailleron Children* and *The Boit Daughters* as a reaction against these maudlin representations of children, supported by his reading of Aesthetic texts and their stress on the child's mental complexity, could be a potential explanation for this visual shift.

Another way to read this work would be to place it within its specifically French context, as a work executed in France depicting a French family. How then, do the French deal with the concept of the child during this period, and how does this relate to Sargent's work? As I have mentioned before, the French Impressionists increasingly used images of children to explore the nature of family life in the modern city. Female painters such as Mary Cassatt were well known for their contemporary reworkings of the 'Madonna and child' theme in an Impressionist framework, while Edgar Degas depicted images of the city child in works such as *Viscount Lepic and his Daughters Crossing the Place de la Concorde* (Fig. 97) of 1875 and his images of young metropolitan ballet dancers. What is notable, and pertains particularly to Sargent's case here, is Greg

⁸ Sargent was most likely mimicking the effect as it was used by Carolus-Duran, as there are many stylistic and compositional similarities between *Robert de Cévrieux* and Duran's 1874 *Marie-Anne Carolus Duran: Portrait of the Artist's Daughter* (Fig. 96). Carolus-Duran, in turn, was most likely influenced in this by the 'child with dog' imagery as used by Velazquez and the described eighteenth-century images, which often included dogs and other animals with children to allude to their 'unformed' and 'instinctual' nature. See Barbara Gallati, *Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children* (Brooklyn Museum: Bullfinch Press, 2004), 71-72 and Emma Barker, "Imaging Childhood in Eighteenth Century France: Greuze's *Little Girl with a Dog*", *The Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (December 2009): 426-445.

Thomas's assertion that Impressionist images of children 'did not, however, repeat the sweet sentimentality found in so much child and parenting literature. Renoir sugar-coated his girls but generally left out parents and family emotions.'⁹

This shift from sentimentality to viewing children as small adults, taking part in family or city life, came at the end of a long century that experienced a transition in the perceptions of what it meant to be a 'child', which included seeing youth as a distinctly separate and formative period in life. This began nominally in 1762 with the publication of Rousseau's *Emile* or *On Education*, whose first three books were dedicated to advice on the raising and education of children in order to preserve their innate sense of goodness amidst a corrupt society. He emphasises, above all else, that parents should allow the child a certain state of 'natural play' in their early development in order to preserve such innocence, while also allowing the child to develop their own natural talents, which would eventually lead them to the correct choice of trade (discussed in book four on adolescence) and the adult cultivation of sentiment (book five).¹⁰

Such views influenced the Romantic visual productions on the theme in the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth-centuries - the child in paint typified the innate state asserted by Rousseau. However, a division began to form between views of the child *in* this innocent state towards a view of the *child-like state* within the adult, as they look to fight against their increasingly jaded views against society. William Blake's angel images frequently depict such, as in *The Good and Evil Angel* of c. 1805 (Fig. 98), where he uses the child as signifier for the adult's internal struggle between good and evil. This transition towards the child as symbol for an adult sense of awe and wonder would become

⁹ Greg M. Thomas, *Impressionist Children: Childhood, Family and Modern Identity in French Art* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), xxiii.

¹⁰ A perusal of the Christie's catalogue of Sargent's books auctioned off by his family after his death reveals that Sargent did own a copy of Rousseau's *Emile*. However, the date that this book was purchased was not included, so it is entirely speculation that he would have owned it at this time and could have used it as a potential influence. See *Auction Catalogue of the Library of the Late John Singer Sargent, R.A. and Miscellaneous books: The Property of Mrs. Edith Cragg*. Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods, Wednesday July 29th, 1925. (London), entry #98.

representative of Baudelaire's use of the child in his discussions in *The Painter of Modern Life*, to be later discussed.

The nineteenth century would also engage with this topic of 'childhood' from both a psychological and a medical angle, extending Rousseau's discussions by insisting on the 'childhood state' as a phase of psychological and identity development. The Goncourt Brothers observed in their *Journal* in 1864: 'a childhood impression is often responsible for the bent or the character of a whole life,' while Dr. Jean-Baptiste Fonssagrives published works during this period that began to explore the importance of the parent's relationship in nurturing the child, such as *Le Rôle des Mères dans les Maladies des Enfants* of 1872. He boldly stressed in his 1882 publication *Leçons d'hygiène Infantile* that 'the child doesn't operate like an adult; he isn't a mere diminutive of the latter, a *homunculus*, he's a frankly individual being.'¹¹ Strikingly enough, a similar theory was applied to a later discussion of *Autumn Leaves* in A.L. Baldry's biography *Sir John Everett Millais* of 1899:

And there is in the purity of the delicate little faces a suggestion of the innocence of childhood, which is exquisitely fresh and attractive. Yet no impossible idealization spoils the truth of the painting. They are frankly children who play their parts in it, not little angels with none of the instincts of human beings.¹²

Thus by the time we reach Sargent and *The Pailleron Children*, childhood in France was viewed as a significantly developmental stage in life, one of unique individuality formed by personal impressions and interactions with external culture, as seen in many of the works of the Impressionists. However, this stage still had its own limitations, and though implying independence, the children were still green and unformed, as seen by Baudelaire's statement that children, though open and susceptible to experience, are still without 'manhood's capacities and power of analysis... to order the mass of raw material... involuntarily accumulated.'¹³ For Baudelaire, children in their natural state

¹¹ Anna Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence 1848-1886* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 2.

¹² A.L. Baldry, *Sir John Everett Millais: His Art and Influence* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1899), 48.

¹³ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 8.

more purely absorb external impressions, but it is the adult who has the abilities to process it and translate it into a form of art.

Does Sargent's seemingly negative view of the Pailleron children reflect this? The children most definitely do not seem passive, or presented solely for beauty and the visual consumption of the viewer; Marie-Louise's intense gaze makes long, lingering perusal of the image somewhat uncomfortable. It can be said that the children here have clearly separate and distinct personalities, and their own autonomous thoughts towards each other, the viewer, and as we have seen in Marie-Louise's memoirs, towards the artist himself. From Sargent's use of the intense red background, to Marie-Louise's nervous energy, to the agitated position of both their hands, the Pailleron siblings are indeed not, as Baldry put it 'little angels' but rather representative of Fonsagrives 'frankly individual beings.' Instead of depicting the children in sentimental poses, connected with animals in order to emphasise their instinctual and carnal nature, Sargent has chosen to show them alone, without such trivial symbolic allusions, in frank openness of their personalities no matter how disruptive he viewed such personalities to be.¹⁴ They are human beings uniquely equipped to experience their own engagement with the world.

Compare Sargent's work here with the child portraits produced by Degas in the 1860s and 70s, specifically *The Bellelli Family*, *Giovanna and Giulia Bellelli* (Figs. 99 & 100) and the previously mentioned *Count Lepic and his Daughters*. The first two images depict the child indoors, as in Sargent's work, and although the first shows the children in the context of a family unit, there is a distinct moment of separation between the children and the adults. This is emphasised in the images of the Bellelli girls a bit older in the second work, where they are even more fractured by their lack of interaction or gaze. In *The Bellelli Family*, the children are shown in similar colours and clothing to the parents, but not identical – this makes the idea of connected lineage easy to read, but there is still a modicum of individuality. Every child depicted here is experiencing the city, the family, their siblings, and themselves in a subjective way, one decidedly removed from anything conveying sweetness or, as Sonia Solicari describes it, the 'commodification of sentiment' denoting a 'concern with the sharing of

¹⁴ Barker, "Imagining Childhood", 431.

emotion, rather than the moralistic or inward looking sensibilities.¹⁵ It is possible, then, to show that Sargent was situating himself in a specifically French context, albeit even a French Impressionist context, by depicting *The Pailleron Children* in such a detached, frank and rationalistic manner. This will also become more evident in my later discussions on 'Britishness' and children in relation to the 1886 *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*.

The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit: The Cosmopolitan Child

Let's shift a year forward to look at Sargent's *The Boit Daughters* to see how this representation of the 'frankly individual' child has progressed. Submitted to the 1882 Salon, the painting depicts the Boit's four daughters: Florence, Jane, Mary-Louisa and Julia ranging in ages from four to fourteen. The scene is set in a sparse and deeply shadowed room, thought to be the family's Parisian apartment. The girls, isolated and set apart (save for the eldest two grouped together whispering in the back) are upstaged only by the presence of two very large Japanese Arita vases, which tower over the older daughters. Three of the girls stare directly at the viewer, almost as if someone has just entered the room and they have looked up from their solitary reverie or play. The fourth and eldest daughter Florence, with her face completely hidden in shadow save for a slight highlight on her right cheek, leans against a vase for support. The piece is bathed in extremes of light and darkness, similar to Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, and forces the focus to the highlighted areas in front.

One thread of connection between this work and *The Pailleron Children* is obvious, and that is the presentation of the children in a context that decidedly prevents the viewer from accessing them in any kind of sentimental or emotional way. The extended foreground space and lack of visual access to half of the figures makes this work emotionally alienating. But what if this was intentional? What I would like to suggest here is that Sargent developed a series of signifiers in this work that consciously intensifies the separation between the

¹⁵ Sonia Solicari, "Selling Sentiment: The Commodification of Emotion in Victorian Visual Culture," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 4 (2007): 1: para. 2, accessed Jan 25, 2013, <http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/index.php/19/article/viewFile/458/318>.

viewer and the children in order to convey a relationship to an Aesthetic program, or more specifically, the discussion of the child as it appears in Aesthetic texts. These discussions on the child responded to the myriad medical and philosophical approaches to childhood by viewing it instead as a state of being that could, or should, be reached by the adult in order to facilitate their own synesthetic responses to external stimuli. This was a facet being explored by both French *and* British writers during this period, linking these works within a cosmopolitan rhetoric. Therefore, Sargent's combination of frank openness on the part of the girls (and their gazes) combined with this to be discussed compositional symbolism denotes his work as a unique visual engagement with the concepts of the impression and Aestheticism delineated in Chapter One.

In addition to this is Sargent's thought-provoking decision as a male artist to paint and exhibit images of children in such an enigmatic and 'sensitive' way. J.K. Huysmans remarked upon seeing Mary Cassatt's images of children at the 1881 Independent Artists Exhibition:

Only a woman is equipped to paint childhood. There is in it a special feeling a man would not know how to render unless they are particularly sensitive or nervous. Their hands are too large to not leave behind clumsy and brutal fingerprints; only a woman can pose an infant, dress it, and put in the hairpins without pricking.¹⁶

Sargent decidedly *does* render this special feeling, even though it may come across as perplexing, therefore linking him again to the 'nervousness' of the Aesthetes and their sensitivity to beauty and sensual feeling. He subsumes this sensitivity under a complex web of symbolic colour and composition, presenting the children in contradictory ways; Marie-Louise is a devil in a white dress, while the Boit Daughters are connected by blood but have no spatial

¹⁶'Au reste, il faut bien le répéter 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 maladroitesses et brutales empreintes; seule la femme peut poser l'enfant, l'habiller, mettre les épingles sans se piquer.' J.K. Huysmans, "L'Exposition des Indépendants en 1881" *L'Art Moderne*, special collected edition 10 (1902): 256-257, English translation reproduced in Gallati, *Great Expectations*, 20.

relationship with each other, not even shared eye contact, to establish their status as family. Sargent seems to be saying something wider here, and the language becomes more obscure and complex as his early period marches on.

The critical reviews astutely pick up on this, however, even defining a work like *The Boit Daughters* in terms I have established in Chapter One. *The Athenaeum* describes it as having a ‘strength and energy, bizarre as the manifestation of the latter is,’ and ‘[it is a] *tour de force*, designed with astonishing energy and in a weird spirit...’¹⁷ This critical uncertainty continues in *The Athenaeum*: ‘The swift execution of the latter has not sufficed for a half-studied, half-finished group. A magnificent Chinese vase is the one fine element of a big picture which has apparently begun without a defined purpose, and is a congeries of parts without a *raison d’etre*.’¹⁸ *The Athenaeum* clearly supports that the *raison d’etre* of the portrait, any portrait really, is to convey a physical representation of the children; this was Sargent’s job as the painter, and he fails, I assert intentionally, in this respect. While the critics may not be able to read the symbolism that Sargent is presenting, they still appear to allude to the fact that Sargent is doing *something* beneath the surface, and the language here attests to this.

However, these terms ‘bizarre’ and ‘weird’ do find root in the texts of Aestheticism, specifically in relation to beauty and children. Though not discussing the child per se, Pater does use the word *bizarrierie* in his ‘Romanticism’ in *Macmillan’s Magazine* of 1876, where in discussing the various national elements of Romanticism in Germany and France, he states in relation to the latter: ‘...(where in a certain *bizarrierie* of motive, united with faultless literary execution, it still shows itself in the writings of Feuillet and Flaubert)...’; he also attests that ‘it is the addition of strangeness to beauty that constitutes the romantic character in art.’¹⁹ Was Sargent’s intent then, in adding this ‘strangeness’ to his child portraits, to convey a type of non-normative beauty, symbolic of the complexity of the child and their inner world? Considering Vernon Lee’s statement on his attraction to the curious, this does not seem

¹⁷ “The Salon, Paris”, *The Athenaeum*, no. 2850, (June 10, 1882): 738.

¹⁸ “The Salon, Paris”, *The Athenaeum*, no. 2904 (June 23, 1883): 803.

¹⁹ Walter Pater, “Romanticism”, *Macmillan’s Magazine* 35, no. 205 (November 1876): 64 – 65.

improbable, and may even be argued in comparing the images with their corresponding texts, specifically again Pater, whose “Child in the House” discusses in depth the separation of inner and outer worlds within the child’s experience and Baudelaire, who has long been considered to have been influential to Pater, especially in regards to *The Renaissance*.²⁰ Close analysis of these texts and how they parallel to Sargent’s images here will establish a clear relationship between the two, implying not only that Sargent was using his works to engage in Aesthetic themes, but was also drawing inspiration for those themes from multiple international sources. The child was not simply a pretty subject for display, but rather, like the verbal implications of the ‘impression’, carried with it a heavily symbolic and provocative significance that varied depending on audience and context.

If Pater was borrowing from Baudelaire, as previous scholarship has determined, then it seems logical first to explore Baudelaire’s notions of the child and how that appears in *The Painter of Modern Life* before moving forward to Pater’s own treatment of the subject. In returning to Huysmans’s comment that the painting of children required a ‘feminine’ openness to sensitivity, Baudelaire’s text does create an indelible link between the child and a similarly raw, sensitive or partially undeveloped emotional state. However, as I have previously mentioned, instead of discussing the child directly, Baudelaire has instead shifted childhood from a literal to a metaphorical phase, one that is applied to the modern artist and his receptivity to the impressions of modern life. He refers to this status as the ‘man-child’ state or ‘a man who is never for a moment without the genius of childhood.’ He contends on the importance of this way of being in the following passage:

²⁰ See David Carrier’s discussion on this textual relationship in his “Baudelaire, Pater and the Origins of Modernism”, *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 14, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 39-43. Carrier later discusses this in more depth in his book *High Art: Charles Baudelaire and the Origins of Modernist Painting* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996), 70-78, where he asserts, with support from Kenneth Clark and Patricia Clements, that Pater borrowed ‘aggressively’ from Baudelaire. See also Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and John J. Conlon, *Walter Pater and the French Tradition* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982).

The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour... . But genius is nothing more or less than *childhood recovered* at will – a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood’s capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated... .The genius of childhood [is] a genius for which nothing has gone *stale*.²¹

Note here the connection between genius and a state of curiosity, or a desire to ‘see everything in a state of newness.’ Unable as an adult to see what the child sees, sick with what Vernon Lee calls ‘artificial culture,’ Baudelaire insists that the artist should strive to return to an open sense of wonder about the surrounding world.²² But much in the way that genius, as defined in Chapter One, left one open to potential for decay or dissolution, so too does Baudelaire connect achievement of the man-child state to a form of ‘convalescence.’ The way the child perceives their ‘brightly coloured impressions’ is similar to those of one ‘who has lately returned from... the shadow of death.’ Indeed, the artist’s inspiration is like a ‘convulsion’ and a ‘violent nervous shock which has its repercussions in the very core of the brain.’²³

So in a dual approach, not only is the artist who is ‘nervous’ able to view the world as a *child* and see their specific *impressions*, but to connect back to Huysmans, it is this particular shock of the brain which also enables the artist to paint children acutely. See how the ideas of the impression, genius and nervousness all circle back into the body, or spirit rather, of the child. If Sargent is able to paint children successfully, then he is simply another ‘impression-ist’ who is able to access that part of his own sensibilities. The impression then takes on another meaning in Aesthetic texts - that of the pure child state, enabling us to view, in some sense, this concept of the child as Aesthetic symbol.

It is important, however, not to step away from the overarching theme of Baudelaire’s discussions on such circumstances – that of transience and the fragility of the childhood experience, and the ephemerality of seeing the world

²¹ All quotes from this paragraph are Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 8-9.

²² Vernon Lee, “The Child in the Vatican”, in *Belcaro* (London: W. Satchell & Co, 1881), 22.

²³ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 7-8.

purely. This is where Pater's impressions take centre stage, defined in his preface to *The Renaissance* where it becomes a fully sensory experience, one that needs to be captured very quickly. Pater's metaphor for this comes in the form of a whirlpool, 'a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought.'²⁴ Pleasure is monumental and essential to increasing the flow of the pool. He speaks of finding it in good wine, well written books, or beautiful landscapes, but above all the most essential element is the act of *seeing*.²⁵ This, again, we find back in Baudelaire's tome, and again it is inextricably linked to the concept of the child:

It is by the deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new, whatever it may be, whether a face or a landscape, gilding, colours, shimmering stuffs, or the magic of physical beauty assisted by cosmetic art.²⁶

The child's gaze, therefore, becomes the site of pure sensory impressions. With this ancestry of the child's role in mind, Pater's 'The Child in the House', first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1878, becomes his own Aesthetic exploration on how the artist can learn from the childhood experience by a recounting the of beauty of one's own youth, and the result it had on one's outcome as a particularly 'sensitive' adult. I intend to make parallels here between the definition of the child's Aesthetic experience with that as depicted in Sargent's *The Boit Daughters*, but for now, let's explore the text itself.

For the purposes of the current discussion, one way to interpret this text is to see it as an instructive treatise on how the artist can learn from, or seek to achieve, the child state. This method of reading is further exemplified by the fact that the story is told from the point of view of an adult, Florian Deleal, who recalls certain childhood memories relating to a beloved home. As a reader, the artist can commiserate with the main character being 'like them' – a corrupted adult. The passage oscillates between moments of innocence, purity and happy memories, and then at once plunges it into a type of *memento mori*,

²⁴ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 247.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁶ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 8.

admonishing on the 'desire of physical beauty mingled itself with the early fear of death – the fear of death intensified by the desire of beauty', evoking, again links to Baudelaire and convalescence.²⁷

Death and beauty again have a commonality in the child, who at once embodies a physical beauty and youthfulness that is also vulnerable to disease and premature mortality. Adeline Tintner's description of the text seems to echo this sentiment of the transient and unfinished, calling it 'an aborted piece of fiction. Pater has invented a kind of hallway novelette, a brief life, containing a character in search of a plot or of some appropriate fictional apparatus, a character waiting in the wings, as it were, to be utilized by a true novelist,' or perhaps painter, in this particular case.²⁸

There are a number of important Aesthetic concepts in this work that echo throughout other Aesthetic texts of the period. Initially, there is the relationship between the development of a child's soul and the objects and atmosphere of their surroundings. For Pater, and for Florian, the house embodies 'the gradual expansion of the soul which had come to be there – of which indeed through the law which makes the material objects about them so large an element in children's lives, it had actually become a part.'²⁹ Pater further advances on the child's relationship with objects in another passage, when he states 'for it is false to suppose that a child's sense of beauty is dependent on any choiceness, or special fineness, in the objects which present themselves to it, though this indeed comes to be the rule with most of us later in life.'³⁰ A child seems to develop their own sense of beauty organically through the objects in their surroundings, and that unlike adults, there is no special distinction between 'objects of fineness' and everyday objects. Ultimately, a child sees and develops their own impressions without discrimination and

²⁷ Walter Pater, "Imaginary Portraits: The Child in the House", *Macmillan's Magazine* 38, no. 226 (August 1878): 313.

²⁸ Adeline Tintner, "Pater in "The Portrait of a Lady" and "The Golden Bowl", Including Some Unpublished Letters of Henry James", *The Henry James Review* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1982): 85. Tintner's theory in this article is that Henry James may have expanded on the character of Florian Deleal in many of his novels as a way to 'finish' what Pater had initiated.

²⁹ Pater, "The Child in the House", 313.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 313-314.

through the process of memory – a beloved object, though tattered and worn, can become beautiful because it recalls hours of play, for example.

Objects, souls and children find an interesting re-interpretation in Vernon Lee's "The Child in the Vatican", published in her volume *Belcaro* of 1881 around the same time she was discussing Pater with Sargent. Vernon Lee's title alone is an obvious homage to the work of her mentor, but Lee's written interactions between children, soul and the environment comes through a more public context: the museum and its collection of antique statuary. She couches this in terms of a fantasy story, where one day a child is walking through the Vatican and the statues, being unhappy with the static nature of their lives, infect the water and leaves of the vines with a special 'love philter' [sic] which, upon eating and drinking them, causes the child to 'fall in love with Rome.' To the child's soul, statues seem 'the most silent art of any,' they contain 'a sense of void and of unattractive mystery which chills, numbs the little soul into a sort of emotionless, inactive comfort.'³¹ Lee muses later on that 'or might these statues have been much more to us? Might they, perhaps, have shaped and trained our souls with their unspoken lessons?'³²

At the heart of the story, however, is the principle that both adults and children are at a similar state in life where they are unable to appreciate the beauty of antique statuary. For the adults, it is due to the fact that they arrive at them too late in life, well after the influx of contemporary culture has infiltrated their thoughts and tainted their impressions. She states this repeatedly; 'for us grown up creatures: familiar with such matters, and with powers of impression quite deadened by culture...' and 'To the statues we return only quite late, when this long-formed, long-moulded soul of ours has been well steeped in every sort of eclectic and artificial culture...'³³ But these children, in their lack of understanding, are in the same dilemma as the adults; only their prevention is due to a *lack of culture*. Youth prevents an appropriate understanding of their object importance.

³¹ Lee, "The Child in the Vatican", 19-20.

³² Ibid., 23.

³³ Ibid., 19; 22.

What is parallel here with Pater is this importance on objects and their relationship with the creation of the child's soul. This soul only really comes alive in the 'fairy tale' when the 'love philter' begins its magical work, enabling the child, once grown, to access an Aesthetic code in all art objects – pieces of music, statuary, paintings, etc. Lee does not mention anywhere that this specific child suffered from 'artificial culture,' words which, by their absence, imply that this early love of objects could be the solution to the adult's deadened state. In "The Child in the House", Florian *does* develop such appreciation of beautiful objects through a nurturing home environment, so there is a fascinating interplay here between inner and outer worlds, a concept I will dissect later in this chapter. The important factor here is that for Pater and Lee, beauty and one's interaction with it by an object medium is essential to the development of the inner world. And the inner world of the child, their 'soul,' is inherently pure, by the nature of its *tabula rasa*, before any interaction with the outside world has tainted it, i.e. in a return to Rousseau and *Emile*.

What is significant throughout both Pater and Lee's discussion of children is their *active agency*. Children may be a type of blank slate, but it is *their own* interactions with their environment that produces experiences, impressions and the ultimate appreciation for beauty which Aestheticism views as essential for participation in modern society. Oscar Wilde stated this more clearly in his lecture "House Decoration" from 1882:

If children grow up among all fair and lovely things, they will grow to love beauty and detest ugliness before they know the reason why... . If everything is dainty and delicate, gentleness and refinement of manner are unconsciously acquired.³⁴

This also links back quite clearly to the views of the child in the French context and Impressionism's visual interpretations that emphasise the child's interaction with the city and modern culture. Thus beautiful objects, and the teaching of beauty through them, form the child into a more productive (or in

³⁴ Oscar Wilde, "House Decoration", or at the time known under the title "The Practical Application of the Principles of Aesthetic Theory to Exterior and Interior House Decoration, with Observations Upon Dress and Personal Ornaments", in Ross, *Miscellanies*, 289.

Wilde's case, a more productively *Aesthetic*) member of civilisation. This idea of agency makes the concept of childhood vastly more complex than the simply sweet state of the child as signified by Millais's *Cherry Ripe* and *Bubbles* (and ultimately by Greuze before him). Children have souls, denoting an inner life, a depth of feeling that implies concerns with adult-like issues such as morality, environment and culture. In light of these concerns, it is possible then to 'translate' Sargent's intentions in *The Boit Daughters* by creating a link between these themes and his more enigmatic visual choices within the work.

Visual Analysis: Sargent, Millais, and Renoir

Due to the cosmopolitan nature of the textual sources, visual comparison to both French and British representative images also seems pertinent. It has already been established that Sargent's earlier child images of this period, like *The Pailleron Children*, are more typically 'French'. However, since *The Boit Daughters* was executed *after* the notable year of 1881 when his Aesthetic explorations began to intensify, it is possible to view this painting as being more representative of his cosmopolitan Aesthetic interests and their representative discussions on the state of the child. In order to highlight how this was coming together visually, closer analysis with examples on a similar theme from the British contingency, in this case Millais's *Autumn Leaves*, and a French Impressionist one, Renoir's 1884 *Children's Afternoon at the Wargemont* (Fig. 12) may be helpful. In a similar method to comparisons between the discussions of Barringer and Tromans on British vs. French Orientalism used in the previous chapter, these images are to be used as representative 'types' of certain national approaches to the child theme as it was used in the exploration of modern 'for its own sake' beauty. That *The Boit Daughters* is clearly adapting elements from both painting 'types' will show Sargent not only as cosmopolitan, but also, in his addition of bizarre or symbolic elements removed from narrative focus, as significantly and symbolically Aesthetic.

The background of Millais's work has already been discussed, therefore an understanding of the context in which Renoir's work was produced may create additional parallels between all three images, and will help to support my readings of their cosmopolitan and Aesthetic connections. *Children's Afternoon*

at the Wargemont, for example, was also executed during a similarly 'experimental' artistic phase in Renoir's career, 1882-1887, which is often called his 'anti-Impressionist,' 'harsh' or 'sour' phase due to its return to more linear, classical, and sculptural form. The work also exhibits a method of art Renoir was pursuing entitled *Irrégulariste*, derived from a manifesto he had written in 1884 which emphasised that since there was a lack of proportion in nature, so too should painterly beauty come from natural imperfection. Such a pursuit may explain the disjointed nature of the image with its contrasting usage of colour pattern. What is significant for an initial connection to Millais and Sargent, however, is that Renoir was actively experimenting with more purely aesthetic choices in his works, and he used the subject of the child to do so. Though this may have been a choice of timing and convenience - the work was executed as part of a series of fourteen family portraits commissioned by Paul Berard beginning in 1879, executed on their estate in Dieppe - the similar subject matter of depicting a series of girls in ascending ages makes a preliminary link to Sargent and Millias's works currently under discussion.

Situated in a room full of alternating motifs, the Berard daughters - shown here in ascending order as 4-year-old Lucie, 10-year-old Margeurite (Margot), and 14-year-old Marthe - initially embody Millais's statement to Collins about the most beautiful thing one could paint is the face of a little girl of a certain age.³⁵ In Renoir's image, the children, much like the woman in Whistler's *Symphony in White No. 2* (Fig. 16), become lost amidst the design of the room. They are seemingly beautiful objects amidst other beautiful objects, echoing Bill Brown's astute, albeit comical, observation about *The Boit Daughters* that 'Sargent here has managed to paint a *portrait* of vases... and a *still-life* of girls', showing the nature of this interchangeability between human and object-persons.³⁶ Also, like the vases, is the fact that these girl children embody the idea of 'art for art's sake' because they are representative of the most beautiful visual time of life, before they have aged with experience and adulthood.

³⁵ Colin B. Bailey, *Renoir's Portraits: Impressions of an Age* (London: Yale University Press, 1997), 209.

³⁶ Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter in American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2003), 139-140.

Renoir here seems to create uniformity out of a subject of natural individuality – the child – by placing them in similar patterns as the objects in their surroundings. Thus the viewer perceives the child, in this instance, on the same level as they would perceive the pattern in the carpet. If it weren't for the arresting gaze of little Lucie, the viewer may not even take too much notice of the figures at all, especially Margot, whose blue dress and muted coloured stockings blend slowly into the blue pattern of the chaise and walls. Colin Bailey called this a 'democracy of values [where] the traditional hierarchy between subject and setting, maintained in Impressionist figure painting, is not collapsed.'³⁷ *Autumn Leaves* works on a similar principle with the muted tones of the clothing and hair, significantly in regards the two figures on the right who blend harmoniously with the fading colours of the sunset. Sargent's work is more direct; the two older girls do not fade slowly but dissolve immediately into the background, extinguishing the boundary of human, object and location. This strange collapse of values between subject and object creates an intriguing statement regarding the status of little girls in the late nineteenth century. On one hand we can read this as meaning that the value of girl children lies merely in their potential as future decorative 'wifely' objects. However, in light of this thesis I prefer to read this as a unified treatise on beauty and aesthetics. For these artists, the youth of a child held just as much visual aesthetic potential as a beautiful carpet or chaise.

This 'girl as object' view is also potentially invalidated by the active status of the children in all three works. Lacking true immobility, as objects do, the children are in a very human state of synergy with their surroundings and objects, either through reading, touching, or holding them. Such action sets the girls apart, negating the a misogynist reading of the girls as beautiful 'trophies' more towards a view of the image as one depicting actual engaged beings. This is further exemplified by the arresting gazes presented in all three works, which negate the viewer's ability to read them as passive objects for consumption. In looking at Sargent's work as the 'cosmopolitan' example, this kinetic versus static role of the child can be seen to typify both French and British textual discussions earlier established. It conveys not only Impressionist/French

³⁷ Bailey, *Renoir's Portraits*, 209.

concepts of the individuality of the child, but their development of a personal sense of beauty through engagement and interaction with external culture. They are in the process of learning to, as Wilde stated, 'love beauty and detest ugliness before they know the reason why'.³⁸

Activity versus passivity is essential to these readings, but other more pressing symbolic issues also run rampant through these three paintings. One theme I would like to address here is the commonality of the idea of children in a 'home space'. Present in all three of these paintings is the clear separation between inner/safe space (where the children are located) and an outer/potentially dangerous space. For Millais, this is evoked by the manicured lawn where the girls collect leaves in contrast to the wild untamed forest behind them; for Renoir, it is through the clear linearity of the inside space in contrast to the loose brushwork of the garden as seen through the window, and for Sargent, the shafts of light on the left side of the image, alluding to a window and the outside, and also the glimpse of the hallway in the back of the scene between the vases. The children here all appear safe and protected, their gazes, though alert to the outside world, do not appear uncomfortable, startled or afraid – rather more curious, and in some cases, inviting. They seem open to receiving the *impressions* of the outside world, and with interacting with us as the viewer, even though, as Pater and Baudelaire assert, this interaction will cause corruption and a loss of their pure sensory state.

That the children are not seen as more concerned about the threat of the outside/viewer's world comes perhaps by this idea of their home space and its inherent safety. Pater stresses this dichotomy in "The Child in the House", repeatedly referencing the home as a secure inner sanctum from the dark, foreboding chaos of the outside world. 'This house, then, stood not far beyond the gloom and rumours of the town, among high garden walls...' but most significantly is the idea that the home was never impervious to glimpses into the 'gloom' for the child:

But upon this assured place, upon the child's assured soul, which resembled it, there came floating in from the larger world without as at windows left ajar unknowingly, or over the high garden walls, two streams of impressions, the sentiments of beauty and pain – recognitions

³⁸ Wilde, "House Decoration", 289.

of the visible, tangible, audible loveliness of things, as a very real and somewhat tyrannous element in them – and of the sorrow of the world, of grown people and children, and animals, as a thing not to be put by in them.³⁹

This passage is followed by a description of how this ‘infiltration’ of the outside world changes and corrupts Florian’s perception by developing his ‘lust of the eye’ and his ‘diseased sensibility to the spectacle of suffering,’ echoing in many ways Baudelaire’s convalescent ‘man-child’ and his nervous shocks to the brain at his continual interactions with the darker sides of culture and city life.

However, objects do play a significant role in this creation of the ‘home,’ both textually and visually. Interactions with objects create memories, which contribute to the development of their souls but also help to create a safe home space, which Pater describes as something ‘inclosed’ and ‘sealed’⁴⁰ If memories manage to create this element of safety for the child, and objects are integral to that process, then home can be evoked or created through the presence or engagement with objects – something appearing concurrently throughout all three of these works. In *Autumn Leaves* ‘home’ is alluded to not only by the manicured lawn, but also by the girls actions. They are in the process of ‘collecting leaves’ and creating a clean space for play, which on a symbolic level is indicative of the actions of home and domesticity, and a potential allusion to the safe ‘home’ space the girls will have in their futures as wives and mothers. The children are essentially creating their identities through this performance of ‘house keeping,’ in turn embodying on multiple levels Aestheticism’s role for the child – an active engagement with the senses in the external world, and an appreciation of its beauty.

Sargent’s painting doesn’t necessarily imply domesticity and home keeping as Millais’s does, but he does use the concept of object interaction and play in a similar way. Some art historians have made this connection, for example in reading little Julia’s holding of the doll to be symbolic play in preparation for her later role as mother. Anna Green relates this symbolism to

³⁹ Pater, “The Child in the House”, 316.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 316.

contemporary texts on maternity from Jules Michelet and the *Grande*

Encyclopédie:

To care for it, adorn it, dress it and undress it, give it lessons, scold it a little, put it to bed and sing it to sleep, presented this object as a living person – all the future of the woman resides in this... . A little girl without a doll is nearly as deprived, and quite as unnatural as a woman without a child.' As well as 'the paramount end of doll play in the view of the nineteenth-century commentators was learning to mother.'⁴¹

However none of the other girls in *The Boit Daughters* participate in traditionally feminine hobbies. Indeed, the room is oddly completely sparse, save for three things – the girls, the rug on which little Julia sits, and the large Arita vases in the background (Fig. 101). Sargent, by paring away the room and limiting the objects within it, seems to want us to look more closely at what little has been left, and this idea of 'home' comes more into view when observing his choice of specific objects. Though dark, the children appear relaxed and natural, so in one sense, this is a type of 'home' for the girls because they are able to be themselves within the space, and Erica Hirshler's research has confirmed this.⁴² However, Sargent's interpretation says something much different than that of Millais or Renoir. Though all three works exhibit children of a comfortable middle or upper class, Sargent specifically does not give us the richly patterned interior relevant to such status, and the children are not mere 'decorations' amidst the wealth of such an interior. In this manner, he shifts away from the Aesthetic emphasis on the construction of visual beauty through pattern and ornament as practiced by the other two painters. How then is one to read this as a 'home space' without all the comforts of home? The presence of a family group of sisters is one way, but the symbolic inclusion of certain objects is also another.

In the darkness aside from the figures, the vases then must become our focal point for discussion, as the rug, in the quickly dashed way Sargent insinuates its pattern, does not seem to have any overt significance (and it is

⁴¹ Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence*, 31-34.

⁴² See Erica Hirshler, *Sargent's Daughters: The Biography of a Painting* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2009) for her discovery that the location of the painting was the Boit's Parisian apartment on the Avenue de Friedland.

also obscured by little Julia sitting squarely on it). These vases have powerful Aesthetic implication, both as a symbol of the larger movement but also as they relate to the cosmopolitan texts I have previously mentioned. In looking back to Pater's tale, Florian comes home one day to realise that the tree in the yard has flowered, and he has a sudden urge to gather them all up and fill 'all the old blue china pots along the chimney piece, making a *fête* in the children's room.'⁴³ However these vases were also high Aesthetic status symbols in real life, as epitomised by Whistler's works of the period and his fascination with *Japonisme*; see for example *La Princesse de la Pays du Porcelaine* (Fig. 102). So on a perfunctory level, Sargent's inclusion of such objects has an overt connection to the Aesthetic movement, but also to interior decoration common amidst the wealthy expatriate circles in which Sargent moved.⁴⁴ Ceramics do play a basic a/Aesthetic role because they act as simple, beautiful, patterned objects (without any historical value) with which to decorate the interior, nodding to the wider cosmopolitan cult for blue and white. However, these vases symbolise much more than mere fashionable design, and in the context of Sargent's painting can be read with deeper significance.

To return to this discussion of 'home,' how then does Sargent as an artist depict a 'home' without putting anything in it? The Arita vases may provide the answer. Historical documentation shows that the vases were indeed much beloved family treasures, and regardless of their size, they were shipped continuously with the Boits' in their cross Atlantic travels upwards of sixteen

⁴³ Pater, "The Child in the House", 217.

⁴⁴ See again Hirshler's *Sargent's Daughters* for further discussion. Also, in email correspondence dated 6 May 2012 with fellow postgraduate Eunmin Lim, who is writing her dissertation on Murray Marks, an art and Asian ceramics dealer in London in the period under discussion: 'These Arita vases tell a lot about this new fashion. It seems obvious that the vases were manufactured in Japan in the nineteenth-century in order to supply the increasing demand for Chinese blue and white in European market. Through this phenomenon, we can also speculate that [the importance was on] the decorative value rather than the historical value of Chinese porcelain. And this is the characteristic in the reception of Chinese porcelain within the Aesthetic Movement. In comparison with the eighteenth-century collecting of *chinoiserie* or with the later collecting patterns from the 1880s which sought after more ancient pieces, this emphasis on decorative value of Chinese porcelain (mostly from the Qing Dynasty) in the Aesthetic circle looks clear.'

times.⁴⁵ The vases then become symbolic embodiments of the Boits' concept of 'home' regardless of where they were at the time. In the context of Sargent, as a cosmopolitan artist, who travelled Europe literally since birth, this idea of creating a 'home-space' within any location was undoubtedly important, perhaps encouraging his inclusion of the vases in the picture. The presence of these vases may also explain why the children do not seem uncomfortable with the dark void of the room; they have their object 'siblings' there, and the memories their interactions with those objects have created, to reassure them. However, the vases also act as further symbols of Pater and Lee's beautiful objects, items that by one's interaction and appreciation of them create their souls and contribute to their status as evolved members of modern society. If Pater, Lee, Baudelaire and Wilde found interaction with beautiful items and locations as essential to childhood development, it would seem appropriate that Sargent's visual work would make such an undeniable connection between the objects and children in the piece. Remove one or the other, and the painting dissolves into darkness, thus stressing the importance of their connection.

It is also germane here to return to Sargent's attraction to the 'bizarre' as a way to read his choices for depicting what on the surface was intended to be a portrait, but which ended up instead as a 'half studied and half finished group.'⁴⁶ The composition is an exercise in contradictions; the shadows seem dark and foreboding, yet the girls appear relaxed and comfortable; we know they are sisters and yet they have little interaction or acknowledgement of each other, the work is a portrait and yet only half of the faces are visible. These discrepancies hint perhaps at the dual nature of life as echoed in Baudelaire and Pater's discussions on the artist and genius, and show that home is only a tenuous stage of life, as is childhood, that will one day be threatened by one's interaction with the external world. On the surface, the audience no doubt saw this as a strange exercise in 'cleverness', as a way for Sargent to attract attention and make himself known amidst the cavernous walls of the Salon.

⁴⁵ Susan Sidlauskas, "'Great Gaps and Voids': John Singer Sargent's Interior Abyss", in *The Built Surface, Volume 2: Architecture and the Pictorial Arts from Romanticism to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Karen Koehler (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 47.

⁴⁶ "The Salon, Paris", (1882), 738.

However, there is something to be said about this work, and *The Pailleron Children* before it, with respect to its lack of sentimentality. *The Boit Daughters* creates a distinct sense of visual alienation, separation and anxiety within the viewer. The knee jerk reaction many would have when looking at images of sweet young girls is invalidated by an enigmatic package that makes it difficult for the viewer to find solace or appreciation in the sentimental thoughts that images of children typically evoke. I see this sense of emotional distance as essential to Sargent's symbolic program, and it only becomes clear when comparing the work with the respective Aesthetic texts, and parallels between Pater, Baudelaire and the inner versus outer worlds of the child and their 'home' attests to this. And yet other stranger elements are also present in all of these works, significantly the child and their gaze, so analysis of this element will also weave an additional thread of cosmopolitan Aesthetic connection.

'A Significant Vulgarism': The Looking, Watchful Child

In all three of these works, we have established that the children are present in a safe, home space, where they are surrounded by beautiful objects which will enable them to reach, if I may reword Baudelaire, the 'woman-child' state in adulthood. But I would like to return to the idea, present within these texts, of the gaze of the child and its relationship to ephemerality. An artist's choice to depict children recalls by its very nature a sense of transience and *memento mori*. Childhood is a fleeting time of life, which for the nineteenth-century viewer was heightened due to prevalent infant and child mortality. In a wider context, the use of children as it performs in Aestheticism denotes that artists like Millais, Renoir and Sargent maybe have been using this theme not simply as a direct representation of the family, but rather to also denote the impermanent nature of their culture – the child as symbol of fleeting modernity. This is a concern Aesthetic texts attempt to dissect and understand with their repeated use of vocabulary such as 'fleeting,' 'sensation,' and the omnipresent 'impression.' Childhood itself is part of this momentary flood of sensations in life, and representations of the child itself can be seen as symbolising not only the impermanence of the sensory process but also the quick nature of

Baudelaire's modern life, or European culture driven forth by industrial advancement.

The gaze of the child then can be seen as something even more transitory than the child itself, and it is used distinctly in all three paintings. *The Art Journal* specifically called attention to this in their review of *Autumn Leaves*: 'We have almost forgotten a significant vulgarism; it is, that the principal figure looks out of the picture at the spectator.'⁴⁷ The use of the term 'vulgarism' clearly implies that the critic thought it improper or unladylike for a girl child to look directly at the viewer. Anna Green again makes an interesting connection about the gazes of young girls in her discussion of Renoir's *The Children's Afternoon at the Wargemont*:

Lucie Berard in our picture appears not only patiently to wait but also to watch. Contemporary opinion would have it that a girl her age was too young to need to temper her gaze, being still at that stage 'amongst little girls' when 'they are open... even with men, with that candidness which constitutes innocence, ' as Larousse, once more explained. Later Lucie will have to learn to mask such directness, according to polite opinion; when she reaches that stage where young girls 'may recognize the pleasure that childhood provides for adults but must not reveal that knowledge, observing adult behaviour only secretly.'⁴⁸

If the direct gaze of girl children past a certain age was considered 'improper,' why then do Millais, Sargent and Renoir choose to include it? Shock value can be one consideration, but for the purposes of this chapter, let's consider an international Aesthetic use. I have previously discussed the French emphasis on the 'adult child' and individuality, so a pre-emptive mention of the idea of the gaze as an assertion of literal presence – the 'I am here, take note of me' cry, if you will - seems superficially obvious. I will return to this momentarily.

These gazes delve a bit deeper than a mere insistence of existence. As it has been shown, there is a consistent emphasis in Aesthetic writings on *looking*. Impressions are *seen* and felt. Baudelaire sees the child's fixed gaze as 'amassing raw material' and processing it. 'At first sight, experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects,' Pater echoes.⁴⁹ All three works visually

⁴⁷ "The Royal Academy", *Art Journal* 18 (June 1856): 171.

⁴⁸ Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence*, 134.

⁴⁹ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 247.

engage with these concepts; they depict the child, the ultimate location of pure sensory processing, actively involved in the act of *looking*. Essentially, the girl children embody the pure aesthetic critic because their childish innocence allows them to 'see the object as it really is.' By placing them in the act of gazing, they act as a reminder to the viewer of the importance of *looking* at objects from a place of innocence. In this way, both these paintings can be read as a form of an Aesthetic treatise on the importance of vision, and in relation to the child, the importance of rooting that vision from a place of purity and genuine awe, hence the 'man-child' state and its primacy in Baudelaire's text.

But there is also perhaps a wider figurative aspect present here in the insistent looks of the girls. As previously discussed, studies in child psychology during this period were asserting, as Fonssagrives stated, that the child 'is a frankly individual being.'⁵⁰ Children were seen as having a life of their own, an independence and individuality formed and moulded by their impressions and experiences, as suggested in the quotation from Greg Thomas about the singular nature of the child as seen in Impressionist works. But this is also supported by the previously discussed texts by Baudelaire, Pater and Lee, who all significantly show the child as engaging with their own world and forming their own identities through those interactions.

'Sargent's daughters', as Erica Hirshler has called the Boit children, are depicted as being decidedly independent, to the extent that this is highlighted by their spatial separation within the image. This seems an odd choice when showing a group portrait of *sisters*. Both *Autumn Leaves* and *Children's Afternoon at the Wargemont* show the related children close to or interacting with each other; in Renoir's work, little Lucie even touches and holds Marthe, emphasising the bond of their connection. The choice to present the sisters as separate tempts the viewer to read the work cyclically, thus viewing the four separate sizes of the girls as representing the four stages of growth that a girl child will take on her path to adulthood, with each stage representing the development of their identities. Their distance negates any attempts to associate them with a familial group, or even their knowledge of each other altogether.

⁵⁰ Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence*, 2.

How then do the gazes play into the idea of the child's distinctive person? It seems important to return to the *Art Journal's* review of *Autumn Leaves* and the critic's statement that the direct gazes represented 'a significant vulgarism.' Anna Green asserts that it was acceptable for children of a certain age to confront a male spectator directly because it was seen to be coming from a place of 'innocence', one later tempered in adulthood to conform to standards of propriety. But a gaze also does much more than disrupt the adult's sense of social etiquette; it also acts as a very blatant assertion of one's person, one's physical here and now presence. It is hard to deny the existence of a child that looks directly at you. If children were to be 'seen and not heard', what then happens when the child switches the boundaries, and becomes the one doing the seeing? Their identities, through the insistence of their gaze, are asserted as real, living and knowledgeable. Children become a substantial presence as opposed to a fleeting, ephemeral symbol indicative of modernity, death or sentimental emotion. Millais did not necessarily see *Autumn Leaves* in this way. He trivialises the childhood experience in a letter to F.G. Stephens by denying their personhood by noting them as being simple vehicles for nature or religious affectation: 'You may take it either way; - as a beautiful study of a peculiar effect of nature, such as is rarely painted, and a triumph that way; or might conceive it as we have attempted to describe.'⁵¹

Renoir is more restrained in his approach, lacking any kind of wider vehicle for the girls outside of a conveyance of common bourgeois feminine practices such as sewing and reading. In a sense, they are more subjects than perhaps Millais's beautiful objects. However, their individuality is similarly denied, as the viewer does not get a sense of them separately but rather as a cohesive family group, which is in line with how many of the other Impressionists were depicting children at this stage; see again *The Bellelli*

⁵¹ See Appendix B, Figure 17. F.G. Stephens wrote a series of articles on the Pre-Raphaelites for *The Crayon* in 1856 between October to December, so for the specific review of this work, see F.G. Stephens, "The Two Pre-Raphaelitisms: The Modern Pre-Raphaelites", *The Crayon* 3, no. 11 (November 1856): 321-324. Millais's letter quoted in John Warner, "John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves*: 'A picture full of beauty without subject'" in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. Leslie Parris (London: The Tate Gallery, 1984): 127.

Family portrait. Sargent's work, in contrast, begs the viewer to see *The Boit Daughters* as separate people having their own experiences in the world. It depicts personhood as enigmatic and complex – a sister can be part of a family, surrounded by her siblings, but also set apart by her own subjective experience and interactions, which include engaging with us as the viewer through her direct watchfulness.

In *The Boit Daughters* their gazes even seem to look in different directions, stressing that the girls are experiencing different sensory impressions by viewing different things, evocative of the same in Degas's previously mentioned *Giovanna and Guilia Bellelli*. They are each having a *unique* experience, asserting their own individual presence, independent of each other. But Sargent does present darkness as enveloping one of the girls, the one daughter who does not look directly at the viewer. This darkness could be symbolic of a myriad of elements, but to echo Pater's "Child in the House" is perhaps to consider that this is indicative of adult experience and the corruption of the outside world. As a child, these girls are able to be frank and honest about themselves within their own home space without having to moderate it for wider society, one embodied by the darkness that will one day steal that frankness, that honesty. The child must learn to create an alternate persona with which to move in the outside world. They must, as Baudelaire stated, develop those adult capacities to process their raw impressions. But for now, Sargent has captured the point where the child, as the site of pure sensory experience, does not need to do this. Sargent's image is a visual representation of that state that artist attempts to reach through their convalescence, evoking Baudelaire's statement:

It is by the deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new, whatever it may be, whether a face or a landscape...⁵²

⁵² Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 8.

Pure Aesthetics: Ornament and Pattern

Yet the gaze is simply one way to separate experiences, spaces and worlds, and another that is also present is the use of pattern, ornament and colour. In *The Boit Daughters*, Sargent uses light and decorative objects to create this division. The Arita vases evoke a contrast between the familiar home and 'other' space, as represented by the sparseness of the rest of the room and its darkness. And yet the vases and the floor carpet are the only objects in the room that contain any kind of pattern or intricacy. Sargent's inclusion of these objects again places the work within an Aesthetic discourse – but instead of focusing on the transience of modernity, it instead evokes another important dialogue – the concept of beauty as essential element within and of itself.

Each of these three paintings engage with beauty in different ways, but they are all united in their specific use of decoration, pattern and colour to achieve an ornamental effect which had no functional bearing on the composition or execution of the image. Instead, these elements were specifically chosen to be 'beautiful' and to elicit attraction and desire. What kind of desire is up for deliberation. Liz Prettejohn has convincingly argued that in *Autumn Leaves* the combination of direct gazes, red apple, 'moist red lips and loosened hair' hints at the emerging sexuality of the girls, while Anna Green's mention of the doll as preparation for motherhood and a later future sexual identity is also plausible.⁵³

To step aside from these discussions, I want to return to the idea of 'attraction' as indicative of something more pleasing to the eye or indicative of visual grandeur. All three paintings here use different elements to create a sense of beauty in and of itself. Both Sargent and Renoir, for example, express this through the use of a decorative interior and objects. Sargent limits his pieces to a vase, a carpet and a doll, while Renoir instead uses his canvas as an exploration into colour and design, creating a finely modelled interplay between the decorative and the painterly. The scene is overwhelmed with ornamental pattern that breaks the painting into separate scenes: the stripes of the chaise,

⁵³ Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 15; Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence*, 31-34.

the dots of Marthe's dress, the floral of the curtains and the geometrics of the rug. He engages with basic colours in a primitive, abstract way. Whereas traditionally Impressionists used colour to capture the truth in nature and optical light, here Renoir minimises this focus *in preference for*, or to heighten, decoration. Indeed, a dedication to the legitimacy of light and shadow almost seems irrelevant here, as flattened as they are. The dresses of the girls, for example, are executed in the most basic of forms to represent three-dimensionality: a lighter blue for highlights, and a darker blue for shadow. Depth is not so much a concern as the creative use of colour and light to create pattern and visual beauty.

Autumn Leaves also takes place within this discourse. The painting is a symphony of tone. Millais could have chosen to simply depict these girls in an autumn garden, and yet he chose to also include the setting at sunset, when the sky itself mimics the colours of the fading leaves. He also chose to depict four girls of distinct hair colour and clothing, fading from light to dark as the viewer reads the painting from right to left. Their dresses are textured, evoking the tactile sense of velvet and the sheen of silk and cotton. The painting may not be overtly erotic, as in Rossetti's use of fabrics and patterns, but it most certainly hints at it, as Prettejohn argues, and is certainly executed for an overwhelmingly sensual effect. Effie Millais, writing in her diaries in regards to this painting, stated that they had to scour the countryside looking for a certain kind of youthful female beauty, noting that they chose Matilda Proudfoot because of all the girls in the local School of Industry 'the girls were all so ugly that [Mathilda] was the only one that was drawable,' while Isabella Nicol was the 'sufficiently pretty daughter of a maid.'⁵⁴ If visual aesthetics were not a concern, then Effie's assertions would have no place.

This leaves only a consideration of beauty in regards to Sargent's work, one that settles uncertainly to the eye because it doesn't seem as visually extravagant as the other works. But aesthetics, I would like to argue, is still a concern; it just may not be *the* concern. He certainly hints at it, on on hand including the vases and rugs and ornamented household objects in a nod to

⁵⁴ Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith, *Millais* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 132.

Aesthetic interiors and design. That they are understated implies that the focus was on the girls and their symbolism and not on an immediate sensual experience, as in the other two. In terms of colour, his palette is remarkably subtle in comparison to the other two. The loose brushwork and chiaroscuro hints at Impressionist practice, but the browns, blacks and creams push the source of influence much earlier, to Velazquez and Rembrandt. Sargent also pushes the children away from the picture space and obscures any ornament in shadow or, as in the rug, by placing a figure on it, negating any attempt for the viewer to 'lose oneself' in pattern and texture. In these elements, beauty for Sargent becomes less about detail and more about overall composition, tone, and subject. The sensuality is one found only in its symbolic allusion, and as the brain and eye looks to fill in the gaps between shadows and figures, the entire realm of the senses falls in, helping to complete the scene.

Apart from this kind of sensual experience through minimalism, Sargent's painting also certainly functions within Millais framework on the 'abstract' nature of a child's beauty. This may account for the choice of sparse interior and simple clothing – through this simplicity Sargent is able to maintain visual focus on the children's faces, not on their clothes, or surroundings. The viewer is then forced to meditate on the child's individuality, and the unique differences between their faces, their expressions and their experiences. This simultaneously plays into the French delineation of the child as a distinct being, as in *The Pailleron Children* and French Impressionist works, but it also participates in the British sentimentality of Millais as we watch the sweetness of the youngest child evolve and fade, like the autumn sunset, into the jadedness of adulthood. Sargent's work is decidedly beautiful, but it is a beauty that is tenuous and ephemeral, harking back to the suddenness of youth, modernity and the 'impression' as it evolves in Aesthetic texts.

In Pastoral Array: *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*

This trio of visual analysis has brought to light the fact that Sargent was engaged in an increasingly multi-layered approach that dealt with such complex issues as child psychology, identity formation, and social and artistic beauty. In order to capture this, he had to draw elements from a multitude of international

styles and sources of influence, both textually and visually, and this resulted in works that the critical reviews repeatedly define as strange, clever or 'impressionist'. My main aim here was to show that he does not sit in 'squarely' within national characteristics, movements, or styles, but rather that there is a fluid interchange between nations, texts and symbols that can engage him at any given time, and they all have root in themes and discussions present in Aesthetic texts and visual dialogues. However, in order to close this discussion, I wish to present the last dominant child image in this early period of Sargent's career, the 1886 *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* because, for all intents and purposes, this image is remarkable for the significant shift in approach it embodies, as compared to the aforementioned depictions of the child in his art. How does his visual 'discussion' of the themes of the Aesthetic child continue further down the line?

Much work has been done regarding the complex nature of this image, but for the purposes of my discussion, there are few key salient points to broach as it relates to the previous images.⁵⁵ Firstly, the painting does participate in this cosmopolitan blending of French and British stylistic traits, many of which have been astutely mapped out in David Fraser Jenkins's 'Pre-Raphaelite and Impressionist: Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*'.⁵⁶ The subject matter, for example, of children in a garden echoes frequently within Impressionist works, while sunsets and their quickly changing tones of light were also explored in depth, as in Monet's haystacks and Rouen Cathedral series. In order to capture the prismatic changing of colours at dusk, Sargent has transitioned away from his more sombre Old Master palette towards using a brighter, more pastel-based French one, a shift in colour choice which one critic called a 'polychromatic aberration.'⁵⁷ These elements may be what Sargent refers to when he says to Edwin Russell while executing *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* that 'it

⁵⁵ See Anne L. Helmreich, "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose and the Condition of Modernism in England", *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 433-455; Ormond and Kilmurray, *Figures and Landscapes 1883-1899*, 120-135; Gallati, *Great Expectations*, 92-100.

⁵⁶ David Fraser Jenkins, "Pre-Raphaelite and Impressionist: Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", *British Art in Focus, Patrons' Papers* 1 (October 1998): 1-14.

⁵⁷ "Exhibition of the Royal Academy – Second Notice", *Daily Telegraph* (May 5, 1887): 8.

might be a long struggle for my paintings to be accepted. It is thought beastly French.’⁵⁸

However, the connection between Sargent painting an image of girls lighting lanterns at sunset also has undeniable connections to Millais and *Autumn Leaves*, as evidenced in his letter to Millais while painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* as previously discussed.⁵⁹ Sargent’s work here also can be seen as playing into the British penchant for sentimental images of children, harking to a Ruskinian emphasis to nature and linking to the wider treatment of the theme by popular children’s illustrators like Kate Greenaway and Beatrix Potter. Sargent creates for us an idyllic, pre-industrialist world, and yet the lack of the children’s direct gazes, present in the other pieces, does not invite us or even allow us to participate. This recalls again Pater and Baudelaire’s insistence on the corrupted nature of the adult, as beings in society we are too world weary to participate in or understand the child’s innocent world. Without emphasis on narrative and an overwhelming sensual dedication to colour, beauty and transience, both stylistically and thematically this work certainly captures many previously discussed elements occurring within international Aesthetic dialogues, and can be viewed as a continuation of Sargent’s explorations into the visual potential of the Aesthetic child.

However, while this work can certainly be categorised as a depiction of the ‘Aesthetic child’ due to its participation in many of the themes previously discussed in this chapter, it also seems at odds with many of the methods Sargent was consistently exploring earlier in his career. On one hand is a lack of subtlety in its association to Aestheticism. For example, Sargent makes wide and prominent use here of the carnation and the lily, and both flowers were well known for their visible relationship with British Aesthetes, with Oscar Wilde stating that the lily and the sunflower are ‘in England the two most perfect models of design, the most naturally adapted for decorative art - the gaudy leonine beauty of the one and the precious loveliness of the other giving to the

⁵⁸ John Singer Sargent to Edwin Russell, 10 September 1885. John Singer Sargent, British Artists, Catalogue file. Documentation, Permanent Collection 4.2.2. Tate Records, Tate Britain, London.

⁵⁹ See n. 5 in this chapter for further details, and Appendix B, Figure 16 for a transcript of this letter.

artist the most entire and perfect joy.’⁶⁰ The carnation was often seen in many an aesthete’s buttonhole in variations ranging from red to green, the latter of which in some circles hinted to an ambiguous sexuality.⁶¹ Like the Arita vases in *The Boit Daughters*, such object choices create a direct visual link to Aestheticism as part of the accoutrement of the aesthete in popular culture. However, as overt as such a link can be made in Sargent’s work here - it seems almost *too obvious*. Why at this juncture has Sargent decided to openly nod to Aestheticism even though such alignments and ‘Frenchness’ were proving a hindrance to his acceptance in the British art world?

On an initial logical note, this painting can be read as an extension of Sargent’s fascination with the Aesthetic child as seen in *The Pailleron Children* and *The Boit Daughters*, but seemingly in a way that completely contradicts the more subtlety symbolic work those images were attempting to produce. The children have shifted from inside to outside, darkness to effusive light, direct gazes to downturned heads, and this very fact alone can indicate that this image was the starting point in a new direction for Sargent and his interpretation of the Aesthetic child. It is a movement away from the heavy allusion and symbolism I have read in the previous works more towards the capturing of sensory experience through the focus on light, texture, colour and setting.⁶² In some respects, this image works with the Aesthetic child in a way more heavily

⁶⁰ Wilde, “The English Renaissance,” 276.

⁶¹ See Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 109-114 for further discussion on the carnation’s symbolism in this vein.

⁶² To tie this into the discussion on Sargent as being ‘anti-naturalist’ and my connection to the word ‘clever’, see *The Athenaeum*: ‘Of the cleverness of this tour de force there can be no doubt. An inquiry, however, conducted on the scientific principles into the loyalty of this professed representation of a peculiar effect, would demonstrate its fallaciousness; the true relationship of the white dresses, the lanterns dimly shining in the hardly reduced daylight, the flesh, tresses, and ornaments of the figures, could readily be established to be other than Mr. Sargent represented it.’ This review really brings home the idea that the reviewers were completely out of their depth as to Sargent’s symbolic and Aesthetic programs here, thinking that he intended pure naturalism and being utterly confused as to why it was so easily disproven. This well proves my insistence in Chapter One about this language of ‘clever’ being used to cover up critical embarrassment. “Fine Arts: The Royal Academy, (Third Notice),” *The Athenaeum*, n. 3109 (28 May 1887): 708 quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *Figures and Landscapes 1883-1899*, 134.

reliant on the methods of Millais and *Autumn Leaves*, with its visual overload of tonal colour, pleasingly soft light, and children interacting with the landscape, almost to the point of becoming a part of it. Also, by shifting the children out of doors, Sargent is able to more accurately convey the connections between the ephemerality of childhood and the fleeting beauty of the sunset, evoking nostalgia and sentiment more fervently than the dark and for boding settings of his earlier child portraits.

The shift towards the outdoors was also a way for Sargent to further experiment with an alternative method of conveying the child and their own subjective aesthetic experiences. Though they are in the 'wild' and the flowers loom large above them, the space created is still safe and enclosed, and the children are able to experience the world and stimulate their own senses and experiences in a non-threatening place. In *The Boit Daughters*, the children were also safe inside their home, but it was a space that was exclusionary and solitary - the children only had each other and a few items with which to interact. In *Carnation, Lily*, the girls have moved a step forward from *The Boit Daughters* and have ventured forth. It is Sargent's take on the child's experience with the outer world, as explored in the Impressionist images of the child and the city, and as such provides Sargent with a new avenue and thus new potentials to explore such a theme.

Sargent's transition in compositional approach and subject matter for the child may have been also a direct result of this point in his career. In the summer of 1886, while he was working on *Carnation, Lily*, he made the decision to pack up his Parisian studio and formally move to London, and the following year he would take up the lease on his Tite Street studio which would remain his base for the rest of his life. This period, however, was not without struggle; Sargent had difficulty gaining acceptance into the British art world, because, as quoted before, he was thought too 'beastly French'.⁶³ He needed a fresh start and a fresh approach to painting that would enable him to continue to work, but also engage with the visual subjects that he loved. If the child can be seen as the pure sensory state of the aesthete here, as Baudelaire insists, then shifting that symbol out of doors heralds a return to nature and one's roots. Perhaps this was

⁶³ See n. 57 for further details on this letter.

symbolic of Sargent's shift in style, of a way of distilling his complexity and purifying his approach to art in a way that would gain wider appeal – Sargent himself needed to return to his roots, so to speak, or rather as Jenkins argues, the roots of the Old Masters through the filter of the Pre-Raphaelites, in order to mediate his increasingly complex and 'beastly' Frenchness. Regardless of this, it does not imply that this image was not at its heart still actively concerned with the themes discussed over the course of this chapter, only that Sargent perhaps needed to change the way in which such themes were visually represented.

It is also possible to view this work as taking part in Sargent's taste for the 'curious.' The aforementioned *Daily Telegraph* named it, though pejoratively, as taking part in 'inscrutable mysteries'.⁶⁴ This found more substantial explanation in Vernon Lee's posthumous rendering of what she asserts is the painting's 'true intention', in that it conveyed Sargent's 'outspoken love of the exotic... [and] unavowed... rare kinds of beauty,' whom her friend Mary Duclaux described, upon first seeing it, as an 'altar-piece' full of Botticellian angels lighting up the shrine of an invisible Madonna' hidden amongst the oversized flowers.⁶⁵ Lee, astutely for my purposes here, brings together an attraction to alternative forms of beauty coupled with a mystical, potentially religious symbolism in this painting, uniting it again with my arguments about these elements in his previous child works. Early and later critics, like Roger Fry, were perhaps too quick to judge the work for its supposed vacuousness, but in light of its status in relation to the themes and images I have discussed here, perhaps it is possible to reclaim the image from its sullied reputation.⁶⁶

Though the child and Aestheticism are both popular topics for art historical consideration, there is a significant lack of discussion regarding how

⁶⁴ "Exhibition of the Royal Academy – Second Notice," *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 1887, 8, quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *Figures and Landscapes 1883-1899*, 134.

⁶⁵ Lee, 'J.S.S. In Memoriam,' 252.

⁶⁶ See Introduction n. 18 & 19 for reference to Fry's review. Specifically, Fry speaks of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* as 'the first feeble echo which came across the Channel of what Manet and his friends had been doing with far different intensity for ten years or more.' He continues on with descriptors like 'vulgarisation' and 'emasculated' in reference to the work. In regards to the earlier critics I mention here, see n. 56.

these two themes come together. If, as Millais insists, the child of a certain age was 'the *most* beautiful' subject you could paint, it is certain that other artists must have stumbled upon its aesthetic/visual potential. In the course of this chapter I have asserted that this was indeed the case, and that Sargent was one of these artists. Sargent uses the child over the course of his early career in a way that mimics the dialogues on youth and transience that were appearing in Britain and France during this period. The child becomes symbolic of the return to the pure state in the adult and of a way to guide one's interactions with the world in such a way as to maximise its potential for sensory experience, as evidenced by the discussions relating the child to the aesthete in the writings of both Pater and Baudelaire. For Sargent, his drive to return to this 'child-like' state within himself enabled him to see his world differently, and to convey the world surrounding him in a way that encouraged aesthetic experience for his viewers. We have seen his drive for aesthetic participation in his 'avowal' of the Caucasian in the previous chapter, and in his capturing of the child's world in this one, but this was also evident in another one of his artistic methods during this period – his use of singular tonal colour studies, and the symbolism that such colours suggested, to be discussed in the next chapter. When taken together, all three of these facets of Sargent's early career will insist that Sargent was not only internationally Aesthetic in source material and method, but also that he was remarkably more emblematic than previously historically considered.

Chapter Five

'The Mystery of White Things': Sargent's Colour Studies

In the previous two chapters, I have established a sense of Sargent's atmosphere and subject matter as he looked to different cultures and source materials, both visual and textual, to inform his sense of the Aesthetic in his art. This chapter will move forward to explore a third and final facet of Sargent's cosmopolitan Aestheticism – that of method - in his use of colour, or more specifically, his limited use of colour. Though his tonal colour studies, or studies using a simplified palette or a blend of tones in a single colour, appear throughout the eight-year period in question, they reached a kind of crescendo in 1884 with his submission of *Madame X* to the Salon, the colouring and composition of which baffled a number of his critics. This chapter aims to understand Sargent's execution of such colour studies during this period as visual evidence of his participation in Aestheticism, as they echo the practice used by many 'earlier' Aesthetic painters such as Whistler and Rossetti. However, colour symbolism was also a frequent topic of discussion in many of the Aesthetic texts examined in this dissertation, so an additional analysis between word and image will also establish Sargent's cosmopolitan Aesthetic intentions as he drew inspiration from multiple national artistic dialogues.

My understanding of Sargent's use of such a palette comes mainly from two letters: the first from Sargent to Lee in 1880 and the second from Lee to her mother from 1885 which discusses Sargent. The first from 1880 will be discussed later in this chapter as it relates to a specific painting, but the second was written at the tail end of this early period, around the time of *Madame X*, and establishes one of Sargent's views that a limited palette was one that could initially help in solving a multitude of artistic and compositional problems. On 25 June 1885, Lee wrote to

her mother, passing on advice from Sargent to their mutual friend Frankie Forbes Robertson, then a budding painter.¹

Tell Frankie that John says she must apply herself almost exclusively to drawing. He likes her colour very much but says that any master here would keep her to black and white, as modelling is her weak point. He says he would almost forbid the colouring at all at present. He says she must work very hard from life. [sic]²

While Sargent's recommendation here was most likely a practical suggestion, due to Frankie's previously discussed difficulties with grasping colour and modelling, it does show, at least in some small respect, that the pairing of black with white in a visual format was in his consciousness, and could also carry with it obvious artistic benefits. In turning to the supporting visual evidence, by the time this letter was written he had executed multiple pieces that could be termed 'colour studies' (or 'symphonies' to evoke Whistler's practice of the same): starting in (and note again the year) 1880, works such as *Fumée D'Ambre Gris*, *Dr. Pozzi at Home*, *El Jaleo*, *Madame X* and *Mrs. Henry White* all work directly with various tonalities of a single or few colours - mainly white, black and red. While many critical reviews addressed this trio of pigments as being inspired by the great works of Velazquez and the Old Masters, the importance of colour, contrast and tonality in the works of

¹Frances Harrod, née Frances Marie Desiree Forbes-Robertson (1866-1956) was one of eleven children of the art critic John Forbes-Robertson, and the younger sister to Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, the Pre-Raphaelite model and later stage actor. Both she and her brother trained at the Royal Academy, after which she went to Italy to become the secretary to Vernon Lee's half brother Eugène. She later became a successful writer, publishing thirteen volumes of fiction and short stories between 1888-1934. *Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction*, ed. Sandra Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell and David Trotter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. 'Frances Harrod'.

² Vernon Lee to Matilda Paget, 25 June 1885. Collection of Vernon Lee Materials, MS 210, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine. See Appendix B, Figure 18.

Aestheticism will again endow Sargent's images with a more complex meaning beyond simple flattery and imitation.³

The Complexity of Colour: Tradition, Symbolism and Science

In order to map out later in this chapter how Sargent was participating in this complex dialogue regarding colour and its relationship to Aesthetic texts, it first becomes essential to place Sargent contextually with other tonal colour studies appearing in the visual arts of this period, if only to establish that what Sargent was attempting was noticeably *different*, and I argue, more highly symbolic. However, in keeping with the theme of cosmopolitan influence, it is important to note again that British, French - and in some small cases American - approaches to colour were vastly different in method and intention. In order to show how this performs in Sargent's works, I have broken down the varying levels of colour as it appeared in the art of the period into four separate factions: rich colour, as indicative of pure beauty, traditional colour, in reference to Old Master palettes, symbolic colour, and optical/scientific colour. Sargent moves between all of these categories, signifying again that his approach was not only complex and international, but also figurative in that he uses these colours in certain ways to evoke the symbolic issues being raised in the Aesthetic texts he was reading at this time.

The first idea, that of 'rich colour', evokes many of the issues I have raised in the previous chapter regarding the use of decoration and pattern in the child works of Renoir and Millais. Rich colour is a palette that can be strongly associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, as their fascination with jewel tones, evoking the woven threads of a medieval tapestry, gave their works a sumptuousness far beyond artistic need. It is a use of colour that is highly evocative of texture, tactility, wealth and richness, and in this sensuality it also becomes uniquely intertwined with the

³ See Mériem, *Tableaux et Statues (Salon de 1882)*, 102; "The Salon", *Art Journal* (July 1882): 218; "American Art in the Paris Salon", 46; "The Fine Arts: Sargent's *El Jaleo*", 4; "Sargent's *El Jaleo* at the Schaus Gallery", 3; two articles by W.C. Brownell, "American Pictures at the Salon," 497-98 and "The American Salon," 494.

notion of 'art for art's sake' because it goes a step beyond merely conveying depth in an attempt to convey an *experience*. Millais's *Autumn Leaves*, discussed previously, is an excellent example. It uses a highly repetitive sense of colour and texture – such as the tone and crunch of the decaying leaves, the sky at sunset, the gradation of hair colour, the changing wisps of smoke – stimulating much more than a simple scene of 'the deepest religious reflection'.⁴ Millais's statement, however, does highlight briefly the idea that such rich colour usage was also intertwined with the notion of 'symbolic colour', or a preference for specific colours in order to convey a deeper emotional or intuitive intent. This will be seen in my later discussion of the use of white in Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* but for now, it must be identified as a form of colour usage that can weave concurrently between varying types of intention or narrative.

In respect to the Pre-Raphaelites, rich colour does hark back to more traditional modes of painting, hence their aims in working towards a modern interpretation of the artistic ideals in extant before Raphael. This echo or reinvigoration of the Old, or 'traditional colour' as I have previously named it, was also gaining popularity in France during this period. Contemporary French portraitists of this time, men like Carolus-Duran, Léon Bonnat, and Ernest Meissonier all worked on Old Masterly principles of limited colour, most often in hues of black, white and red. While this colour trio can be termed 'rich' in some respects, it was less used as a vehicle for sensual involvement and more in an effort to link contemporary art to more historical norms of painting - similar to the original intent of the Pre-Raphaelites - by situating these artists within a timeline of the 'greats.' The function does not seem to be one of overwhelming experience or sumptuousness, but rather the usage of colour as an 'homage.' Thus the use of darker, more earthly colours in both the 'rich' and 'traditional' formats can be seen to further indicate two key intentions: an Aesthetic one, by its use to imply 'fleshly' or body rooted beauty, and an academic one, in its adaptation of Old Master elements, maintaining the essence of painterly tradition. However, these methods

⁴ Warner, "John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves*", 127.

contrast greatly with another kind of colour palette prevalent at this time, that of the bright, pastel colours of the concurrent Impressionist movement, who shifted the tonal heaviness into the realm of optics and lightness.

This leads directly to the concept of 'optical/scientific colour', which in contrast can be seen as a move towards a type of 'anti-naturalism' (or perhaps even as a type of extreme naturalism) by shifting colour away from symbolism or pattern towards its pure form as a reflection of light. In contradiction to how many painters would use colour to encourage storytelling or enhance sensitive response, this scientific approach would seem to negate this type of subjectivity by distilling colour into fact or pure light, taking away the overall sense of palette as a indication of artistic license. This can be seen mainly in the work of Michel-Eugène Chevreul, whose notable *De la Loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs* of 1839 (translated into English in 1854) influenced a wide array of Impressionists; Pissarro, and later Seurat and Signac, for example, all name him as influential, the latter two specifically in the creation of pointillism.⁵

Chevreul, whose work at the Gobelins tapestry complex began in order to 'banish unforeseen and unwanted colour from the woollen threads and produce pure blacks by the removal of the subjective effects of simultaneous contrast' frequently spoke of achieving 'pure blacks' and 'pure whites.'⁶ This purity of colour was based on the idea that all colours were composed of other colours – when one sees the 'white' of the clouds, for example, this white is really composed of all the colours the cloud is reflecting, the blue of the ocean, green of the trees, and so forth. 'Pure' colours were not tainted by this amalgamation of reflections and formed the basis of the colour scale, and as indicated in the above quotation, were distanced from subjective interpretation and vision. In order to connect this back to Sargent (and even Whistler before him), Chevreul insists that, for portrait painters at least, a limited palette of pure colours was necessary in order to 'fix the attention of the

⁵ See Jo Kirby, Kate Stonor, Ashok Roy, Aviva Burnstock, Rachel Grout and Raymond White, "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Painting and Technology", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 24 (2003): 4-37; John Gage, *Colour and Meaning*, 196-228; Smith, "Parbleu," 223 - 247.

⁶ Gage, *Colour and Meaning*, 196.

spectator upon the physiognomy of the figures which he is to reproduce.' Note 356 claims:

The greater the number of different colours and accessories in a composition, the more the eyes of the spectator are distracted, and the more difficulty is experienced in fixing attention.⁷

Thus limiting the colour of the clothing and setting allows the painter to push focus towards the face, which as Chevreul adeptly points out, *should* be the main concern of the portrait painter. Both Whistler and Sargent in effect 'purify' their palettes in order to shift focus to the skin and faces of their subjects, fixing attention to the beauty of the human visage, as opposed to the beauty of the carpet or texture of their fabrics. Whistler remarked on just this process to Otto Bacher in Venice in 1880, teaching him that in portrait painting one should always look closely at the features of the face as, 'If you do that... your values will be right. Remember that your model is your main subject – what is back of it you must get very accurately.'⁸

How then are we to weave all of these usages together? The connection here can be identified by looking through the lens of Aestheticism, and by using Sargent as a specific point of focus. In a further point of unification, all of these palettes, though they are using different types of colours with different aspirations, seem to be moving away from narrative towards the capturing of beauty, regardless if that beauty was contemporary or through a historical filter. Although there were many different ways one's choice in palette could be interpreted during this period, they all seem to have some kind of grounding in aesthetics, oftentimes also the Aesthetic. Thus when Sargent oscillates through all of these first three 'types' of colour in his early career: Impressionistic and prismatic colour, to darker Old Master colour, to the stark contrasts of the Decadents, and then back again to the light of an airy English garden, he was working on a similarly exploratory phase of using colour to indicate a/Aesthetic concerns, and the variance in critical interpretation of these different works analysed in Chapter One reflect this.

⁷ Chevreul, *Principles of Harmony and Contrast*, 121.

⁸ Bacher, *With Whistler in Venice*, 71.

At the basis of it, Sargent's choice to focus on a limited palette connects him, at least visually, into the network of 'art for art's sake' productions of the period that engaged with the same concept of limited colour, or colour for more beauty-based purposes. But the intentions behind these productions are significantly varied, as above noted, and start as far back as Rossetti and his *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Fig. 17) of 1849-50, moving to Whistler's *White Girls* of the 1860s (Figs. 15 & 16), and forwards to Sargent contemporaries Giovanni Boldini and the American William Merritt Chase. I intend to work through many of these examples here in order to establish a timeline of the evolution of the singular tonal study as it worked for many of these artists, some of whom were specifically and openly Aesthetic. Sargent's works will be seen to oscillate between colour symbolism, as established early on by Rossetti and the whiteness of *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* to the for its own sake experiments of colour seen in the later works of Whistler. I am wont to read Sargent's performance in this trend as lending itself more towards playfulness, as in the works of Whistler, and will return to the evidence of such intentions in a moment. However, for purposes of my discussion here, Sargent's 'exercises' - by the nature of their whimsical and of-the-moment intentions - appear mainly to work outside of traditional, more academic standards of narrative and colour referents.

Aestheticism then emerges at odds with two separate concepts of beauty through colour, both of which seem to play with or against the idea of naturalism. One on the hand there is the use of intricate pattern and ornament in a concerted dedication to detail, thus creating an emphasis on sensuality and experience in its creation of a realistic world within the picture frame, one in which the viewer can authentically move. In the other spectrum is an approach of tonal simplicity, done only for its own sake, which in many ways negates its basis in a form of naturalism by focusing on the spirit or essence of the experience as opposed to its detail. It is unnatural in the sense that it is highly subjective and simplistic, but it is authentic in the sense that it alludes to the fact that what a viewer experiences is often only a small part of what actually occurs. Sargent's Spanish dancer studies, discussed in Chapter Three, are clear examples of this. Both of these methods can be found in

Sargent's early oeuvre but again never in a consistent way, often times being driven by a subversive attraction to the esoteric while at other times wishing to convey the many faces of beauty, however it may present itself. It is a clear blending of multinational approaches and uses of values, but ones which clearly all speak towards a highly a/Aesthetic purpose.

A Timeline of 'White' Studies: Rossetti and Whistler

The main colours to be discussed in this chapter will be the aforementioned black, white and red, because Sargent made significant representative images using each of these three colours in this early period. For purposes of chronology, I will begin with white, as Sargent's 1880 *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* (Fig. 9) was his first significant leap into using this tonal practice. However, 'white studies' did occur amongst significantly Aesthetic painters many years before Sargent made an attempt at it, so I will begin at mid-century, looking at Rossetti, in order to establish the myriad implications present in the use of such colours which, like the 'impression', all shift and melt depending on context.

Upon initial comparison, there is a potential visual relationship between *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1850 *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* and later Whistler's *White Girls*. Since I have discussed a relationship to the Pre-Raphaelites in my previous chapter on the child when comparing Sargent to Millais, in order to maintain this momentum between these early 'Aesthetic' painters, as Liz Pettejohn delineates them, and Sargent, an additional comparison will also be made here. Not only does Rossetti's image provide a striking contrast of colour function to the later works of Whistler and Sargent, it is also relevant as a starting point to the larger dialogue of equating colour to the 'impression' and its sensual or emotional experience. Though the religious symbolism of the work can be seen to override any larger arguments about its status as purely 'sensual', the colour can be seen to take part in the Aesthetic drive towards viewing beauty within non-traditional, or in this case, non-naturalistic means, which also finds strength of place in Sargent's early productions.

Ecce Ancilla Domini! stands out amongst the earliest productions of the Brotherhood as a work that, in one perspective, is suggestively anti-naturalistic. When compared to his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (Fig. 103) painted the previous year, for example, Rossetti's transition from lush gardens, rich velvet greens and blood reds to a void of white with primary colour accents does support this kind of view, especially in addition to what Julian Treuherz states as a 'supernatural' element in the depiction of the floating angel.⁹ By paring down the colour symbolism in the work to white, blue and red, Rossetti can be seen to be actively visualising Chevreul's theory that a simplified palette will create more emphasis on the human face, as Mary's visage and subsequent emotional reaction appears to be the main focus of the painting. Since the scene is so limited in its colours, the eye is forced to find respite in the blocks of colour dotted around the composition, like the blue curtain, which again pushes the eye back towards Mary's face. This focus is then held by the assertive line of the lily's stem, which cuts off visual movement and holds Mary's head in a closed triangular composition between the blue curtain, the angel's head and the wall behind her. While the primary documentation relating to this painting stated that Rossetti wished to use white in order to symbolise the Virgin's purity, it seems more appropriate of William Michael Rossetti's statement that the work was to be a 'a vehicle representing ideas' which could encompass not only spiritual and religious but also Aesthetic, or more beauty-based, concerns by showing the stimulating properties of specific tones.¹⁰

Ecce Ancilla Domini! also establishes an important Aesthetic delineation for colour 'studies' – the importance of colour symbolism and how that interacts with the structural composition of the work. The whiteness of this work was meant to provide a moral context, i.e. to stress Mary's virginal status, and all the supporting

⁹ Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Edwin Becker, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

colours were chosen in order to enhance this effect.¹¹ The blue of the sky and the curtain echo the Renaissance tradition of the colour's association with the Virgin, and the red is used to evoke thoughts of Christ's passion and blood, and to nod to his status as royalty and king of kings. However, when thinking of later Aesthetic white works, such as Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* of 1861-62 and the ensuing *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* of 1864-65 this idea of sparse colour symbolism becomes complex, as Whistler actively seeks to negate any kind of didactic function in order to achieve something more akin to pure 'art for art's sake.'¹²

Both of Whistler's paintings depict his mistress Joanna Hiffernan in a white dress, looking forlornly in one instance away from the viewer, and later in the second work, into the reflective surface of a mirror. Whistler's titling of these works as *Symphony* has been viewed as his method of giving the works Aesthetic implications by invalidating the subject to focus on the harmonies of colour. I find this view slightly problematic, as linking them with the same title and in succession veritably creates a form of sequential reading or 'story' regardless of stated intent. Yet in as much as I find this disputable, in this case Whistler's own words on the matter are in extant to clear the account, and they certainly try to place a great deal of distance between the work and any type of literary context. With the first *White Girl* image, Whistler openly and publicly criticised the media for providing a textual basis for it, in this case by relating it to the popular novel and then play, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. He states in response to *The Athenaeum's* review that

¹¹ The critical reviews of Rossetti's work specifically pick up on this, with *The Art Journal* stating, "The background is white; indeed, so generally white is the picture, that it is only here and there broken by colour – a treatment allusive to the purity of the Virgin." "The National Institution for the Exhibition of Modern Art," *Art Journal* 12, no. 5 (May 1850): 140.

¹² Whistler only ever exhibited *The White Girl* under this title, and not the full one listed here. According to Robin Spencer, Whistler added the *Symphony in White, No. I* label to a book of press cuttings in 1878, in order to create a connection to *Symphony in White, No. III*, exhibited in 1867 and *Symphony in White, No. II (The Little White Girl)* from 1865. See Robin Spencer, "Whistler's *The White Girl*: Painting, Poetry and Meaning", *The Burlington Magazine* 140, no. 1142 (May 1998): 300, n. 1.

he had 'no intention whatsoever of illustrating Mr. Wilkie Collins's novel, it so happens, indeed, that I have never read it. My painting simply represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain.'¹³

Whistler's function here for white is decidedly against Rossetti's earlier intention with a white study, done to implore contemplation of the colour's beauty and symbolism in its connection to a Biblical text. Whistler does not want any texts, historical or contemporary, related to his painting, hence his public remonstrance to F.G. Stephens for making such an assumption. If this was indeed the case, Whistler's work was most likely twofold in intention; first, that he explore the visual potential of a single colour, in order to create a more abstract form of beauty through purity, or 'colour for colour's sake', which I mention may have been significant for Rossetti as well. Secondly, he also may have done this in potential exploration of Chevreul's understanding that limiting a portrait's colours creates focus on the physiognomy of the face. Whistler most likely knew of Chevreul's work, not only from his contacts in the French art world but also due to its popularity amongst British painters after it was translated into English in 1854, and he would have been well versed in the discussions on colour predominant in both artistic environments. Hints at a knowledge of Chevreul does also appear in these paintings – Whistler's mere process of paring down colours serves to only heighten the contrast between the whiteness and Joanna's bright red hair, which again serves the function of pushing visual emphasis onto her face. There is a tenuous connection here, but the main point rather is to link Whistler's white studies as engaging within such international approaches to colour usage, disparate of actual objective.

However, being Whistler and seemingly never content to adhere to any sort of visual stability, his reuse of this palette in *Symphony in White No. II* seems to negate his aforementioned statements about the simplicity of intention behind *No. I*. The second work similarly uses various shades of white, but the colour here reaches beyond mere playfulness into a realm of a seemingly ambiguous, intangible

¹³ "Our Weekly Gossip", (1862): 23, quoted in Spencer, "Whistler's *The White Girl*", 305.

symbolism. All that was direct about the first image has been rendered opaque in the second one. Instead of a simple, straightforward figure in a basic gown, Joanna is now looking away from the viewer, reflected in a mirror, wearing a wedding ring, and surrounded by decorative fans, flowers and vases. The mirror, a common theme in Pre-Raphaelite works, evokes associations with duplicity and other worlds. The decorative objects convey a fascination with the East and exotic beauty, while also potentially acting as a statement about woman's status as 'decorative object.' Whistler's images seem to oscillate between Aestheticism's explorations into colour – as that of a simple facet to explore a modern sense of beauty, or as a way to create focus on the symbolic representation of the colour, whatever the artist intended that to be.

The symbolism of white, however, seemed in art of the period to be frequently couched in terms of morality, specifically a female morality. This is seen in the obvious pairing of Rossetti's whiteness with Mary's purity and virginity, but also in Whistler's image and its evocations of a bride or the fallen woman in *White* from Collins's story - the age old sunbeam/hoyden binary of female characterisation.¹⁴ In executing his first *White Girl* image and then publicly making a statement about his intentions, Whistler was most likely attempting to negate this traditional understanding of a 'woman in white' as equalling a wholesome bride (hence the lack of wedding ring) in a drive towards what I see as Aestheticism's urging to separate colour from social and moral implications, and I will discuss this further in a moment. Beyond this, the facet most compelling here is the relationship between colour, morality, women and Aestheticism, a theme prevalent in Aesthetic texts that will also appear in Sargent's later female portraits that engage with the concept of the feminine through the use of blacks and whites.

¹⁴ For further description of this phrase, which is a Victorian specific phrasing relating to the Madonna/whore binary often used to describe women in literature, see Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983).

Sargent, Whiteness and the Sculptural Body

With the timeline of Rossetti and Whistler in mind, Sargent's initial exploration into using colour studies, specifically with white, began with his 1880 Salon submission *Fumée D'Ambre Gris*, an image of a Moroccan woman dressed in white in an all white courtyard, holding open a veil in order to catch the ambergris smoke wafting up from a perfumer at her feet. Painted at the tail end of three years abroad between 1877 and 1880, this period marked Sargent's first major explorations further afield, as discussed in some length in Chapter Three. On 9 July 1880, he wrote to Lee to tell her about the work's progress:

I shall send you a photograph of a little picture I perpetrated in Tangiers. It is very unsatisfactory because the only interest of the thing is the colour; it will give you a general idea of what your 'twin' is about.¹⁵

Sargent clearly acknowledges that the focus of the image was to play with the various properties of tonal whiteness, and not to convey any further reaching ideas regarding the subject, the architecture, the landscape or the ritual itself, hence why those areas are so 'unsatisfactory'. But there are also other highly evolved Aesthetic elements presented here, and they all come together to convey the scene as one that is done to purely elicit sensual response. For one, all of the senses are represented here; the smoke recalls smell and taste, the ceramic tiles and plush patterned rugs imply coolness and texture against bare feet, while the cool whites are sumptuous and simultaneously restful for the eyes. Sound seems to be only thing potentially missing here, and is mainly represented by the implied silence of the woman's solitary ritual. Though Whistler's statement about *The White Girl* made no mention of using colour studies to create visual indulgence, such an evocation of the senses was an integral part of Aestheticism's assertions, especially with Pater, who spoke well of finding pleasure in 'objects...works of art, and the

¹⁵ Ormond, "John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee", 163. The reference to 'twin' is something from Lee and Sargent's childhood, a kind of pet name indicating their early closeness. See Appendix B, Figure 19.

fairer forms of nature and human life.’¹⁶

Such sensuality also becomes evident in how the work was received. A. Genevay, writing for *Le Musée artistique et littéraire*, picked up on the image’s Aesthetic importance, linking it to the likes of Théophile Gautier, whose poetry and art criticism was an inspiration for later Aesthetic and Decadent writers and painters. Note also Genevay’s use of certain previously defined discussed terms and elements here, italicised for emphasis:

His *Fumée D’Ambre Gris* is one of the pictures in the Salon that most intrigues those *members of the public who are unfamiliar with the refinements of sensual pleasures*. If Théo were still alive, what an inspiration this canvas would have been to his writing. This Oriental woman who perfumes herself and awakens passion... is a figure that is *bizarre* and original in effect. I wonder if... M. Sargent will have the distinction of having introduced a practice which might become dear to *those with ultra refined tastes*.¹⁷

A salient point here is mainly the indication that Sargent’s work speaks to a select group of Aesthetic participants, as opposed to the general masses, in his separation between ‘members of the public who are unfamiliar with the refinements of sensual pleasures,’ and ‘those with ultra refined tastes.’ More importantly is that Genevay is situating Sargent and his work specifically within this exclusive world, and this review creates a link to the other reviews discussed in Chapter One that imply this type of Aesthetic symbolism through their use of terms like ‘bizarre’ or ‘clever’. Sargent’s image speaks not only to non-traditional forms of beauty, but a use of that beauty that would only incite passion in those with Aesthetic interests, in this case Gautier, and those who would have read Gautier and understood what that meant. Whereas, as I have asserted in Chapter One, many critics did not understand such ciphers, and passed it off as ‘clever,’ Genevay picks up on the programme, and makes it more explicit to those in his literary audience, signifying through allusive language that ‘yes, he is one of us.’

¹⁶ Pater, *The Renaissance*, xi.

¹⁷ Genevay, “Salon de 1880”, 14-15. Italics are my own for emphasis.

In terms of its links to British Aestheticism and Pater, I would like to return to Pater's discussions on 'whiteness' in order to create a more consummate international picture. Setting aside any obvious racial implications, Pater makes frequent connections between whiteness and the body in many of his texts; however, that body most often tended to be sculptural as opposed to corporeal, and thus also highly figurative. In *The Renaissance*, the most frequent mentions of white are always twinned with a discussion on the 'whiteness' of ancient sculpture - Sargent's 'white' body in *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* is indeed heavily sculptural, so a perfunctory link between colour and subject to Pater can tentatively be made here.

In order to provide a modicum of background, the Aesthetic obsession with Greek sculpture has often been interpreted as a medium through which many Aesthetic figures of the day could awaken or safely explore their more subversive desires - for sensations, for other men, or the longing for the liberated mindset of ancient societies - through the study of 'Platonism' and the Classical sculptural forms that lay at the heart of such artistic appreciations.¹⁸ With this in mind, Pater's mention of the colour in his essay on Winckelmann, in description of Classical statues who hold a 'white light...purged from the empty angry, blood like stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the god in him...' can be read to have a double - aesthetic and sexual - intention.¹⁹ Whiteness in this context could reveal the 'god within' by potentially revealing one's own desires. On one level, it becomes a blank canvas onto which the Aesthete could (safely) project fantasies, fetishes, and intellectual musings about their role within a subversive (and somewhat predominantly homosexual) subculture. In opening out into a wider link to Sargent, it is not altogether improbable to view *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* as performing under a similar rhetoric; the Oriental, foreign woman was definitively a

¹⁸ For additional reading on the relationship between homosexuality and the study of ancient sculpture in both a masculine and feminine context (the latter specifically in relation to Vernon Lee), see Evangelista, "Platonic Dons and Adolescent Bodies", 206 - 236 and Patricia Pulham, "A White and Ice Cold World", in Patricia Pulham, *Art and the Transitional Object*, 31-70. For a good overall review of Platonism and what it represented for Aestheticism, see Evangelista, "Lovers and Philosophers at Once", 230-244.

¹⁹ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 224.

similar type of 'unattainable' beauty who elicited fetishistic or imperialistic desires with the 'other' or the 'exotic,' a topic I have explored in some detail in Chapter Three.

Whiteness in Pater's case could also be connected back to Rossetti's implications of 'purity' – the white body of Greek sculpture was 'pure' in its intent without the taint of, or having been expurgated from, human emotions and passions; it symbolised a type of stoicism which Pater, in the quote above, seems to admire. Yet in his 1876 essay "A Study of Dionysus", becoming 'of whiteness' also symbolises a transition of identity, as Dionysus

will become, as always in later art and poetry, of dazzling whiteness; no longer dark with air and sun, but like one εσκιατροφηκως, brought under the shade of Eastern porticoes or pavilions, or in the light that has only reached him softened through the texture of green leaves; honey-pale, like the delicate people of the city, like the flesh of women, as those old vase painters conceive of it, who leave their hands and faces untouched with the pencil on the white clay.²⁰

Becoming 'of dazzling whiteness' here is metaphorical in a myriad of ways. Initially, Dionysus can be seen in his deific status as transcending the limitations of the body by evolving from a masculine persona, tanned from work in the air and sun, into white flesh, visually similar to that of women of leisure who spend their time indoors. This appears on some level to hint towards issues of class, insinuated by the move from the rural to the urban landscape, as Pater insists he will 'soon forget that early country life.'²¹ But the larger analogy here, and the one I find relevant to Sargent's purposes, seems to be that Dionysus will move from human to myth, and then myth to statue, embodied in stone flesh by ancient sculptors in order to sit, eternally, under Eastern porticos. In this metaphor, the transition into a white sculpture is akin to reaching a state of immortality, as one's body remains of pure whiteness for the pleasure of generations, like Pater's, to come.

²⁰ Walter Pater, "A Study of Dionysus", *Fortnightly Review* 20, no. 120 (December 1876), 767.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Sargent may have openly stated that his work was nothing but an experiment in colour, but if, as this dissertation attests, he was using the works of Pater to inform his early Salon paintings, then his specific choice of depicting *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* in shades of white can be read as symbolic of his Aesthetic intentions in a number of ways. This first comes in his statement of 'it is a thing done only for the colour' - one that seems to specifically echo Whistler's public statements on the *White Girl* images some twenty years previous. Although his meeting of Whistler came *after* the production of *Fumée D'Ambre Gris*, it is possible that Sargent was thinking of Whistler (who had been widely publicised in the press around this period due to his trial against Ruskin) and his *White Girl* images in his choice of colour scheme. His description for it in his letter to Lee certainly seems to make that connection, couched in similarly nonchalant terms. The work itself also mirrors Whistler's use of anti-naturalism in the sense that Sargent does not seek to imply that this scene is 'authentic'; like Whistler, he is unashamed in the openness in which this image constructs and blends fantasy and reality, the scarcity of colour being the more obvious indication of this process of artificiality.

In this respect, Sargent can be seen to be producing *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* specifically in order to align himself with Whistler, and possibly Rossetti before him, as a way of announcing publicly his Aesthetic leanings. But this only establishes a nascent visual link. In order to push this closer to Pater, who he may have been reading around this time, it is possible to view the image as also delving into the concept of the white sculptural body. The way in which Sargent has chosen to depict the woman, columnar with her long straight robes with her veil open tent-like on top, echoes the shape of the attached columns to the right and left of her. The bottom undulation on the top of the column juts out in the same way that her veil juts out atop her cylindrical body, forcing the viewer's eye to fluctuate back and forth between column and body, body and column. Sargent's visually twins these elements, similar to the connection of vase and girl in *The Boit Daughters*, perhaps in order to make it visually difficult to separate the woman from the stone, i.e. linking them on a deeper level. If the column and woman can be interchangeable in this way, then her figure can be seen as sitting, as Pater describes, 'under the

shade of Eastern porticoes' and thus immortal for all time.²² Her blankness also allows the viewer to project their Orientalist fantasies onto her body, like the ancient statue, inciting their desires for foreign lands and cultures, in the same manner that the Oxford Aesthetes did with Greek male nudes.

If Sargent was producing a work that was, on one hand, a reflection of pure Aesthetic motives, done only for the colour in the Whistlerian fashion, and on the other hand as a symbolic gesture towards the importance of bodily whiteness in Pater's texts, then this work places him in a realm looking to refashion Aestheticism into a cosmopolitan venture that was not limited to purely nationalistic specificities. *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* states, in its minimalist and almost modern palette, that visual beauty did not have to adhere to certain cultural standards but rather could be a conflux of internationalist elements – Moroccan dress and figures, French minimalism, colour theory and light reflection, and British (i.e. Pater's) literary symbolism to name a few. Sargent here expands upon what both Rossetti and Whistler attempted before him by broadening the scope of colour studies to include both 'art for art's sake' elements *and* symbolism – a symbolism, however, that was only open and knowledgeable by a select few, due to its shift from the religious or spiritual (Rossetti), towards something decidedly more carnal (Pater).

While I would like to return to this idea of bodily whiteness later in this chapter, it is important to follow Sargent's colour studies chronologically in order ascertain how these exercises progressed. His next work in this vein, *Dr. Pozzi At Home* (Fig. 50), departs from the hardness and coolness of white and stone into the decidedly more passionate realm of sensual reds. Whereas *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* called forth a calm space in the midst of a hot country, *Dr. Pozzi* returns the viewer to the heated and amorous secrecy of the gentleman's boudoir. Red, like white, had an innate symbolism in Aesthetic texts of the period and often was used to imply supernatural qualities that existed outside the realm of the merely erotic. In a similar approach to 'whiteness', I would like to begin by situating the use of red during the period in an overall context between the nations in discussion, in order

²² Ibid.

to work through its usage and make a final comparison and evaluation of how Sargent was using it in his early art. I will maintain focus here on the interplay between 'pure colour' and symbolism, as I have done before, as I find that these methods retain particular relevancy even as the colours, and their intentions, begin to shift.

From Dazzling Whites to Half Real Reds: Visual and Symbolic Shifts

Red colour studies do not seem to have precedent in an Aesthetic based visual portfolio prior to 1880, when Sargent began work on *Dr. Pozzi*. Instead, Sargent's initial inspiration for use of the colour then most likely goes back much further, to its predominant use by Velazquez in portraits such as *Pope Innocent X* (1650) and *Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Pink Dress* (1660) (Figs. 104 & 105), and was probably encouraged by his studies with Carolus-Duran. In these images, red was undeniably connected to issues of royalty, power and luxury; it has both a tactile (red velvets and silks) and symbolic (for example, clerical) implications.

Millais plays on this idea of red's associations with wealth and grandeur in some of his exploratory Aesthetic works of the 1860s, for example *Leisure Hours* of 1864 (Fig. 90), which uses the colour in the velvet of the girls dresses and the rich designs on the painted screen behind them in order to indicate beauty and high status. However, in many of the predominantly red 'studies' produced after *Dr. Pozzi*: Carolus-Duran's *Portrait de la Comtesse de St. Cyr* of 1882 (Fig. 106) and *Study of Lilia* of 1887 (Fig. 107) and William Merritt Chase's 1884 *The Young Orphan, Study of a Girl (At Her Ease)* (Fig. 108), red no longer seems to have this intrinsic monetary value. The symbolism here seems to shift towards one of passion and eroticism (and its relationship to its beautiful, specifically female figures) or nothing at all, acting as simply a contrast colour to emphasise, in a word, Chevreul's 'true blacks.'

Sargent's choice of red in *Dr. Pozzi* can be seen as participating in this revolution of reds, as the colour here lacks the more traditional implications of hierarchy. But what if it meant something deeper and more substantial? In

returning to Pater's texts, the colour red is mentioned almost as frequently as white, but in relation to supernatural concepts present in dream and fantasy worlds. In as much as white symbolised purity and idealisation, redness transcends into the messy world of shadows and obfuscation. In his *Marius the Epicurean*, in the intriguingly titled chapter "White Nights", he explores a certain relationship between red and white things:

"The red rose came first," says a quaint German mystic, speaking of "the mystery of so called *white* things," as being "ever an after thought – the doubles, or seconds, of real things, and themselves but half real or material...". So, white nights, I suppose, after something like the same analogy, should be nights not passed in quite blank forgetfulness, but those which we pass in continuous dreaming only half-veiled by sleep.²³

The association of red flowers with Marius's childhood home in the much-discussed "The Child in the House" of Chapter Four echoes this link between the colour red and the subconscious. In that text the red hawthorn flowers have a unique relationship to childhood memories, and this - paired with the red roses from the above quote and their intricacy with 'white things', dream states, and the 'half-veiled' and 'half real' - links the colours symbolically into the realm of the subliminal.

Such connections are reinforced again by Pater's 'scarlet lilies' in his "Poems by William Morris" where he speaks of the colour as part of 'reverie, illusion, delirium...' and the 'strangest creations of sleep' as embodied in Morris's "King Arthur's Tomb."²⁴ Red and white have an unbreakable connection for Pater; they are colours that indicate fantastical worlds or internal reveries.²⁵ Baudelaire also echoes this when he states (in relation to rouge and eyeliner), 'Red and black

²³ Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1896), 9.

²⁴ Walter Pater, "Art II – Poems by William Morris", *Westminster Review* 34, no. 2 (October 1868): 302-03.

²⁵ For further contemporary discussions between red and white as it relates to spiritualism, see Grant Allen, *The Colour Sense* (London: Trübner & Co, 1879), 205 and Edward W. Hopkins, "Words for Color in the Rig Veda", *The American Journal of Philology* 4, no. 2 (1883): 166-191.

represent life, a supernatural and excessive life...'²⁶ Thus by creating pure colour studies that focus on shades of red or white, Sargent can be seen to be speaking on a symbolic level to an Aesthetic evocation of one's inner world. Ultimately, by depicting Pozzi in a predominantly red colour study, and placing him in the private and internal space of the boudoir, Sargent is evoking thoughts of Baudelaire, Pater and 'reverie, illusion, [and] delirium.'²⁷ Pozzi is enclosed in a dimly lit, predominantly red space, most likely a bedroom, which evokes associations to dreams, sleep and the alternative lives that one has behind closed doors. It is an image of the private, personal and inner life, and can be seen to have evocations through its subject matter and colour to Pater, Baudelaire and the world of reverie and the fantastic.

Kathy Psomiades also connects the use of red back to the Pre-Raphaelites, as Pater does with William Morris, as she relates it to Rossetti's participation in this shift of red from luxury to eroticism in his *Lilith* and *Sybilla Palmifera* (Figs. 109 & 110):

Identity is suggested by the presence of the rose and poppy, flowers attributed to Lilith in the [Rossetti] poem "Body's Beauty," in Sybilla's painting, and by the fact that Lilith, although representing sexual corruption, wears a white rose, while Sybilla, despite purity, wears a red one. To make soul's beauty and body's beauty attributes of the same woman in different guises... allows for the simultaneous figuration of surface and depth, purchasability and pricelessness, economic and symbolic value.²⁸

Psomiades's argument about Rossetti's exchange of white and red and his intentional reworking of these colours (a pure figure in red, for example, and a seductive figure in white) supports my assertion that Aestheticism, and those who participated in its more symbolic functions, like Sargent, were using specific colours in alternative ways or meanings in order to enhance an element of the uncanny and bizarre. I have hinted at this in my previous discussion of Whistler

²⁶ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 34.

²⁷ Pater, "Poems by William Morris", 302.

²⁸ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, "Beauty's Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism", *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 50.

wanting to step away from viewing white as always making a type of moral judgement on the woman who wears it in his *White Girls*, but it finds additional links here in Psomiades's argument. But also, by switching the meaning in this way – using red, which usually symbolised passion, on a chaste subject – such artists were challenging notions of traditional colour symbolism, exploring a dialogue on what exactly colour did and could mean in a painterly context. Sargent does this in *Dr. Pozzi*; he uses symbolic colour by reversing the Old Master associations of red with power to one of overt sexuality, passion, and blood. It can be read as participating in this extremist Aesthetic dialogue, forcing the viewer to confront their own constructed notions of colour and beauty in a way that earned, for all three of these artists at least, particular public censure at one point or another in their careers.

Sargent's portrait supports this shift in symbolism from the public (in a statement of status) to private (in denoting the mind's world and its desires) not simply by colour, but by his choice to depict Pozzi in an intimate dressing gown, an item of clothing not intended to be viewed in the public sphere. The red curtain to the right is mostly likely the direct appropriation of a motif used frequently by Velazquez (see, for example, Figs. 111&112, *The Toilet of Venus* and *Infanta Margarita Teresa in White Dress*), but it also evokes, along with the gown, a setting of the boudoir or an intimate and potentially erotic space. The redness closes in and blocks out any sources of light save for one at the bottom right, which glows softly as though it comes from a fire. The composition is remarkably closed, like a womb, with Pozzi's outward gaze acting as the sole reminder of an externalised space. This 'womb-like' composition may have been a tongue in cheek nod to Pozzi's gynaecological profession, and some art historians have also hinted at the sensuously 'long fingers' as indicative of this, or even as a nod to his reputation as a noted lothario.²⁹ The red then becomes symbolic again of the womb, but also of

²⁹ Specifically Sarah Burns, "Under the Skin: Reconsidering Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent", *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 124, no. 3 (July 2000): 345 and Marc Simpson, Richard Ormond, H. Barbara Weinberg, *Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent* (London: Yale University Press, 1997), 116.

blood and life and death, evoking Sarah Bernhardt's name for Pozzi as 'Docteur Dieu', giver and taker of mortality.³⁰ While it does perhaps play on Velazquez and his use of the colour to denote power – a doctor has power by his very role in the act of saving lives – it seems more likely that Pozzi's is a power born in sensuality, not birthright.

Sargent's use of red here also points towards my wider assertion that he was specifically using this portrait as an advertisement of his Aesthetic leanings. Aside from its figurative value, the colour red was also associated with known Aesthetic figures. W. Graham Robertson notes in his memoirs that the well-known effete French dandy Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, Pozzi's close friend, had a 'room of all shades of red, one wall deep crimson, the next rose colour, the third paler rose, and the last the faintest almond pink'.³¹ Close confidantes in the Aesthetic circle in Paris would have known well of Montesquiou and his eccentrically decorated rooms, so the idea of Pozzi in a 'red room' speaks to that inner knowledge. In an odd additional link, Montesquiou would later write a 1905 review of Sargent's career for *Les Arts de la Vie* entitled *Le Pave Rouge*, or the 'red paving stone', named after a monograph volume of photogravures of Sargent's works published in 1903 with a magnificent red binding, potentially linking together brother aesthetes through the colour once again.³²

Sargent then can be seen to be actively taking part in this process of an Aesthetic visual symbolism or coding through the use of certain colours that would signal to a specific kind of audience, embodying what Kathy Psomiades described as 'an entire ideology of art that rests on the possibility of simultaneously knowing and not knowing that art serves no function yet is bought and sold, holds a place

³⁰ For further information on Pozzi's role in French medicine, as well as his relationship with Bernhardt, see Caroline de Costa and Francesca Miller, "Sarah Bernhardt's 'Doctor God': Jean-Samuel Pozzi (1846-1918)", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 47 (2007): 352-356.

³¹ Robertson, *Time Was*, 100.

³² Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent*, 128. For the original text, see Robert de Montesquiou, "Le Pave Rouge: Quelques Reflexions sur l'Oeuvre de M. Sargent", in *Altesses Serenissimes* (Paris: Librairie Felix Juven, 1907), 83-114.

for privacy and yet is implicated in a public activity.’³³ This is all, of course, speculative until we return again to the ever observant Vernon Lee, who remarked upon this painting in a letter home to her mother from 16 June 1882:

This morning Mabel & I went to the Academy; poor stuff for the most part, but John’s red picture, tho’ less fine than his Paris portrait, magnificent, of an insolent kind of magnificence, more or less kicking other people’s pictures into bits.³⁴

Does this ‘insolence’ give us a tangible clue to Sargent’s intended Aesthetic programme? Potentially. It is certainly clear from this missive that when *Dr. Pozzi* ‘kicks other people’s pictures into bits’ that Vernon Lee is hinting towards its overt sexuality, and its non-traditional use of red to convey this element of man’s inner life. It would have appeared bright, maybe even flashy, or ‘clever’ to use the popular term, amidst the duller palettes present at the Royal Academy. Regardless, Sargent is definitely doing something *different*. This was the accepted view by some critics, who stated that Sargent ‘thinks that all the paintings in the Louvre are brown and that he holds them in contempt,’ and another who finds his reds to be ‘too much stylishness... it is theatrical, affected, and... like a glass of champagne filled to quickly that contains more froth than wine.’³⁵ As we have established in Chapter One, such language hints at a critical embarrassment and misunderstanding; but it also indicates that Sargent is working outside accepted artistic parameters - he is not trying to ‘fit in’ - and people are taking notice of it. He is attempting to convey an image of pleasure, like a glass of frothy wine, and not one that indicates his allegiance to a literary or narrative heavy tradition. Stylishness, like his ‘cleverness’ is significantly Aesthetic, and such readings of *Dr. Pozzi* attest to this. However, in as much as *Dr. Pozzi* was noticed for his ‘flashy’ use of red in this context, his next pair of portraits and their return to his studies in black and white, would speak more

³³ Psomiades, “Beauty’s Body”, 33.

³⁴ Willis, *Vernon Lee’s Letters*, 87.

³⁵ Léon Lequime, “Première Exposition de la Société des XX”, *Le Journal de Bruxelles* (14 February 1884), no page number given; Emile Verhaeren, “Chronique d’art”, *La Libre Revue*, (February 1884): 233; translated and quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *The Early Portraits*, 54.

loudly regarding his Aesthetic intentions, much to the potential detriment of his fragile early career.

Sargent's 'White Girls': *Mrs. Henry White* and *Madame X*

Sargent's last definitive colour studies of this period are a pair of portraits which hold the most potentially fascinating implications in terms of its Aesthetic programme. With the 1884 Salon in mind, Sargent, seeking perhaps to extend the enigmatic qualities of portraiture he had previously explored in *The Boit Daughters*, began plans for two controversial portraits; one of the French society beauty Virginie Gautreau (Fig. 6), and the other of the wife of an American diplomat, Mrs. Henry White (Fig. 13). When exhibited together, this pair would act as the definitive *tour de force* of his black and white colour studies to date. Yet unfortunately for us as historians, this public display of contrasts was never to be, as the paintings were not finished in time for their joint submission to the Salon. On 15 March 1883, Sargent wrote to Mrs. White, imploring her apologies on the unfinished nature of her painting, expressing uncharacteristically heightened concern over their chromatic elements:

Just one illegible line. This is the evening of the fatal sending in day & I have sent nothing in. Neither you nor the Gautreau were finished. I have been brushing away at both of you for the last three weeks in a horrid state of anxiety. Your background has undergone several changes and is not good yet. Well the question is settled and I am broken. Your frame is charming. One consolation has been that I know you do not care a bit whether your portrait is exhibited or not. Is not that true? May I send it to the academy? P.S. I send the Boit children to the Salon.³⁶

Why exactly was Sargent so distressed about these portraits? He had submitted works to the Salon consistently since 1878, even receiving a second-class medal for his 1881 *Madame Ramón Subercaseux*, a similar play on blacks and whites. His

³⁶ John Singer Sargent to Mrs. Henry White, 15 March 1883, Roll 647, Frame 856, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Washington, D.C. This is a full reproduction of the brief letter, so the transcript is not included in Appendix B.

commissions were increasing, and his future was bright and assured. It is possible he simply wanted to please his client, but *Madame X* was not a commission - it was rather a personal pursuit, which I will discuss momentarily - and thus was not tied so strongly to the whims of a paying customer, as in *Mrs. Henry White*. This excessive concern may have been due to the fact that this pair of images had symbolic value - they represented something deeper to him, and to the artistic identity he wished to convey. His discomfort could also imply that these works were, on some level, experimental, and that he was treading along uncertain ground. I interpret this hesitation and concern as his knowledge that he was producing a work that was decidedly and openly Aesthetic in its implications, one that would advertise, maybe even shout, of his status as one of the cult of the avant-garde, and he wasn't exactly sure how this would be received.

Both of the images were finished eventually and exhibited in decidedly different venues; *Madame X* went to the 1884 Salon, and *Mrs. Henry White* went to the Royal Academy of the same year. They were never shown together, which over time has obscured the intention that they were to be viewed as a *whole* and not as individual parts, or works executed without connection. The key is to return to them as two sides of an Aesthetic coin, and view them as two images that can be seen to represent their respective French and British Aesthetic elements, which when brought together, complete a larger view of this cosmopolitan Aestheticism which Sargent courted during this period in his career. Comparison, as opposed to disparity, will create a richer dialogue about the Aesthetic concepts of beauty, whiteness (or colour in general) and symbolism as they specifically related to Sargent's portraiture. They are, as this dissertation wishes to define them, Sargent's *White Girls*, embodying Sargent's symbolism, internationalism, aesthetic interests and everything in between. This was Sargent at his most complex, and his most significantly and openly Aesthetic.

To start with basics is to think more critically about his intent of a paired exhibition for these portraits. Sargent did not originally plan for them to be executed as companion images; rather according to the historical timeline it appears the thought was a result of chance. Mrs. White was a commissioned work -

she sought out Sargent after seeing his *Lady with a Rose* in Paris in 1882.³⁷ However, the sittings were delayed due to Mrs. White's recovery from typhoid, during which time Sargent began to pursue Virginie Gautreau for a portrait, a pursuit that, according to the documents available, seemed to have become a sort of obsession. In 1882, he wrote to Ben del Castillo, Virginie's cousin, imploring an introduction:

I have a great desire to paint her portrait and have reason to think that she would allow it and is waiting for someone to propose this homage to her beauty. If you are 'bien ave. elle,' and will see her in Paris you might tell her than I am a man of *prodigious talent*.³⁸

Sargent's obsession with Virginie here does not seem forced in the sense that he was looking for someone to create a companion portrait but rather that she inspired in him his innate attraction to the 'strange and bizarre', as seen in his letter to Vernon Lee from Brittany while working on *Madame X*:

In a few days I shall be back in Paris tackling my other 'envoi', the portrait of a great beauty. Do you object to people who are fardées to the extent of being uniform lavender or blotting paper colour all over? If so you would not care for my sitter. But she has the most beautiful lines and if the lavender or chlorate-of-potash lozenge colour be pretty in itself I shall be more than pleased. [sic]³⁹

She fortuitously consented to sit for him around the same time Sargent was beginning work on his portrait of *Mrs. Henry White*, so the idea of submitting them together as a pair most likely came together quite spontaneously, and with the Salon approaching, the timing seemed fortuitous.

This idea of commission versus pursuit is important, and establishes the initial contrast between Sargent's intent with the portraits. In his pursuit of Virginie Gautreau and his obsession with the colouring of her skin, he was most

³⁷ Ormond and Kilmurray, *The Early Portraits*, 106.

³⁸ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 59.

³⁹ John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee, 12 February 1883, quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *The Early Portraits*, 113.

likely looking for another portrait to participate in his line of Aesthetic colour studies. Though *Dr. Pozzi* received some notice when it was exhibited at *Les XX* in Brussels in 1884, it was otherwise given little attention when initially shown at the Royal Academy in 1882. *Madame X* may have been a counter reaction in order to stir publicity; but it is also possible that Sargent did not learn of Mme Gautreau's existence until his meetings with Dr. Pozzi, who was rumoured to be her lover at the time.⁴⁰ If Pozzi did encourage Sargent to use her eccentric look as the subject of his next Salon work, it again supports this theory that the painting, like so many before it, was representative of Aesthetic principles, in the same way Pozzi's red room spoke to the intellectual elite about the 'red rooms' of Montesquiou, and the red symbolism of Pater. In addition to this is Lee's mention that during 1884 she was having long talks with Sargent about Baudelaire, 'bonbons' and the 'fantastic, weird, curious' in London.⁴¹ Baudelaire and his followers will prove to have significant relevance to my later discussion of *Madame X's* whiteness, so if anything this material establishes a solid atmosphere of Aesthetic discussion and influence during the period when these portraits were produced.

However, inasmuch as *Madame X* would speak to Aesthetic circles, *Mrs. Henry White* would accomplish exactly the opposite - it would align him with a more traditional, wealthy class who viewed Gautreau's eccentricities as distasteful or affected. By showing his ability to successfully capture the completely disparate hierarchies in which these women moved, Sargent was clearly able to advertise an impressive range as an artist - one capable of giving graceful form from the most bizarre to the most respected; to the French, British and American elite, and to both natural and artificially constructed beauty - captured in a style that effortlessly blended historical and modern styles. But what these works also represented on some level was a form of visual split between Sargent's more Aesthetic avant-garde leanings and a return to more naturalistic compositions, in a way bringing him full circle from the 1878 *Oyster Gatherers at Cancale* forward towards the airy *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* that was produced two years later. This pair appeared to

⁴⁰ Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle*, 116.

⁴¹ See Appendix B, Figure 3.

be a way of testing his markets to see which style was more viable to his career, and the somewhat disastrous reception of *Madame X* seemingly solved that stylistic problem.

With intention and background being established, these works then need to be placed within the line of colour studies as they evolved towards this point, both art historically and within Sargent's early career. On the surface, there initially appears to be clear reflections of Whistler's portraits of the period. Vernon Lee writes to her mother in 1885 that when it was first exhibited (though it had been painted earlier in 1883) Whistler's *Lady Archibald Campbell* was 'beating John into fits,' alluding to a potential knowledge of Whistler's portrait beforehand, prompting a visual 'response' by Sargent.⁴² *Lady Archibald Campbell* works in a similar format to *Madame X*, exhibiting a woman against a dark background while also wearing black, with only the contrast of her fair skin to prevent her from dissolving into the darkness.

Whistler painted *Lady Archibald Campbell* in his Tite Street studio in 1883, and although Sargent would not sign his lease for his own studio in Tite Street until 1887, it is possible Sargent knew of this portrait, since he had developed a close friendship with Whistler after their meeting in Venice in 1881. This was not to be the first time that a portrait between Whistler and Sargent would cause a 'fit' as a result of potential mimicry, recall Sargent's concern over the portrait of W. Graham Robertson discussed in Chapter Two.⁴³ However, my research has also discovered another potential connection between Sargent and Whistler's portraits at this point, with Whistler potentially 'borrowing' from *Mrs. Henry White*. Compare the latter work with Whistler's unfinished and now destroyed portrait *Harmony in White and Ivory: Lady Colin Campbell* of 1886 (Fig. 52). While any clarity regarding who 'borrowed' from whom is uncertain until further evidence surfaces; the larger issue here is that that black and white portrait-based colour studies are being used in a specifically cosmopolitan artistic context, by artists who both straddled multiple stylistic 'national' elements.

⁴² See Appendix B, Figure 18.

⁴³ See Chapter Two, n. 59.

Another wider connection to be made, and to return to a more textual and symbolic basis, is to examine more closely the relationship forged between Aesthetic ideals of femininity with that of colour. Take, for example, Théophile Gautier's poem 'Symphonie en Blanc Majeur' from *Emaux et camées* of 1852, translated by F.C. Sumichrast for the complete works of Gautier in the early twentieth century, which gives us a sense of the erotic pull of woman's 'whiteness', specifically these two stanzas:

On the white of her shoulder bare.
Whose marble Paros lends,
As through the Polar twilight fair.
Invisible frost descends.

What beaming virgin snow.
What pith a reed within.
What Host, what taper, did bestow
The white of her matchless skin? ⁴⁴

Let us compare this to Pater's archetypal feminine beauty - the Mona Lisa from *The Renaissance* - also a portrait that represents a womanly 'ideal' for its respective author. In his description, Pater also connects her to white sculptural bodies, as the Classical statues surrounding her are 'troubled by this beauty' because she contains more of the human soul than they do. However, to transcend this idea of 'whiteness' past the bodily plane, Pater also describes her as a vampire, evoking thoughts of pale white flesh and crimson lips and cheeks.⁴⁵ Whiteness and women seems to have a type of mystical quality in these Aesthetic texts, harking back to my discussions about red and white implying thoughts, dreams and reveries.

However, Vernon Lee also writes about the symbolism of whiteness for contemporary culture, and while she doesn't make specific connections between whiteness and the feminine in her text, her disliking of the connections between

⁴⁴ Théophile Gautier, *Emaux et camées* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1881): 33-34. For the full poem in both the original French and Sumichrast's English, see Appendix B, Figure 20.

⁴⁵ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 130.

the colour and 'wholesomeness' is a discussion that can be applied to these issues regarding the morality of the female body. In 1908 she published a collection of essays under the title *Lauris Nobilis*; one essay in particular - "Beauty and Sanity" - was a reprint of an article she had published in 1895 in the *Fortnightly Review*, where she discussed her concerns regarding the connections between whiteness, social propriety and feminine 'wholesomeness'. In an initial lament against such associations, she cries:

But what if we *do not care for white*? What if we are so constituted that its insipidity sickens *us* as much as the most poisonous and putrescent colours which Blake ever mixed to paint hell and sin? Nay, if those grumous and speckly viscosities of evil green, orange, poppy purple, and nameless hues, are the only things which give us any pleasure?⁴⁶

Those who do not like white are therefore labelled as 'abnormal, unwholesome, decaying' and in response, and thus clearly identifying herself as an Aesthete, Lee proclaims 'very good, then why should we not get pleasure in decaying, unwholesome, and abnormal things?'⁴⁷ Lee's statement embodies perfectly Whistler's early Aesthetic approach towards colour in his remonstrance to Stephens in *The Athenaeum* rejecting the association of his painting with a bride or a fallen woman. Why should certain colours always have certain social implications, why apply moral codes to colour at all? Why does painting a woman in white have to imply any kind of social status (bride) or cultural reference (Collins's text)? Colour is simply a form of expression, a reflection and prism of light – a fact the Impressionists understood and embraced. Textually, Aesthetic writers saw colour as a format for the aesthetic critic and artist to capture their impressions, represented soundly by Lee's statement in *Belcaro* from 1884 that 'Beauty, in itself, is neither morally good nor morally bad...it has no value other than its being beautiful.'⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Vernon Lee, "Beauty and Sanity", in *Lauris Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life*, (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1908), 134-135.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁸ Vernon Lee, 'Ruskinism', in *Belcaro*, 210.

Aestheticism's approach to colour then, in Lee's example, shows that aesthetic elements such as colour, line, and texture were being extracted from their narrative confinements and presented for their own purposes. This is significant because it works directly back into Whistler's statements that he simply executed his *White Girl* images in order to play with various tonalities of colour, and not to express any overt statement on the figure of Joanna or what she represents. By executing a colour study, Sargent is participating directly in this 'for its own sake' exploration of colour. But what is also significant here is this idea of the 'purity' of a colour and how Lee sees that as being later tainted with cultural norms or understandings as to what certain colours can mean. *Madame X* certainly seems to work on the principle that a woman's whiteness is not indicative of her wholesomeness or purity as it was widely understood to be, but that it can rather alternatively (or even simultaneously) engage with the more uncanny notions of whiteness with decay and decadence. If, as Lee states 'beauty, in itself, is neither morally good nor morally bad', then so too, at the root of it, is colour. If colour holds this kind of status as a *tabula rasa*, then the Aesthete, or anyone else for that matter, can redefine them with their own subjective codes and standards. This is also relevant for Sargent, because it is my reading that this is exactly what he is doing by intending to present these portraits as a pair – presenting 'typical' whiteness against Aesthetic 'whiteness' in an effort to raise a dialogue of the properties of colour and what they represent to a larger audience.

In bringing this together, Sargent's images here represent a strong point of intersection between a number of these themes and source materials. For example, in looking back at Gautier and his 'swan women', it is significant here that Sargent was connected to Gautier in the earlier stated review for *Fumée D'Ambre Gris* from 1880. But such a connection also extends further to Whistler, as Gautier was also a point of inspiration for Whistler, certainly in his application of Gautier's 'for its own sake' motto from *Mademoiselle de Maupin* to his methods of painting. Both Whistler and Lee are discussing in one form or another the extraction of colour from moral symbolism or narrative, and Sargent does this visually by presenting *Madame X* in shades of white, even though she is not a 'typical' example of what feminine

whiteness entails during this period, and there will be more on that to come. The aim here is not to proclaim definitively that Sargent definitely drew inspiration from Gautier, Whistler and Pater to inform his own *White Girls* – without surviving evidence, this is not feasible. However, it is critical to imply strongly, as my second chapter has done with Sargent’s Aesthetic circle, that there was a significant atmosphere of Aesthetic dialogue surrounding Sargent at this point that included these ideas of whiteness, blackness, women, portraiture, art for art’s sake (and it’s French equivalent in ‘l’art pour l’art’) and so forth. That Sargent produced these two paintings exhibiting clear visual ‘discussion’ on such concerns connects him wholeheartedly to these dialogues. Sargent wanted to take part in the debate; these works were his response.

So what exactly is Sargent saying here - what else can we read through this visually disparate pair? Moving forwards out of the Aesthetic penchant for the esoteric allure of feminine beauty, there is also a wider discussion to be had between ideas of ‘naturalism’ and ‘artifice’ – a contrast Lee makes in her discussions on society’s understandings of whiteness versus that of Aestheticism’s. An obvious contrast between *Madame X* and *Mrs. Henry White* is that one exhibits a type of constructed beauty through cosmetic enhancement while the other represents a more ‘natural’ Victorian feminine type. I am inclined to read this contrast as *Madame X* representing Aesthetic feminine ideals, while *Mrs. White* implies more Ruskinian ones. For example, Mme Gautreau’s public nomenclature was that she was considered to be a ‘professional beauty,’ a term that finds roots in Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life*. While Baudelaire seems to relate the phrase to common prostitutes, and while I don’t want to make the judgement that being a ‘professional beauty’ was a form of prostitution in itself, there are still connections here in that the phrase - whether by Baudelaire or society - is still being used to describe a person who cultivates the beauty of her person for male desire. Women such as Virginie Gautreau made it their ‘profession’ to be beautiful, to cement her place in society through a recognisable set of visual characteristics. An 1879 article on these ‘professional beauties’ proclaims: ‘For good or evil, beauties are now the fashion. Indeed so fashionable are they that to be a beauty is

one of the recognised professions,' citing this possibility due to the modern agencies of 'advertisement and photography' but also by becoming an artist's muse, where 'in the public picture galleries we find them in characters of nymphs, vestals or sylphs.'⁴⁹ Lillie Langtry was perhaps the British equivalent of Virginie Gautreau, captured for the popular conscious by Millais in *A Jersey Lily* of 1878.

Branching out from this idea of construction or self-cultivation, these works also address the idea of feminine 'artifice' through the use of cosmetics, which intriguingly is also discussed in both French and British Aesthetic contexts. Baudelaire includes a section called 'In Praise of Cosmetics' in *The Painter of Modern Life*, while Max Beerbohm printed 'In Defence of Cosmetics' in the highly Aesthetic *The Yellow Book* in 1894 - recall Sargent's drawing of Henry James would appear in that publication in that same year. Sargent was clearly attracted to Virginie's use of cosmetic enhancement and self-fashioning - recall his letters to Castillo and Lee regarding his desire to paint her portrait and her lovely lavender colouring. Yet I wish to contest a certain W.C. Brownell's assertions from *The Magazine of Art* who insisted that Sargent painted *Madame X* in order to create a satirical 'Hogarthian image...dictated by the impulse of painting a beauty a la mode in all the unbeautiful aspects of such a product of the art of society.' [sic]⁵⁰ My interpretation rests rather in the assertion that Sargent wished to *praise* the idea of constructed female beauty, but creating a large-scale image presenting such a beauty in the context of a Classical sculpture of a goddess. I previously established the links between sculptural bodies, women and Pater in my discussion of *Fumée d'Ambre Gris*, but it also applies here, showing that Sargent continued this trend well into the latter part of his early career.

Sargent uses two techniques in *Madame X* to bring focus to her 'whiteness' and her 'cosmetic exterior': the dark background, which creates a high contrast to further highlight her skin, and the uncomfortable, sculptural pose, paired with the simplicity of the gown, which forces more of her flesh into view. The gown and the

⁴⁹ "Professional Beauties", *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, no. 7658 (September 3, 1879): 2.

⁵⁰ Brownell, "The American Salon", 494.

cosmetic enhancement it displays are decidedly modern accoutrements, but what is striking is that they are also present on a figure that wears a crown of the crescent moon, a symbol present in images of Diana/Artemis. In addition to this, one of the reasons the painting was chastised upon its exhibition was due to the fact that the shoulder strap was originally painted down, as seen in an archival photograph of the painting from the Met's collections (Fig. 113). A fallen strap, in addition to the crown, creates a strong visual link to this Classical goddess, whose strap was also frequently shown fallen on the arm in order to allow her easier access to the quiver of arrows behind her right shoulder.⁵¹ This juxtaposition of Classical and modern forms of beauty only highlights my insistence that Sargent was firstly attracted to artificial, non-normative beauty, as seen in the Aesthetic international works I have discussed, but also that by choosing to depict her in a pared down colour study, the larger issues of what constitutes 'Classical' and 'idealised' beauty really comes to light, highlighting not only a purely a/Aesthetic based intent in executing this work, but also situating him amidst a type of symbolic, modern avant-garde. *Madame X* can be seen to be Sargent's visual representation of Pater's Classical white sculptural bodies and Baudelaire's 'professional beauty', an intersection of symbolic Aesthetic feminine ideals. This work was one of praise for her eccentricity, not censure.

Mrs. Henry White, however, conveys none of these more allusive elements. Her beauty seems natural, her body modest and covered, with her pose straightforward as opposed to uncomfortably contorted. Her 'whiteness' is everything that *Madame X* is not. The contrasts present between the varying implications of 'white' embodied here achieve complexity *only* when viewing these images together. And in this kind of analysis, it is instead *Mrs. Henry White* who becomes the true 'Hogarthian image' mocking social traditions on the concepts of status, race and beauty. For starters, how tongue in cheek is it to paint a 'Mrs. Henry

⁵¹ I explore this in further depth, with reference to Classical images of Artemis, such as the *Artemis de Gabies* in the Louvre (first century) in my article "'The Mystery of White Things': Aestheticism, Obsession and Female Corporeal Whiteness," to be printed next year with MHRA and Legenda Press. See 'Author's Declaration' for more details.

White' in shades of white?⁵² This alone can perhaps hint to Sargent's intentions. She also does not 'hide' her complexion under a ruse of artifice; she presents it openly, for all to see. I view this as representative of wider Victorian notions of natural femininity, tying back to Ruskin and his insistence on a truth to nature.⁵³ For example, one's exterior was seen to be representative of one's inner moral life; thus an 'unvarnished' face is more 'truthful' and conveys honesty of character, harking to Oscar Wilde's quote in *The English Renaissance* that children should 'love what is beautiful and good and hate that which is evil and ugly.'⁵⁴ Cosmetics were seen to obscure this kind of moral 'reading' – women could hide their true natures from men, as Beerbohm states in his discussion on cosmetics: 'the fairer the fruit's rind and more delectable its bloom, the closer are packed the ashes within.'⁵⁵

Mrs. Henry White works on the traditional symbolism of white as equalling moral and social 'purity,' a concept challenged by Aesthetic writers, especially Vernon Lee, as we have seen in 'Beauty and Sanity'. This 'traditional' view was also the one most critically accepted, as when *Madame X* was exhibited, she was denounced as a corpse while *Mrs. Henry White* was seen as full of the 'freshness of youth, [with the] carriage of a graceful head'.⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ By presenting this more 'typical' ideal of whiteness in one image next to a wholly contradictory image of modern or

⁵² Sargent did, however, also execute a study in blacks of *Mrs. Henry White* (now lost), which was exhibited along with the full-length white study at the Galerie Georges Petit in May 1885. This image seems to be simply a closer cropped detail of the study in whites, with the high neckline and same hairstyle as that shown in the full-length portrait. It could be possible that Sargent may have considered presenting *Mrs. Henry White* in a black instead of white gown, and executed this piece as a preparatory sketch. His choice to move forward with the white gown, however, seems to support more the idea of contrast with the intended pair in *Madame X*.

⁵³ See Linda M. Austin, "Ruskin and the Ideal Woman", *South Central Review* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 28-39 and Jennifer M. Lloyd, "Raising Lilies: Ruskin and Women", *The Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 3 (July 1995): 325-350.

⁵⁴ Ross, *Miscellanies*, 271.

⁵⁵ Max Beerbohm, "The Pervasion of Rouge", *The Yellow Book* 1 (April 1894): 70.

⁵⁶ For example, '[It] more or less resembles the flesh of a dead than a living body...' Sharp, "The Paris Salon", 180. Ralph Curtis, in a letter home to his parents, also describes the sitter as 'decomposed' in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 61-62.

⁵⁷ "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy", *Art Journal* (August 1884): 242.

controversial 'whiteness' in the other, Sargent could have been disputing or confronting such notions as they existed towards women and feminine archetypes of beauty. If white can perform successfully and aesthetically in one woman as well as the other, then why, as Vernon Lee words it, should beauty, colour and art only represent one side of the coin? As she states in 1908: 'If life has got two rhythms, why should art only have one?'⁵⁸

Through his varying use of whiteness, both as a colour and as a larger symbolic vehicle, Sargent was able to present contradictory notions of beauty while also pushing Aestheticism's fascination and attraction to the 'wanton' and 'artificial' into the mainstream. Again, this may have been done to proclaim his Aesthetic alignment, but it also could have represented his way of challenging the perceived notions about colours and their associations, as those in his circle were doing in their images and texts. Whistler, for example, does this with his first White Girl image, negating the assumption that a woman in white always has to mean a 'bride'. In this context, colour therefore becomes an important Aesthetic medium for conveying wider dialogues and concerns. Sargent's images bring together multiple international approaches - British and French texts, and historical and modern colour palettes and subjects - in order to create images that conveyed Aesthetic concerns. By placing him within the context of these texts and images, their deeper significance in Aesthetic art becomes clear, and essential in placing him within the timeline of Aesthetic artists in the nineteenth-century.

'A Return to Fifteenth-Century Ideals'

However, as I stated in the introduction to this chapter, colour had multiple facets of usage, and while I have established Sargent's symbolic and Aesthetic ones here, Sargent's practices can also possibly link to the wider scientific discussions dominating artistic circles during this period. I have previously mentioned Chevreul and his discussion regarding black and white in the context of portraiture and its use as a potential aid in creating focus on the subject's face, to which I

⁵⁸ Lee, "Beauty and Sanity", 122.

presently return. Sargent could have chosen to depict *Madame X* in any colour of dress, but he *chose* to pair down the scene to one of blacks, whites and greys. While using this kind of palette may have been a specific nod to Whistler's portraits of the period, it also may also have been a reflection of Impressionistic colour theory. Chevreul supported the idea of colour simplification in order to focus on the 'physiognomy of the face', as earlier discussed, but he also stated that colour contrast was essential in preventing mediocrity in the portraits of ladies, most especially in the execution of women's skin tone:

This method of bringing out colour by contrast.... ought to particularly fix the attention of portrait painters. A portrait of a lady might have a very mediocre effect, because neither the colour of the dress nor the background have been properly selected... The portrait painter must endeavour to find the predominating colour in a complexion he has to paint; once found and faithfully reproduced, he must seek what is among the accessories at his disposal will give value to it.⁵⁹

Sargent's main attraction to Mme Gautreau was her skin, and according to Chevreul's directions he had already found the 'predominating colour in [the] complexion he has to paint'; recall his letter to Vernon Lee from 10 February 1883, praising the eccentricities of Gautreau's lavender tinge. However, this focus was problematic, and in order to maintain focus on her strange colouring and really do it visual justice, he needed to pair down everything else in the image to give it pride of place. This may explain why the few letters we have in extent relating to this portrait express Sargent's anxiety over colour and tone. The first, his previously quoted letter to Mrs. White claims that he was 'brushing away at both of you in a horrid state of anxiety' and the second is a letter to Ben del Castillo, expressing dissatisfaction with finding the right background colour for *Madame X*. In anger and frustration, he

dashed a tone of light rose over the former gloomy background. [Then] I turned the picture upside down, retreated to the other end of the studio and

⁵⁹ Chevreul, *Principles of Harmony and Contrast*, 120.

looked at it under my arm. Vast improvement. The élancée figure of the model shows to much greater advantage. [sic]⁶⁰

After *Madame X* was taken down due to the scandal of the fallen strap (and other various complaints of offence), Sargent repainted the background to the current colour seen today, further darkening it to heighten the contrast against skin, in a way following the words of Chevreul in finding the correct 'accessory' colour to complement the subject's complexion. These letters again highlight that colour, and its more expressive properties in highlighting eccentricity and strange beauty, was one of the main objectives of the portrait, and thus had to be done just right.

Vernon Lee, again ever astute and insightful for us into Sargent's hitherto unconfessed purposes, writes in her letters home that *Madame X* is 'bizarre and even unpleasant' and is acting as Sargent's 'return to fifteenth century ideals.'⁶¹ A fascinating statement, this forcibly pulls our discussions of Aesthetic colour into a completely different, but relevant direction - out of the concerns of modernism into something more akin to the Pre-Raphaelites and their Old Master inspirations, evoking my previous discussions on the idea of 'traditional colour'. But what exactly does she mean by this? In one sense it seems to establish a link back to Rossetti and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* by placing Sargent's intentions into an early British Aesthetic context - by the use of symbolic and traditional colour to create a link to historical subject matter and painterly method.

Yet in the year previous to this letter, Vernon Lee included in her collection of essays *Euphorion* (which she notably dedicated to Pater) a work called "The Portrait Art" where she speaks mainly of the ideals gleaned from the great portrait painters stretching from Giotto all the way to Rembrandt. In her separation between Giotto and later fifteenth-century portraitists, she remarks that while both styles show dedication to decoration *and* realism, it is the latter that more victoriously combines idealism and realism, in a capturing of soul *as well as* face. Beauty is created by the harmonisation of the human subject and the artist, as the

⁶⁰ Charteris, *John Sargent*, 60.

⁶¹ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 126. See Appendix B, Figure 21.

human 'merely afford[s] the beginning of a pattern which the artist may be able to carry out'. Renaissance portraitists had awareness of exhibition location and light, which they used to 'change the value of the whole assemblage of features', something 'undreamed of by nature'.⁶² Lee description of a blend of realism and idealism, truth and fantasy strongly evokes Sargent's stated and unstated desires for *Madame X* – as one that captured her beauty accurately through a manipulation of artifice of pose, dress and contrast, but also by linking it to Classical ideals of sculpture and female form.

There are also other clear links to 'fifteenth-century ideals' present as Lee describes them. In situating the great portraitists of this historical period, she nominates 'the art of the great medallists of the Renaissance' as supreme, specifying Pisanello as a primary example. In returning to Sargent's *Madame X*, close inspection shows the image's facture to be tight and controlled, with lines crisp and colours matte. Such stylistic traits, in addition to depicting a clear profile against a dark ground, was a popular visual motif during the Renaissance as exemplified by the aforementioned bronzes and Pisanello. See Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Woman from Frankfurt* (1480-1485) (Fig. 114) and Piero Della Francesca's *Portraits of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza* (1467-1473) (Fig. 115) for example, which translated into paint what was done in metal. These works have additional significance when taking into account that the former two portraits are both housed in the Uffizi; Lee lived in Italy most of her life, while Sargent oftentimes made yearly trips there, even visiting as recently as October 1883 while he was working on *Madame X*. Thus a 'return to fifteenth-century ideals' not only has a/Aesthetic connection to the Pre-Raphaelites, decorative art and beauty for its own sake, but also significantly cosmopolitan intersections with Italy, the Old Masters as well as portraits in sculpture and bronze.

Other brief additional historical links include the block-like black and white colour and sharp lines of eighteenth-century Japanese woodcuts, a significant

⁶² Vernon Lee, "The Portrait Art", in *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Medieval in the Renaissance* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884): 2:27-28.

visual source popular amongst the Aesthetic elite in both France and Britain during this period. These *ukiyo-e* prints, for example, were a compelling influence on Whistler's London bridge images, based loosely off of Andō Hiroshige's series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*.⁶³ What is also significant is that in March of 1883, while Sargent was painting *Madame X* and *Mrs. Henry White*, he visited a retrospective on Japanese art - *L'art Japonais* - at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. This, in combination with his later visit to Italy and potential viewing of the Italian portraits, may be a fruitful source of inspiration for these works, and his drive towards the more eccentric type of colour study that resulted. Again, however, is not only the notion that these sources are all within the Aesthetic consciousness but also that in their use as source material by Whistler, the French Impressionists and British Aesthetes, they are elements shared uniquely across multiple cultural and artistic boundaries. Such works become visual treatises of a cosmopolitan Aestheticism through the medium of paint and canvas.

By moving outward and looking at Sargent as a small microcosm, it is possible to see that Aestheticism had a specific language, found textually as in the word 'curious' and its derivatives, and also visually, as the symbolic aspects of certain colours. Sargent was reading and seeing all these things, and he was discussing it with his circle, and was able to use that language to visually convey a wide array of relevant concerns. The fact that Sargent was executing these black and white colours studies in line with - but not in exact mimicry of - what other Aesthetic painters and writers were producing during this time certainly establishes him as an artist engaged with such modern concerns. The works under discussion in this chapter - by Sargent, Whistler, and Lee - all appear to challenge and attempt to redefine traditional notions of colour symbolism, beauty, femininity and the natural, and a core method of approach for all of them was the extraction of aesthetic elements from moral connections. When Sargent is executing things 'only for the colour', he is playing against a tradition of object realism, in a way creating what Lee asserted as the Renaissance's crowning achievement in its blend of truth

⁶³ Julia Meech-Pekarik, "Early Collectors of Japanese Prints and the Metropolitan Museum of Art", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1982): 95.

and artistic license. He is also aligning himself with other avant-garde artists who are also doing the same.

His choice of nonconformity here highlights a number of important points of interpretation for Sargent and his art outside of the fact that he may have simply had a mentorship with Whistler and other Aesthetic based artists. By tracing back these colours to the texts Sargent was most likely reading (and that were also most likely read by many in the cosmopolitan Aesthetic circle around him), a greater understanding of *why* he decided to do something 'only for the colour' can be established. With the extremes to which he took this experiment in the case of *Madame X* - one which temporarily stalled his career and which he viewed as 'checking his success' - his decision to take just such a risk poses a number of questions.⁶⁴ While no one is able to definitively answer such questions without solid historical documentation from Sargent himself, by bringing together Lee's description of his attractions to the bizarre, their discussions on Baudelaire and Pater, and his nascent relationship with Whistler, it is possible to see this as not merely a publicity stunt, but as a pursuit of his own Aesthetic and intrinsic ideals. This again has far reaching ramifications for Sargent studies at large, as it aids in bringing him out of the confused depths of his nationality, as well as helps to shake off this notion of 'selling out' which plagued him well into the twentieth century.

But there are also significant points to be made about his use of colour and its importance in relation to Aestheticism and its drive towards the capturing of 'impressions'. Like the 'impression', it has been established that colour meant a great number of different things to a different number of artists and writers. Simply painting someone in white or describing someone's 'whiteness' in text did not always mean the same thing across national and artistic boundaries or movements. For Aestheticism at least, whiteness seems to represent anything from the sculptural body and its relationship to an Aesthetic homosexual subculture, decay and the corpse, and purity and feminine wholesomeness and cosmetic artifice, just to name a few. Sargent was participating in all of these things, but a drive towards

⁶⁴ Lee mentions this in a letter to her mother. See Appendix B, Figure 22.

capturing a type of beauty seems to always be at the core of it. That his use of the colour in many of these symbolic realms connects him back to similar explorations by earlier Aesthetic painters – Rossetti and Whistler, for example – places him within a lineage of painters whose aesthetic focus acted as the catalyst for their embrace of international influences. When Sargent reworks, modernises or extends an earlier generation's colour studies and the symbols their work carries, he can then be seen as attempting to situate himself as the new leader of this cosmopolitan Aesthetic movement, but whether or not he is successful in this in the long term will become more evident in the next chapter as we look towards present-day imaginings of Sargent and his works.

‘There is an end on’t’: Conclusion

The last three case studies I have presented have set the ground for a last, far reaching point, one hinted towards at different stages, but which comes to greater light when taking this dissertation together as a whole. That Sargent was a cosmopolitan artist is not under question here, as he clearly and undoubtedly was. That he was Aesthetically minded not only in his choice of subject matter, colour and composition in this early period, but also in the social circles in which he moved has also been widely exhibited. That this identity of his worked within a parameter of symbols and ciphers, to which information could be conveyed to an audience of the intelligentsia has also been established. But what exactly do all these things imply about Sargent when connected together? What does it mean that Sargent was cosmopolitan, aesthetic and symbolic, and why does it matter?

On one hand, such an argument has significance because it contests a negative, long accepted view of Sargent that has thrived in many art historical circles since his death in 1925. That Sargent suffered from a degradation of his artistic reputation during the twentieth century is well established, represented soundly by Roger Fry’s scathing criticism of, amongst others, *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* seen at the end of Chapter Four. I will go into some of Sargent’s other posthumous commentary in due course, but it is sufficient to say that by the start of WWI, Sargent was not always viewed as the great Victorian artist that his popularity at the end of the previous century seemed to imply. Unfortunately that view continued throughout the rest of the twentieth century, and is only now being questioned. Sargent has been continuously placed in exhibitions and books that define him as the quintessential painter of the Gilded Age – a ‘*prince of the atelier*’ (suspiciously not a king) as George Moore is quoted as saying in Fry’s article – who used his ‘undifferentiated eye’ to take advantage of being in the right place at the right time.¹ Walter Sickert, in a 1910 article for *The New Age* listed Sargent as one of the ‘*wriggle and chiffon group of portraiture*’, implying that unlike his contemporary Manet, Sargent had decided to rest his laurels with the ‘traditions

¹ Fry, “J.S.Sargent”, 125, 133.

of the great masters' and not those with a 'flower of modernity'.² Such a label persists even to this day, with Kenneth McConkey's revival of Sickert's links between Sargent and 'wriggle and chiffon' in his 1987 *Edwardian Portraits: Images of an Age of Opulence*. Ultimately such titles are infinitely telling in their lack of substantiality, indicating that perhaps prejudices against Sargent, until now, were slow to dissipate.³

Perhaps this *was* the case after the 1890s and the period following where this dissertation ends, when Sargent's career skyrocketed and he became the premiere portraitist across two continents. A brief perusal of his works after 1886 do not appear to show the more pervasively experimental elements discussed during the course of this dissertation, at least in regards to those chosen for public exhibition. However, this period was also dedicated to the desire of others – Sargent painted works for his paying customers, and as such was in some ways constrained by how they wished to present themselves. It is therefore possible to look at this early period as being more indicative of his own private interests, interests which repeatedly show him to have initially situated himself as a participant in the artistic avant garde. Though Fry and Sickert are critically distasteful against Sargent's art of this later period, perhaps there is a grain of truth in the view that his works participate more in the frivolity of the age rather than its concerns, especially as they wrote, as in Fry's case, from a world that has seen the horrors of war. Sargent may have seemed superficial by contrast, yes, but that was not the extent of who he was, and the fact that many of these outdated views of Sargent have persisted is a cause of for concern and renewed dialogue.

² Walter Sickert, "Wriggle and Chiffon", *The New Age* 8 (June 1910): 129-30.

³ For additional readings regarding Sargent's connection to the Gilded Age, see Christopher Capozzola, "The Man Who Illuminated the Gilded Age", *American Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 2000), 514-532; Kenneth McConkey, *Edwardian Portraits: Images of an Age of Opulence* (Woodbridge: Antique Collector's Club, 1987), 22-35. For a good overview, see the catalogue to the Yale Center for British Art's 2013 exhibition, Angus Trumble and Andrea Wolk Rager, eds. *Edwardian Opulence: British Art at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 2013).

The close analysis of his works here has repeatedly shown that he was not, at the outset at least, a mere panderer to public taste but rather that he continuously challenged the status quo, even to the seeming detriment of his fragile early career. That this boldness was later tempered to maintain a working career is evident, but it does not necessarily indicate that it was his true interests as an artist, only that, like many painters, he was obligated to support himself. What I have shown here is that Sargent's adroitness as a painter and 'performer' does not rest merely in a form of pandering or copying, but rather that he more likely swung playfully, up and down and side to side, from many branches of a socially agreed set of artistic hierarchies, and the varied pathways I have taken throughout these chapters has aimed to contextualise this in a more concrete and discernible way.

This becomes more evident when moving forward in time to our present day, which even as I write this conclusion is seeing Sargent and his works experience resurgence in popularity. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, in conjunction with the Brooklyn Museum of Art and with the open support of Richard Ormond, is currently hosting a traveling exhibition of Sargent's Watercolours, which will run from May 2013 to May 2014. There is also to be a new exhibition to begin early in 2015 entitled *Sargent: Portraits of Artists and Friends* at the National Portrait Gallery in London, which will run from the 12th February to the 25th of May. This raises two relevant questions: for one, if Sargent was this very 'old-fashioned' artist, then why, in our current age of digital replication, pixilation and extreme hypermodernism, are people interested in seeing him? And secondly, considering the success of such ventures, what does that say about our current reception of Sargent as an artist? On some level, I certainly see attraction to Sargent as a form of nostalgia, a type of reversion and looking back popular in contemporary culture. This is evident in the final note of a thought-provoking review of the current watercolour exhibition printed for *The Boston Globe*:

The underlying difficulty is that, simply put, we are troubled today, and we tend to trace the onset of so many of our troubles back to Sargent's time: the Edwardian age, the onset of modernity, and the eve of global catastrophe. We look back and, with touching naiveté, expect the great artists to reflect,

or at least hint at, those oncoming troubles. We are met instead with Sargent, who was, at least on evidence of his pictures, the most untroubled artist of his time.⁴

However, there is something to be said for this critic's surprise that an artist would adhere to a programme of beauty instead of one that addresses, as many current artists do today, more social or political concerns. Historically, if Sargent was anything, he was decided *not* interested in those things, at least insofar as has been seen here in regards to his subject matter and methods in the context of his early career.

However, this critic calling Sargent 'untroubled' at the end of an article which, for all purposes, stands slack jawed in the face of Sargent's dazzling colours and expansive European landscapes does hark backwards to one of the larger points my research has made. I have suggested that Sargent's early works were created with a focus on 'art for art's sake' principles, and the fact that his emphasis on 'aesthetics' as opposed to 'message' is still perceptible by a modern audience today does speak of the substantiality of my argument. In fact, Sargent's approach to beauty becomes even more evident now in contrast to the heavily digital and mechanical nature of current art, as modern society challenges the concept of artistic production without the need for training, proscribed materials, and in some cases even an artist-creator. 'Untroubled' then becomes on some level 'Aesthetic,' or beauty focused. Just as the movement in the nineteenth century looked to reject the oppressive nature of mechanisation by shifting back towards the subjective and the artist's personal 'impression,' so too does Sargent's art speak to more pleasurable concerns in the face of digital globalisation. And through his method of indicating such beauty, of distinctly and faithfully mapping it out, he was able to ascribe importance and meaning to the 'merely' aesthetic. As Vernon Lee said in

⁴ Sebastian Smee, "MFA Hosts Ravishing Exhibition of Sargent's Watercolors", *The Boston Globe*, 10 October 2013, accessed 12 December 2013, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2013/10/10/review-john-singer-sargent-watercolors-mfa/KQxZ3eCII5LcuNIqaRaRij/story.html>

her posthumous reminiscences of Sargent in Charteris's biography: 'besides [giving it] significance, Sargent extracted and made visible the actual beauty of the world.'⁵

That Sargent was walking a queer and/or Aesthetic line in subject matter and method is clearly evident from the historical documentation and visual analysis. However, such views are surprisingly not limited to Sargent's own time but again can also be perceived in our present day. To return to the *Boston Globe* review of Sargent's watercolours exhibition, this critic, without any implied previous knowledge or understanding, makes the following statements: in discussing the room of Sargent's Venetian views, the author mentions Sargent's use of pencil to outline his '*impressions* that might otherwise have been too amorphous.' He calls Sargent's works a response to the 'joys of looking... the brief and relishing glance of a *curious* and comfortable traveler' while his paintings of Rose-Marie become a '*cipher* for Sargent's pictorial occupations' as her beauty is overshadowed by the contrast between a turquoise umbrella and a white dress.

In bringing such thoughts together, it is astonishing that almost one hundred and thirty years later, critics are still repeatedly using this allusive language to describe Sargent's work – curious, impression, and symbol (or cipher). While such terms do not have the coded rhetoric they carried for Aestheticism in the 1880s, their use still insists on the importance and pervasion of a specific art language as it relates uniquely to Sargent. That my thesis has traced back these words to roots having specific meaning, and that I can, in the here and now, connect this critic's language in a thread back to those roots concretely grounds my assertions about Sargent's visual agenda. Regardless of the fact that perceptions of what constitutes art have changed massively since Sargent's time, such connections speak textually of the transcendence of his message. And if a present-day viewer can connect to Sargent's art through the same experience and language as one in the nineteenth century, does that not imply that Sargent has a kind of 'modern' attraction, thus making his works ahead of their time? Issues of modernity, culture and

⁵ Lee, "J.S.S. In Memoriam" in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 254.

impermanence have only escalated since Sargent's time, and his works speaks to that and will no doubt continue to do so.

To establish Sargent as modern was a large portion of my intent here, but I also wished to use my research in a way that was itself more dynamic and inclusive. As I have stated before, artists did not live in a vacuum, and it is illogical to assume that as artists working in a visual medium they found inspiration only through the act of seeing. What I have proven here is that what they were *reading* and *discussing* was also significant to their oeuvres, and can be seen to have had a proportionate amount of value to how they translated their surroundings into their art. This approach may have been taken with other Victorian artists – the connection between Whistler and Gautier, for example, has often been explored – but it has never been done in regards to Sargent.

In many ways, however, this approach was a form of necessity, and the most pressing issue I confronted with Sargent was his lack of personal record. There are some few letters in extant, and I have made use of some of them as a source, but the bulk of my research had to work peripherally in order to compensate for this lack. Sargent was not a man of the media; though he was most likely aware of his critical reception, he shied away from courting publicity in the way that Whistler did. It is also possible that Sargent did not wish his private life to overshadow his art; rumours of his homosexuality have been prevalent and even discussed academically, embodied by the work of Trevor Fairbrother, and caused conflict even in Sargent's own time, successfully destroying the lives of fellow artists such as Simeon Solomon and Oscar Wilde. Existing amongst a quiet circle of elite, like-minded characters seemed a more viable (or 'safe') option, and if he preferred the company of a tightly knit group, what is not to say that his works weren't executed with this kind of audience in mind? By constructing Sargent through the lens of these figures, and through the printed page, between the public and the private, it is possible to access a Sargent that is perhaps more realistic or accurate than the one that exists in the public record - a record he controlled in part by the select preservation of personal material, and also through the work of the Ormond family, who continues to exert a similar kind of concern over his public image.

Sargent died of heart failure on April 14th, 1925 at the age of sixty-nine. Reports on the coroner's inquest into his death showed that his parlour maid discovered his body, as if 'dropped off to sleep' with glasses on his head and a 1784 edition of the complete works of Voltaire in his hand.⁶ Even at the end his relationship with texts was insurmountable. In the wake of his death, amidst the numerous publications, articles, and retrospective missives which littered global newspapers, many things were said about Sargent, most of them, to be frank, fairly standard, and most of them, as can be expected, fighting to claim Sargent as their own – American, British, *and* French. But there are a few rays of light amidst this darkness, a light I hope my dissertation has clarified. Two examples I will list here, the first being a memorial written by his friend, the fellow artist Edwin Blashfield, and the second an anonymous op-ed piece in *The New York Times*:

If one turns to what must be a very summary consideration of the main points of Sargent's work, perhaps his superiority may be established upon four fundamentals, his capacity for characterization, his dazzling technique, his sense of values, his originality, or if you prefer, his unusualness, his difference from other men.⁷

One cannot, however, scramble his formidable output into any one pigeonhole. Whoever takes pains to survey it finds it escaping classification. Who could think of the Wertheimer portraits as belonging to the same category as Beatrice Goelet or of these as in either case related to the portrait of Wilson, or any of the portraits as belonging to the memorial decorations in the Widener Library at Cambridge. It is difficult to think of the frieze of the prophets in the Boston Public Library as the work of an artist who painted the subsequent decorations in the same building in spite of the fact that no other painter could be associated with either series. One idea does, however, emerge from the massed impressions gained from that lifetime of steady work... What best expresses his artistic quality, is not merely the glory of his superb craftsmanship, but the artist's vision of a beauty dependent upon his own power to create it.⁸

⁶ "Find Sargent Died of Heart Trouble", *The New York Times*, April 17, 1925, 5. [sic]

⁷ Edwin H. Blashfield, "John Singer Sargent-Recollections", *The North American Review* 220, no. 827, (1 June 1925): 641.

⁸ "The World of Art: A Comment on Sargent: Current Exhibitions", *The New York Times*, April 26, 1925, 16.

'His originality, or if you prefer, his unusualness, his difference from other men' speaks quietly amidst the posthumous roar of characterisations that Sargent was one who mainly 'sold himself to the Duchesses.'⁹ It speaks, if anything, to the attractions to the 'curious, strange, bizarre' which Vernon Lee used to characterise him in her own posthumous essay on Sargent.¹⁰ But it also nods to *The New York Times* review, to the impossibility of labelling Sargent under any one category, and to the insistence of an embrace, not an exclusion or a tidy organisation, of his specialness and his dimensionality as an artist who was able to produce works that, on the surface, appeared nothing short of contradictory. My last word can only be that moving forward as art historians, specifically us self-labelled 'Sargentologists', is that we should embrace, as these reviews have done, the humanity present in our artists, their sense of chaos and insanity. Our current world is no longer separated by national boundaries, why then should our research remain that way? To close thoughtfully on the words of Blashfield:

And now there is an end on't – an end of his abundant, superbly vitalized production; but of his influence there is no end that can be perceptible to us.¹¹

⁹ H.I. Brock, "John Sargent: Man and Painter", *The New York Times*, April 19, 1925, 5.

¹⁰ Lee, "J.S.S. In Memoriam" in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 249.

¹¹ Blashfield, "John Singer Sargent-Recollections", 641.

Appendix A

John Singer Sargent's Exhibition Timeline 1878-1887

Shaded areas indicate periods where Sargent did not exhibit in that country.

Year	France	Britain	U.S.
1878	<i>Salon de 1878</i> Paris		Society of American Artists <i>First Exhibition</i> Kurtz Gallery, New York
	<i>Exposition Universelle Internationale</i> Paris		
1879	<i>Salon de 1879</i> Paris		Society of American Artists <i>Second Exhibition</i> Kurtz Gallery, New York
			National Academy of Design <i>Fifty-Fourth Annual Exhibition</i> New York
			National Academy of Design <i>John H. Sherwood and Benjamin Hart Sale</i> New York
1880	<i>Salon de 1880</i> Paris		Society of American Artists <i>Third Annual Exhibition</i> Kurtz Gallery, New York
			St. Botolph Club <i>Inaugural Exhibition</i> Boston
			Metropolitan Museum of Art <i>Inaugural Exhibition</i> New York

John Singer Sargent's Exhibition Timeline: 1878 - 1887

1881	<i>Salon de 1881</i> Paris		Society of American Artists <i>Fourth Annual Exhibition</i> Kurtz Gallery, New York
	Cercle des Arts Libéraux rue Vivienne, Paris		<i>Works of American Artists Abroad: The Second Exhibition,</i> Philadelphia
1882	<i>Salon de 1882</i> Paris	Royal Academy <i>One Hundred and Fourteenth Exhibition</i> London	Schaus Gallery New York
	Cercle des Arts Libéraux rue Vivienne, Paris	Grosvenor Gallery London	Williams & Everett Gallery Boston
	Société Internationale de Peintres et Sculpteurs ('les jeunes') Galerie Georges Petit, rue de Sèze, Paris	Fine Art Society <i>British and American Artists from the Paris Salon</i> London	
1883	<i>Salon de 1883</i> Paris	Fine Art Society London	Society of American Artists <i>Sixth Annual Exhibition</i> Kurtz Gallery, New York
	Cercle de l'Union Artistique Paris		Society of American Artists <i>Sixth Annual Exhibition (visiting exhibition)</i> Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
	École des Beaux Arts <i>Portraits du Siècle</i> Paris		Museum of Fine Arts <i>Fourth Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Art</i> Boston

John Singer Sargent's Exhibition Timeline: 1878 - 1887

1884*	<p>Société Internationale de Peintres et Sculpteurs ('les jeunes') Galerie Georges Petit, rue de Sèze, Paris</p>		
	<p><i>Salon de 1884</i> Paris</p>	<p>Royal Academy <i>One Hundred and Sixteenth Exhibition</i> London</p>	
1885*	<p>Cercle de l'Union Artistique Paris</p>	<p>Grosvenor Gallery <i>Eighth Summer Exhibition</i> London</p>	
	<p><i>Salon de 1885</i> Paris</p>	<p>Royal Academy <i>One Hundred and Seventeenth Exhibition</i> London</p>	<p>Williams & Everett Gallery Boston</p>
1886	<p>Cercle de l'Union Artistique Paris</p>	<p>Grosvenor Gallery <i>Ninth Summer Exhibition</i> London</p>	
	<p>Galerie Georges Petit <i>Exposition Internationale de Peinture</i> Paris</p>		
	<p><i>Salon de 1886</i> Paris</p>	<p>New English Art Club <i>Inaugural Exhibition</i> London</p>	<p>Society of American Artists <i>Ninth Annual Exhibition</i> Kurtz Gallery, New York</p>
		<p>Royal Academy <i>One Hundred and Eighteenth Exhibition</i> London</p>	

John Singer Sargent's Exhibition Timeline: 1878 - 1887

1887		Grosvenor Gallery <i>Summer Exhibition</i> London	
		New English Art Club London	St. Botolph Club <i>Loan Exhibition 1887</i> Boston
		Royal Academy <i>One Hundred and Nineteenth Exhibition</i> London	
		Walker Art Gallery <i>Seventeenth Autumn Exhibitions of Pictures in Oil and Watercolours</i> Liverpool	

* These two years also included exhibitions outside of nations included in this chart. In 1884, he exhibited at *Les XX* in Brussels, and at the Dublin Sketching Club's *Annual Exhibition of Sketches, Pictures, and Photography*. In 1885, he exhibited at the Musée Rath's *Salon Suisse* in Geneva. Both the Brussels and the Dublin exhibitions are well accounted for in the Sargent catalogue.

The Geneva exhibition is something of a mystery. Two works were apparently exhibited - a portrait of a man and a portrait of a woman - but neither of them have been traced or identified by Sargent scholars. The Ormond catalogue The title of the exhibition is given as *Salon Suisse des beaux-arts et des arts decoratifs de la vie de Genève* so one can presume that these two portraits, to be included in this exhibition, would have been either prominent or known Swiss figures who had a relationship to Geneva. I could only locate two potential candidates for these works in the catalogue that had Swiss related backgrounds and who had portraits executed before 1885; the Burckhardts, whose patriarch Edward was a Swiss merchant, and Sargent's friend and fellow painter Charles Alexander Giron, who was a native of Geneva. According to my research, the latter work is most likely the male portrait listed, as the *Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse* remarks that a number of Giron's portraits were included in this exhibition,

so this connection makes the Sargent portrait entirely feasible.¹ However, the female portrait remains a mystery. In line with my thinking on the Burckhardts, Sargent did execute portraits of both the daughters before 1885; a smaller portrait of Valerie from 1880, and Charlotte in *Lady with a Rose* of 1882. The latter seems unlikely, as it was a popular, large piece and I do not think documentation of such a piece being exhibited would have been lost. The second portrait of Valerie was executed on the occasion of her marriage, and the Ormond catalogue indicates she subsequently moved to the United States, presumably taking the portrait with her, making this portrait, again, unlikely.

However, inclusion of such portraits together perhaps implies a marriage pair, so it could be possible that Sargent painted a portrait of Giron's wife, which has been subsequently lost. The catalogue entry for the Giron portrait mentions an archival source of the collection of a Madame Giron de Pourtalès for information, so perhaps this is the figure in question. Given the above information, I hazard a guess that these portraits were of Giron and his wife, the latter of which is now lost.

¹ 'Chroniques Suisses: Octobre: Le Salon de Geneve,' *Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse*, v. 28, no. 3 (October–December 1885): 205. For a detailed recounting of the exhibition (which sadly does not mention by name any of Sargent's works) see Émile Bonjour, 'Le Salon de Genève,' *Courrier de l'art*, v. 5, no. 1 (January 2, 1885): 468-470.

Appendix B

Letters and Documents

Figure 1.

John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee
Paris
Saturday, c. summer 1881

My dear Violet,

I saw Miss Robinson on Wednesday looking better than I expected, from all accounts, and not exhausted by her journey. She was going on a Thursday with a lady friend and I promised to be at the station which I did not reach in time owing to a miscalculation of distance and cab horse power. I hope you have heard of her safe arrival in London and wish you could give me her address there which I have lost.

I think I shall be in London in the spring for the opening days of the R.A. and Grosvenor where I shall probably be exhibiting something.

Your book *Belcaro* has at last arrived. I have been expecting it for weeks and it only came yesterday. I am going to read it at once. Tell me what you think of Pater's Essays. I like one or two of them very much.

I suppose you hear from Nice occasionally and know that Mama is getting on piano piano and that Emily still continues to write incoherent and crazy letters. Those she writes me are most alarming.

With kindest messages to all your circle,

Your affectionate friend,

John S. Sargent¹

¹ John Singer Sargent Catalogue Raisonne Archives. This letter is undated, but Elaine Kilmurray suspects it to be from 'late 1881 or early 1882'. Lee writes to her mother in the Willis collection that *Belcaro* was first printed in June 1881, so I presume this letter is much earlier, from around that period, as it seems most likely from this letter she was sending Sargent one of the first initial manuscripts. See Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 62; 79.

Figure 2.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
June 21st, 1881
84 Gower St, London

Dearest Mamma,

We went to the Lewis Campbells Saturday to dine – a very pretty house in Wimbledon, with garden & sort of foggy view – and rejoiced greatly, when we found the room where we left our things quite crammed with devotional literature, to Gospel almanacks. Except for E.'s warning we shd. None of us have thought of that. It was a pity we had to go, because a cousin of the R.s had sent tickets for the Opera, by Annie Cobden – for the old play they are acting; either wd have been more amusing. But it was pleasant. The C.s are nice, specially she. They played at tennis, and Mary & I, not knowing how, did the ball picking up. Then there was quite a solemn, very funnily solemn dinner party, with written menus to a sort of leg of mutton Valentino dinner; who the people were, neither of us knew, but a great deal was talked about the Fleeming Jenkins. Mrs. Fl J. seems to be quite celebrated as an actress. When we returned we found Papa R., just back, a nice, amiable, amused, shy little round mixture of P. Villari & Socrates – Can Eugène, understand that? I can't tell you how nice everything is in this house, I mean the furniture, serving, the whole way of living & a general air of simplicity & perpetual hospitality, with people dropping in perpetually.

Yesterday morning came Satchell. A thin yellow bronze headed & bearded man, quite comic to hear him speak of his son. A little superciliously depressed, the utter reverse of his letters – with a big nosegay in his buttonhole. Civil, but not at all gushing. He wants to begin printing in August, & wants as much new matter in the book as possible. Snaps at Mr. Ruskin & intimates that the atheistic public is the only one which reads good books.

21st Mrs. Dickson seem to me looking well – very well. I was quite astonished after all that Eugène had said. She was very kind, but I think couldn't get over evidently finding me looking very unlike what she expected. The tiny house is very pretty & prettily situated, but oh so gloomy for all the surrounding whitewash, flowers, green, compared with this deal old black smutty house, with the stairs, & landings all crammed with majolica, & pictures & books. Lalla was out, but I saw Guy, a pretty, delicate weazen thing with prodigiously projecting ears.

Sunday. John dined here, in the early afternoon, it was very pleasant. He took us, that is Mary & a sort of cousin boy of her's, by the underground to Fulham to see Burne-Jones. Burne Jones has such a pretty house in a large garden, in which the Cobden girls were disporting themselves with his wife; but as we didn't know him, we only saw the studio. Evelyn Pickering was there, who asked us to tea tonight.

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

She & John were so oddly different in all their appreciations. Some of Burne Jones pictures, especially a set of unfinished things of the Sleeping Beauty, I admired extremely & so did John; I think John is singularly unprejudiced, almost too amiably candid in his judgments. He remained to tea. I like him now. He is just what he was, only much more serious, without spirits or humour. He talked art & literature, just as formerly, and then, quite unbidden, sat down to the piano & played all sorts of bits and things, end & middles of things, just as when he was a boy. In the train he suddenly said, in the oddest way, that he had a suggestion to make. This suggestion was, to do a sketch of me. Do you think it was very nice of him? So today, when R.s have a sort of huge afternoon tertulla, we are to fix the day for the sitting. Mabel hearing this asked whether she might try at the same time, as she thinks she might learn a good deal, painting by John's side. John is extremely serious, a great maker of theories; he goes in for art for art's own sake, says that the subject of the picture is something not always in the way, etc._He is quite emancipated from all religious ideas. He speaks English without an accent but has to help himself out with French words.

June 22d. Yesterday morning we went to the Grosvenor Gallery; one or two very fine portraits, the other pictures below the level of Donatello. In the afternoon came the Clarkes & Miss Callwell's sister, and Mr. Herkomer, who is young (but certainly one of the cleverest portrait painters they have here). He was very amusing about Tennyson. Then came Mrs. Wm. Rossetti, a plain, Italian looking, extremely engaging woman, engaging like Mme. Giminez. In the evening Mary & I went to Evelyn Pickering. She has a mother & sisters, but, for all one sees, appears to be all alone in a huge handsome house in Bryanston Square. She is looking quite pretty. Her pictures in the Grosvenor are on the whole extremely hideous; but she had a very fine thing in the studio. We sat on perch chairs (the things models sit on) and talked for a long time. She is very clever, imaginative, theorizing, the most comic contrast, with her theories or poetical subject, to John. I must get them together.

I can't say how good they all are to me. It seems Miss Poynter had given them such a fright about my health, that they refused all invitations for the first week. But there are lots of things pending: - Sarah Bernhardt tomorrow, & another performance, where Mr. Irving, Miss Terry and all the best actors are together. Then to see the German company play *Winter's Tale*, then Mr. Cook, he is so extremely friendly (he was at Siena) takes us up the Thames in a boat: & John takes us to Hampton Court, and Mrs. Cadell's boy to Woolwich. And then we are to stay a week at Oxford, where Mabel is going to paint. I have not touched a book, you may think. I can scarcely find a minute to revise the MS. for Satchell. Saturday evening to the Groves, & Sunday afternoon I to Mrs. Clifford. They know the Pfeiffers, so I shall go there with them. I have not had time to call on anybody. I am feeling much better & stronger. The great tertulla has come off. There were heaps of people & a great amount of food. I had a sort of feeling that I ought to attend to my more especial friends, the Clarkes, Middlemores, John, the Sharps, the Cobdens, instead of interviewing celebrities (I am writing before my breakfast in my room, & there is no ink in the pot) of whom there are varieties. Eugène must not be very angry that I

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

would not be introduced to Mr. Browning, who was there, *ménant train de grand génie*. I thought it so derogatory to myself to be honoured in the sort of way that Agnes Clarke was, by two minutes platitude. He is a rather common looking old creature, by no means unlike Captain Huet. But we are going to see him at his house. Then Wm. Rossetti, the type of the stodgy reviewer, was introduced. This is what Mary calls so many people wanting to know me!!!! Quite the nicest person is Mrs. Wm. Rossetti; I like her extremely. I also like Miss Zimmern, she who wrote the books on Lessing & Schopenhäuer, & Miss Mathilda Blind, the adopted daughter of Karl Blind. She is an ugly, course, evidently amiable woman, extremely like Ouida. Mary says her poetry is just among the very best written at present. Young Sharp, with his punk fleshy, or rather meaty face & his prominent eyes, his whole linendraper's sleekness & prettiness, is quite repulsive to me, as I think he is to Mary. He looks the incarnation of underbredness. I quite understand his poems now. In conversation very dull. The wonderful Oscar Wilde was brought up – the Posthlethwaite of Punch. I must send you a caricature of him. He talked a sort of lyrico-sarcastic maudlin cultschah for half an hour. But I think the creature is clever & that a good half of his absurdities are mere laughing at people. The English don't see that. John is coming for my likeness, so I must stop. ²

² Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 62-65.

Figure 3.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
Post Card.
16 June 1884.

Got E's letter this morning. I shall write at length tomorrow. Spent yesterday morning hearing Manning preach, Afternoon, M., John, Evelyn P. etc. at Mrs. Stillman's, sitting on grass, discussions, fantastic, weird, curious, cigarettes, bonbons, Baudelaire. Met Henry James at National Museum. Every creature has heard of my novel (Miss B) & of my new dress. *Euphorion* seems selling well: no reviews. Ellis has declared no more books of poetry; but I shall try. Talked spiritualism with Gurneys today. John & Lemon here to dinner tomorrow. Tertulla of 200 people.

So much love.³

Figure 4.

James McNeill Whistler to John Singer Sargent
1110 Rue de Bac.
20 January 1894

No my dear Sargent! - you cannot "go in there", as Carlyle is supposed to have said of the South Kensington Museum, and expect "irony" to follow you! - vous en demandez trop! -

Tell me one thing only - did you,
In the face of great temptation,

Chuck up the t'other nation

To become an En - glish - man!?! -

However you are all right - for you have at last proved that a man is not to be judged by his Associates! -

[Whistler's butterfly signature]

Come over & see us -⁴

³ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 144.

⁴ James McNeill Whistler to John Singer Sargent, 20 January 1894, *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler*, Record No. 02669, University of Glasgow. Accessed 11 November 2013. <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/>

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Figure 5.

John Singer Sargent to James McNeill Whistler
Morgan Hall
Fairford
Gloucestershire
22 January 1894

My dear Whistler

Your runes are dark enough to fill one with a vain regret - I must not brood over them.

As for the question of nationality I have not been invited to retouch it and I keep my twang. If you should hear anything to the contrary, please state that there was no such transaction and that I am an American.

With kind regards from the Abbeyes

Yours sincerely
John S Sargent⁵

Figure 6.

John Singer Sargent to Lady Lewis
London
Circa Summer 1894

[Excerpt only]

You seem to me really to like my decoration and not to look upon it as a hopeless conundrum as most people do. I was delighted to find that you got some pleasure out of it through your eyes and you were not fidgeting about the obscurity of those old symbols. What a tiresome thing a perfectly clear symbol would be.⁶

⁵ Letter from John Singer Sargent to James McNeill Whistler, 22 January 1894. *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler* (Online Edition), Record no. 05387, University of Glasgow. Accessed 11 November 2013. <http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/>

⁶ Excerpt taken from Charteris, "John Sargent", 144. I have been unable to locate this letter to date. Sargent exhibited his Boston Public Library lunettes at the Royal Academy in May 1894, so I am assuming this letter would be around that date.

Figure 7.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
84 Gower Street, London
June 16 & 17th, 1881

Dearest Mamma,

Many thanks for the letter & for Pauline's. I can't say how agreeably surprised I am with everything. The house is the most charming house I have seen, I think, full of all sorts of pretty things & picturesque furniture. The diningroom has a bow window looking on the garden trees; much prettier & more elegant than the Fishers' house. I have a charming and large room on the 2nd floor, Mary's I believe, so very prettily furnished. Papa R. is away for a day or two. The mother is extremely kind & so is Mabel.

17th June. Yesterday Mary took me to the Br. Museum to inspect Mr. Garnett. Imagine a younger & less besotten Gortschakoff whose arms & legs have been stretched and made limp with a glove stretcher; blinking, smirking, constantly rubbing his hands, which are supposed to be lovely; moreover extremely dilapidated in garment. He was very obsequiously & shyly civil. Satchell he says goes to the Br. Museum almost daily & is a clerk in something about Customs. In the afternoon they took me a drive (Mary is not well). I think the shops & streets ugly & sordid, I meant Regent St., etc, & all tawdry badly got up shops, whatever the things inside. Via Tuornobuoni is a magnificence in comparison; and after Paris it looks like a huge overgrown provincial shop street. Really I like this black part best, it has a look of its own. They took me to Westminster Abbey; drizzling, so we saw only the inside, with which in many ways I am disappointed & pleased; but the effect of the weather (or smoke) blackened and eaten, carved stone I admire very much. I think all this damp, smoke, etc., produces certain fine effects. Then Mary & I went to the Middlemores. Nina has grown quite strong, fat (in a long, awkwardly stodgy dress) rapidly approaching the shape of Mme. Villari; utterly conventional, with only a few tricks of voice & manner to remind me that she was actually once Miss Sturgis. She bored me. For the rest, extremely cheerful and friendly. I got John's letter forwarded by you this morning; Mabel Robinson (60), who is extremely interested about him, had actually got his address here against my arrival, so I wrote to him at once; perhaps he may turn up today. Ralph Curtis is here too. We merely dine with the L. Campbells tomorrow, as Mary doesn't know what their religious views may be, & says she wd. find it as awkward as I should. By the way Wm. Sharp showed her Eugene's sonnet on God & she thinks it very fine. She evidently doesn't like Sharp & thinks him rather a snob. This morning she gave old Maddox Brown, one of the earliest preRaphaelites & father of the wonderful boy who wrote the *Dwale Bluth*, a last sitting for a portrait of her in chalks; just on the same non-resembling system as Mrs. Stillman's portrait of Zina, and indeed much more like Zina than Mary. The sort of "glornacking" idealistic tendency of this

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portrait is I fancy characteristic of Maddox Brown's school; he taught Mrs. Stillman, a rather prosy, would be amusing old fellow, living in a coal black house with a square with trees: the plaster casts quite black with smut, and carpet, window-panes, chairs all tinged with soot. As a treat he showed me a large picture of his of some Greek women finding the drowned Don Juan, such a strange, false, childishly executed thing, with a sort of (I don't know what I meant to say never mind). I have seen the Clarkes & John. The Clarkes live a world off, in a dingy genteel sort of quarter – shabby & ugly house & furniture, decidedly fallen off since Florence I think. Both girls much older, plainer – almost pathetically so. Mary went to see a friend next door & came and fetched me away such an utterly out of place little figure in her pink cotton frock in that dingy sitting room of the Clarkes. They were very friendly – Agnes, I think, quite excited; I feel sorry – somehow there is something depressed and depressing about them. When we returned home, the maid said there were visitors in the drawing room, Mr. Sargent – so I rushed up to John & past two others, one sitting, very quiet, small and pale; with a scraggy beard, sickly looking; the other a great tall smirk blond shopmanny young man. They were Mr. Marston & Mr. Sharp. John is very stiff, a sort of completely accentless mongrel, not at all like Curtis or Newman; rather French, fauborg sort of manners. Ugly, not at all changed in feature, except for a beard. He was very shy, having I suppose a vague sense that there were poets about. He had been there a long time & had to go home almost immediately; the Robinsons had asked him to come Sunday & he wants to take us out for a day at Hampton Court. Meanwhile Mr. Marston and Mr. Sharp also took their departure without me having been able to talk to either. I am sure Sharp will go home & report to Lizzie that I was so horrified at the idea of confronting him that I talked to John instead. (18th morning) I am going to call on Mrs. Dickson this morning. I could not yesterday, because Mary was dragging me off in all directions. Got a very civil note from Satchell, asking when he may call. The announcement of the new book (*Belcaro*) but without the title. I believe we are going to dine with the Lewis Campbells tonight, if it don't rain too much. I am so struck by everybody's absurd exaggeration about blackness, damp, etc. By the way, I had the loveliest passage. I was virtually alone, & got through the journey quite comfortably. Don't read this to Eugène, but tell him the various items.

So much love. V. ⁷

⁷ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 61-62.

Figure 8.

Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro
Eragny
6 October 1891

My dear Lucien,

We received this morning your letter announcing that you have found a studio. So you will soon be settled.

What you say about Sargent doesn't surprise me; Monet had told me that he is very kind. As for his painting, that, of course, we can't approve of; he is not an enthusiast but rather an adroit performer, and it was not for his painting that Mirabeau wanted you to meet him. He is a man who can be very useful, and I hope that when the time comes he will put himself at your service. Have you informed him that you are giving drawing and painting lessons?

There is an article in today's *Éclair* which I will send you. Arsène Alexandre berates the directors of the Luxembourg asking by what right they refuse to buy the work of painters whom all the art critics recognize as gifted and who sell their painting to collectors less stupid than the said directors. – For thirty years now I have heard such complaints! But they remain unmoved, the bureaucratists!

[No signature]⁸

⁸ John Rewald, ed. *Camille Pissarro: Letters to his son Lucien* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1943), 183.

Figure 9.

John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee
Hotel Steinbock
Pontresina
August 12, 1872

Dear Violet,

The confusion occasioned by Papa's return from America hindered me from answering your first kind letter and since then I have been gladdened by the expected receipt of your second one, so long and interesting for both of which many thanks. I am very glad that you like the little sketch and only wish it deserved all your kind praise. I had serious misgivings as to the propriety of sending you such an insignificant little daub, and would probably not have done so, had I had a few days more to paint a better copy in, but our departure was hastened by the fearful hear. It was from a peculiar Italian, at once a pianist, organist and copyist of pictures in the galleries that I learned the subject of the pendant to your chosen faith, and on what grounds he said that it was [illegible] herself! I do not know. He was copying a very hideous picture in the same room as I, and he painted for friends of ours who are now here one or two little panels in oils of different well known figures such as the Virgin in the Presentation by Titian, and others, at the very moderate price of ten francs each. He did them, it must be confessed, rather badly, but I mention this thinking that he might perhaps be useful to you in giving you hints of doges or other celebrities, which must be plentiful in Venice. I shall try to find out his name from our friend but I doubt if they know it.

Many thanks also for the photo of that Greek bust which is certainly very fine in a large, broad treatment. It has not the beauty of some of their heads, but perhaps more expression. In these greek heads I so much admire the splendid cheeks, the beautiful transition of the cheek into the chin, and the line of the jaw, and the straight, oblique hint of the hair. The cheek and chin are of exquisite beauty in Tintoretto's heads of women, those beautiful combinations of snowy skin, golden braided hair, and strings of pearls. How I detest that Burckhardt whose criticism of Tintoret and Veronese I read in Venice; his blindness of the beauty and grandeur which one cannot fail to perceive in the pictures of the former, find his occasional [illegible] of unwilling [illegible] wrong from him in spite of himself, together with the way he extolls Paul Veronese to the skies commending his universal [illegible] of beauty and happiness, etc is most aggravating. It seems to me that Paul Veronese has a most debased sense of beauty, rather a sense of chic than of beauty, and I know of no thoroughly beautiful head painted by him; his faces have all the same type; course features and protruding eyes with swollen ugly eyelids and no eyebrows. His composition, dexterity with the brush and treatment of drapery, are, I suppose without approach.

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But I long for the time when I can show you in Rome, some sketches drawings of particularly beautiful bits of Tintoretto that I did this spring, and try to convert you to at least some of my intense administrations for that great master. I will not increase the risk of tiring you by saying anything more about him now, for I know the theme is not as dear to you as it is to me. I think I agree with you in your distaste for ruggedness, and I find ugliness and meanness now in the mountains which I used to think perfection; there is ugliness in slides of debris, in a shrunken mud covered glacier surrounded by pale, bare rocks that it used once to cover, in meager [illegible], patches of snow and in all their betokened rain and decay. I suppose this is what you feel. This partial alienation from the mountains I ascribe to my delightful stay in Venice which is full of beauty of a totally different soul, the beauty of man and art. The Venetians are indeed a splendid race, and it is very delightful to meet such fair, golden haired women as you already know through Titian's pictures, and to trace to the majestic movements of the gondoliers and the graces of the water carriers at the wells, the origin of that peculiar love of graceful motion and fine positions which characterizes the Venetians and especially Tintoretto. It is therefore not affectation or mannerism but merely the result of observation. I do not speak of Veronese, who imitated Tintoretto in this respect and in whom it is therefore affectation.

But I must close this egotistical and badly written letter with what ought to have begun it. We were very much grieved at your account of your brother's healthy and sincerely admire hi energy at facing another examination in such a state of bodily weakness.

About us, I cannot give you as good news as I could wish; we came up here half poisoned from the heat and cholera atmosphere in Venice, and the suddenness of the change from the steaming lagoons to six thousand feet above sea has retarded the good effects of the pure mountain air. We have all been alternatively indisposed, and baby was once quite seriously ill and Mamma was much thankful for Papa's return, which took the burden of responsibility off her shoulders. Papa came back in better health than any of us, and keeps quiet well. Emily is also very well. As for me, I have really not yet recovered from the typhus fever and measles of last year and I cannot climb as I used to, on account of the beating of my heart and waste of breath. It is a great deprivation, for high walks and climbs were my delight.

You said nothing in your letter of your plans for the autumn. We purpose staying on here until it gets unpleasantly cool and will perhaps after that go to the sea shore to Viareggio near Carraras. Who knows if we may both have the pleasure of seeing you there? It is a very pretty place surrounded by pinetas of stone pines, with a beautiful beach and fine views of the carrara mountains and and within and hour's sail of Pisa and quite near Spesia and Leghorn.

Thanking you again for your kind letters and photo and hoping that we may soon here from you, I remain with much love from all to all,

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Yours truly,
John S. Sargent.⁹

⁹ John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee, 12 August 1873, Collection of John Singer Sargent Materials, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.

Figure 10.

Vernon Lee to Eugène Lee-Hamilton
20 Earl's Terrace, Kensington W.
July 4, 1884

Dearest Eugène.

I got your letter yesterday; thank you. Should the cholera make its appearance at Leghorn, *I hope & implore that the whole Casa Piccola may at once be taken*, as people will precipitate themselves from Leghorn to Bagni, and your one safety lies in having no neighbors. In a few hours you might have you know not what choleraic neighbours.

Yesterday John's famous nominee teaparty came off. I don't know whether you understand that we coerced him into giving it and that the two Robinson girls & Arthur Lemon constituted ourselves inviters or nominators, each to invite nominees. John was permitted only one or two invitations, & with the express stipulations of no married couples, for we feared the Caldecotts. Each nominator had to submit his list to the others. Arthur Lemon was refused the permission to invite Miss Margaret Hooper! Mary's list was: Mr. Henry James, Mrs. Stillman, Mr. Clifford (the eccentric artist who paints Duchesses & heads the operations of the Church Army in the slums) and Mr. Theo Watts; Mabel's Charlotte McCarthy, Mrs. Carstow, etc. Mine Mrs. Callander, Mr. Pater, Mr. MacColl & Maclean. The studio which John has temporarily taken near Albert Hall is very large & pretty, and a Mr. Abbey, an American artist, also lent his on the ground floor & invited two young daughters of Matthew Arnold in payment. Through the windows you saw the apple trees in the garden; there were piles of melons & grapes & strawberries & tea & cakes & siphon & a handsome model boy to open the door. Mary Robinson and Mabel in pretty white frocks, myself in high black dresses, Mrs. Barstow, were wandering up & down stairs from the tea table to the easel with John's unfinished portrait of Lady Playfair, with Pater limping about for gout and Henry James wrinkling his forehead as usual for tight boots, & a lot of artists buzzing about, when I suddenly became aware of the entrance of a tall young woman very frumpily dressed in blue with red spots, who discovered herself to be Lady Colin Campbell. Immediately my thoughts rushed to Mrs. Callander, my nominee; a hansom stopped; I flew out and into the arms of Mrs. Callander to acquaint her of this disaster & of my innocence therein (for I had impressed, or thought I had, on John the impossibility of such a meeting). Mrs. Callander took it most placidly, & I fancy was quite tickled & amused. Lady Colin was upstairs; she came in grandly, as usual surrounded by a train of adorers, and saw calmly taking her tea, the placid Mrs. Callander, se glaça d'effroi, while Mrs. C proceeded to munch her cake. Then, summoning her dignity, Lady Colin sat down near a window & gathered her adorers about her, & stared fixedly at the enemy. But the enemy merely took MacLean's arm & walked into the garden, right in front of her. I wish you could have seen that placid piece of sussiego. This greatly added to the dramatic interest. Lady

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Colin beat an early retreat, leaving the field to Mrs. Callander, who ate a lot of cake & melons & made herself highly agreeable & looked very handsome.

In the evening we went to a concert, for which Miss Wakefield had sent me tickets. I lunch there today.

Beckford turns out too improper for manipulation, save by Symonds.

Goodbye,
Yr. V.¹⁰

¹⁰ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 152-53.

Figure 11.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
20 Earl's Terrace, Kensington W.
11 July 1884

Dearest Mamma – I fear I have not much news, but know you like to hear whatever there is.

Theodore Watts wrote me a delightful letter about my book. On the whole I am surprised to find so many people reading it. Fagan got for his club the other day. The *Pall Mall & Brit.Q.* reviews were very good.

Yesterday I took Mme Villari to Fisher Unwins on some business of her's. Poor woman, her long looked forward to visit has come off very badly: her sister in law just dead en couches and her old mother very ill. Unwin was very civil, but it took a great deal to screw any information out of him. The *Prince of the 100 Soups* was an edition of 2000 copies; 1200 have sold. *Euphorion* was an edition of 650 copies; 250 sold to America unbound, 200 & over in England, Mudie going to take more, & sale expected to increase with reviews. Despite his lamentations Unwin is mediating a cheap one volume edition.

I wrote to Satchell some time ago, but he has not descended an answer. Blackwood is silent.

We saw the new building & clearing away of rubbish in consequence of fire in Ivy Lane.

Mrs. Stillman met Mme Villari & me & gave us lunch at Simpson's in the Strand, & boldly took us into a shop to buy cigarettes. Then we called on the Wards. Mrs. Ward asked me to spend a day with them at a farm they have in Surrey; but I believe going there is ruinous.

Today a lot of people are coming here to meet Mme. Villari; so I will leave this open.

[later] The afternoon tea was a great success; the Wards, Rossettis, Madox Brown, Theo. Watts, Henry James, John, Paters, Sharps, Stillmans, Pennells & Mme Vallari. The0 Watts was almost charming & friendly and regretted he had not had the doing of my review, as he said Wm. Rossetti's was not near good enough. But Henry James was even nicer: he takes the most paternal interest in me as a novelist, says that *Miss Brown* is a very good title, and that he will do all in his power to push it on.

Love,
Yr. V ¹¹

¹¹ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 154-155.

Figure 12.

John Singer Sargent to Miss Popert
41 Boulevard Berthier
Paris
18 January 1884

Interesting Mad One –

Your very long letter reached me many days ago. I have finished reading it and I am resting the seventh day. What especially pleased me was the intimation that I would one day have my little Diana. I shall receive her to my bosom.

I have nothing just now worthy of sending to Kofpp, but I shall try to do something nice for him and send it as soon as possible. Please remember me most kindly to him. Also to Capi and Car, whose names I have forgotten, and also to Mancinino and Pio.

I hope you now and then draw a little and are aware that sometimes things are beautiful in form and that you are moderate in the use of wine. Copious draughts of Alcartico and Cinzano, even if they result in a momentary appreciation of splendid and exuberant colour would always limit you to the fascinating but incomplete art which you revel in, so that if you a really want to draw, take fewer fiestas a day.

The most interesting thing in Paris now is Manet's exhibition. It is altogether delightful.

And now God bless you child. I send you a photo of myself from a sketch. It is town but the only one.

Yours Affectionately,
John S. Sargent¹²

¹² Mount, *John Singer Sargent*, 74-75.

Figure 13.

John Singer Sargent to Miss Popert
41 Boulevard Berthier
Paris
6 March 1884

My dear Friend,

You are very good about the [illegible] & I shall wait very patiently for what you will send.

I am working very hard at a portrait or two, and am soon going to England for awhile. This summer I shall spend several months there doing portraits in the country.

Mme Gautreau is the only thing I send to the Salon.

I got a letter from an Italian servant whom I kept here for several months, but was obliged to send away on account of his quarrels with the cook. He wants a recommendation to you on the strength of having put my letters to you in the post box and having remembered your name and address, but I refused to give it, and he is not really a good servant and had a tendency to get very drunk and fight the cook...So don't receive him if he has the audacity to present himself.

My ideal would be to have a good Italian servant as they are so amusing and steal so pleasantly, and I am very sorry that my experiment did not succeed. Perhaps you will help me to find the ideal when I come back to Rome.

When are you coming to Paris?

Yours Sincerely,
John S. Sargent.¹³

¹³ Ibid., 75.

Figure 14.

John Singer Sargent to Miss Popert.
31, Tite Street
Chelsea, S.W.
7 April 1908

Dear Miss Popert,

I have received your cannonade and I answer it for myself alone, as my sister is abroad in Ireland. I am sorry you have felt crushed at my not looking you up when I was in Rome, but if you knew what a profoundly unsociable old crank I have become in the last thirty years you could not take it as a personal matter. My hatred of my fellow creatures extends to the entire race, or to the entire white race and when I escape London to a foreign country, my principle object is to fly from the species. To call on a Caucasian abroad is a thing I never do. I am not proud of this, but neither am I of a bald head and other changes that you will notice if you do me the pleasure of coming to see me in London. I keep up appearance of politeness well in May.

If you will propose a day, you will be astonished at the cordiality of my welcome, especially if you will come to lunch.

Yours Truly,
John S. Sargent

P.S. Falchetti is no more a count than I am – merely a bore.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., 224.

Figure 15.

John Everett Millais to Charles Collins
Annat Lodge, Perth, N.B.
Sunday
Autumn 1855

Dear Charlie,

I have been to church once this morning, and my wife has gone there again, and now I will remember you and give you a regular stomach full of writing – Mr. Anderson the Minister have I find out is a poet, and I have just finished reading a short poem entitled ‘The Pleasures of Home’ – Very much in the same distinction as Coventry K. Patmore’s last book. This is in the **Goldsmith** style, and very good, but somehow poetry is such an intangible thing, that I really wonder a man is ever in a state of sufficient confidence about his work, as to give it out to the world with his name attached to it. It bears so little analysis that you cannot read over him, or

without them becoming obscure and sometimes absurd. Now in painting man cannot so easily make a fool of himself. I suppose Emma Brandling was one of the actors in the so tableaux you mentioned in your last, I have often thought that, - ie, how inferior these real pictures are to the work of a great master – and the reason is I think, because you feel the actors are alive, and with personality more, besides the disturbing influence of space around [illegible] the scene you are looking at. I saw that same thing Marrochetti told you of at Phillips, the introduction of the face itself into a hole cut in the canvas with the figure furnished with paint, and I *could not* be deceived for an instant. How should Marochetti be satisfied with a face awkwardly let into a hole with arm and figure distorted in their [illegible] the hair painted by Phillipse, and a horrible reality in the midst of a painting hallow of raw umber – Pooh! – How could anybody be pleased with the real face when its complexion looked as dark as the coat and the background, I admit there is some truth in what the Baron says, and that nature is too variable in itself to give more than a transient feeling of pleasure.

Aspect is the great secret. *The prospect of aspect*. I have never seen any beauty yet but what looked at times altogether without it. The *only* head you could paint to be considered beautiful by *everybody* would be the face of a little girl about eight years old, before humanity is subject to such change. With years, features become so much more decided, expressive, through the development of character they admit of more or less appreciation – hence the difference of opinion about beauty. A child represents beauty more in the abstract, and when a peculiar expression shows itself in the face, then comes the occasion of difference between people as to whether it increases or injures the beauty. Now this is evidently the game the Greeks played in Art, they avoided *all* expression, feeling that it was detrimental to

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beauty according to the capacity of understanding in the mass. I believe that perfect beauty and *tender* expression *alone* are compatible and there is undoubtedly the greatest achievement if successful. In that case hundreds would say '*but she looks so pained and unhappy*' but I think there would be less dissension than in any other treatment. That very lovely expression in little Alice's eyes which you know, would be the very point which thousands would object to. They would say 'there is such an odd miserable look about her, I don't like that for a child, etc.,etc.' You will think with all this that I have been offered the place of lecturer on painting at the RA. The fact is I have been going through a kind of cross examination within myself lately as to a manner of producing beauty, when I desire it to be the chief impression. I have nearly completed the picture I commenced when you left, without it being in the least less finished than work which has taken double the time. It looks to me sometimes very good, and at often very bad, so that I have lost the ability of judging.

I am not at all sorry to be away here from all Art, you will see I think that I do more, the new of it quite maddens me, and how much more would I have to insult my ears in London? Where everything comes to our knowledge. When a barbarous piece of injustice has been done, I have no (inserted 'like-thinking') friend to speak to about it, and so I escape the prolongation of the excitement of indignation, and first foam for an instant to a wife, who can firstly say 'it was not I that did it' and then the worst is over – After all the mean acts of the world don't matter in the end, I know this, but I don't get to think it so quickly as I do in retirement. We have been in the habit of kindly putting coals in each other's fires, which maybe is the only way of ridding ourselves of the coals in the cellar of our evil spirit, (I use an [illegible] phrase) or I copy them up from the [illegible] of our discontent, etc. etc.¹⁵

Now the light is going, and I feel tired of this discourse, besides here [illegible], so pray do write me news, but not of Art, carefully avoid mention of everything connected with it – anything but the production of a really good picture is most hateful.

[illegible] Park.¹⁶

¹⁵ Warner, "John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves*," 137-38.

¹⁶ Sir John Everett Millais to Charles Collins, Autumn 1855 [undated], Literary and Historical Manuscripts, The Bowerswell Papers, MA 1338 ZB.09, Morgan Library Archives, New York. Partial transcription taken from Warner, "John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves*," 137-38.

Figure 16.

John Singer Sargent to Sir John Everett Millais
Undated (Presumably 1886)

Dear Sir John,

It is very kind indeed of you to propose coming to my studio and I hope you will do so and give me your advice about a picture I am struggling with. I have felt very inclined to ask this favour of you but have hesitated – you must be so overrun with requests of this kind and I have no hit upon the right time to find you since our last meeting. If you could drop me a line the day before, saying when you would come I would be very glad as I sometimes work in another place. At any rate my housekeeper has orders to ask you into the studio, so that I might have the benefit of your criticism in case I should be unfortunately absent.

Yours very truly,
John S. Sargent.¹⁷

¹⁷ John Singer Sargent to Sir John Everett Millais, undated, Literary and Historical Manuscripts, MA 1485 K 675, Morgan Library Archives, New York.

Fig. 17.

John Everett Millais to F.G. Stephens
Winter 1856

Mr. Stephens,

I have read your review of my works in *The Crayon* with great pleasure, not because you praise them so much but because you entirely understand what I have intended. In the case of *Autumn Leaves*, I was nearly putting in the catalogue an extract from the Psalms, of the very same character as you have quoted in your criticism, but was prevented so doing from a fear that it would be considered an affectation and obscure. I have always felt insulted when people have regarded the picture as a simple little domestic episode, chosen for effect, and colour, as I intended the picture to awaken by its solemnity the deepest religious reflection. I chose the subject of burning leaves as most calculated to produce this feeling, and the picture was thought of, and begun with that object solely in view... I cannot say that I was disappointed that the public did not interpret my meaning in *Autumn Leaves* as I scarcely expected so much, and I was not sanguine of my friends either, as I know I am not the sort of man who is accused of very deep religious sentiment, or reflection. However as you certainly have read my thoughts in the matter, I do not hesitate to acknowledge as much.

J.E. Millais¹⁸

¹⁸ Warner, "John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves*," 127-128. I have been unable to locate this original letter to date.

Figure 18.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
Paris
25 June 1885

Dearest Mamma.

I have been quite unable to send you more than a postcard hitherto. This place is at the world's end, although the way to it is very pretty, and an immense amount of my time is consumed in getting to & fro the Hotel Louis le Grand where the Cargouets are, also a good deal of time is wasted by the talk of Mary's ex-governess & the other Dames of this school. John came to look me up in the evening of the day I arrived & took me a little walk before I dined with the Cargouets. I find him much aged. Yesterday morning he took me to the Salon & then I lunched with him. His work of this year is remarkably good; but unfortunately his principal picture is hung by the side of Whistler's Lady Archibald Campbell, which beats John into fits. I fear John is getting rather into the way of painting people too *tense*. They look as if they were in a state of *crispation de nerfs* (nervous twitch). He takes me to the Louvre today & tomorrow I lunch with him and Miss Burckhardt. Bourget declined John's invitation yesterday, saying he had too much to do; but he asked my address, not I fancy however, with much real intention of coming.

Tell Frankie that John says she must apply herself almost exclusively to drawing. He likes her colour very much, but he says that any master here would keep her to black and white, as modelling is her weak point. He says he would almost forbid her colouring at all at present. He says she must work very hard from life.

I have had nearly all my meals with the Cargouets hitherto, & know of this house only breakfast. It is a pretty situation with a big garden belonging to the Duc de Nemours behind.

I send a gratifying letter. Cotter Morrison is a man who has written about French things, but I don't know what. Mrs. Linton has written to say she will be out of town. I cross tomorrow night. I am really sorry to say goodbye to Pauline, I like her so much. She asks greatly about you. John will be here in a minute, so I must stop.

Give Frankie my love and message. Papa spoke of some Australian girls she might know. It might be well, don't you think?

So much love. Yr. V. ¹⁹

¹⁹ Vernon Lee to Mathilda Paget. 25 June 1885, Collection of Vernon Lee Materials, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.

Figure 19.

John Singer Sargent to Vernon Lee
9 July 1880

Dear Violet:

I shall send you a photograph of a little picture I perpetrated in Tangiers. It is very unsatisfactory because the only interest of the thing was the colour; but still it will give you a general idea of what your "twin" is about.

My compliments, most illustrious twin, for what you are achieving. If I had the opportunity I should so enjoy running down Florence and meeting you again & your circle.

You wished some Spanish songs. I could not find any good ones. The best are what one hears in Andalucia, the half African Malagueñas & Soleàs, dismal, restless chants that it is impossible to note. They are something between a Hungarian Czardas and the chant of the Italian peasant in the fields, and are generally composed of five strophes and end stormily *on the dominant* the theme quite lost in strange fiorituras and guttural roulades. The gitano voices are marvellously supple.

If you have heard something of the kind you will not consider this mere jargon...

Yours sincerely,

John S. Sargent.²⁰

²⁰ Ormond, "John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee", 163.

Figure. 20

Théophile Gautier
"Symphonie en Blanc Majeur" / "Symphony in White Major"
1881

De leur col blanc courbant les lignes,
On voit dans les contes du Nord,
Sur le vieux Rhin, des femmes-cygnés
Nager en chantant près du bord,

Ou, suspendant à quelque branche
Le plumage qui les revêt,
Faire luire leur peau plus blanche
Que la neige de leur duvet.

De ces femmes il en est une,
Qui chez nous descend quelquefois,
Blanche comme le clair de lune
Sur les glaciers dans les cieus froids;

Conviant la vue enivrée
De sa boréale fraîcheur
A des régals de chair nacrée,
A des débauches de blancheur !

Son sein, neige moulée en globe,
Contre les camélias blancs
Et le blanc satin de sa robe
Soutient des combats insolents.

Dans ces grandes batailles blanches,
Satins et fleurs ont le dessous,
Et, sans demander leurs revanches,
Jaunissent comme des jaloux.

Sur les blancheurs de son épaule,
Paros au grain éblouissant,
Comme dans une nuit du pôle,
Un givre invisible descend.

De quel mica de neige vierge,
De quelle moelle de roseau,
De quelle hostie et de quel cierge
A-t-on fait le blanc de sa peau ?
A-t-on pris la goutte lactée

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

Tachant l'azur du ciel d'hiver,
Le lis à la pulpe argentée,
La blanche écume de la mer;

Le marbre blanc, chair froide et pâle,
Où vivent les divinités;
L'argent mat, la laiteuse opale
Qu'irisent de vagues clartés;

Livoire, où ses mains ont des ailes,
Et, comme des papillons blancs,
Sur la pointe des notes frêles
Suspendent leurs baisers tremblants;

L'hermine vierge de souillure,
Qui pour abriter leurs frissons,
Ouate de sa blanche fourrure
Les épaules et les blasons;

Le vif-argent aux fleurs fantasques
Dont les vitraux sont ramagés;
Les blanches dentelles des vasques,
Pleurs de l'ondine en l'air figés;

L'aubépine de mai qui plie
Sous les blancs frimas de ses fleurs;
L'albâtre où la mélancolie
Aime à retrouver ses pâleurs;

Le duvet blanc de la colombe,
Neigeant sur les toits du manoir,
Et la stalactite qui tombe,
Larme blanche de l'antre noir?

Des Groenlands et des Norvèges
Vient-elle avec Séraphita ?
Est-ce la Madone des neiges,
Un sphinx blanc que l'hiver sculpta,

Sphinx enterré par l'avalanche,
Gardien des glaciers étoilés,
Et qui, sous sa poitrine blanche,
Cache de blancs secrets gelés?

Sous la glace où calme il repose,
Oh ! qui pourra fondre ce coeur!

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

Oh ! qui pourra mettre un ton rose
Dans cette implacable blancheur!²¹

In the Northern tales of eld,
From the Rhine's escarpments high
Swan-women radiant were beheld.
Singing and floating by,

Or, leaving their plumage bright
On a bough that was bending low,
Displaying skin more gleaming white
Than the white of their down of snow.

At times one comes our way, —
Of all she is pallidest.
White as the moonbeam's shivering ray
On a glacier's icy crest.

Her boreal bloom doth win
Our eyes to feasting rare
On rich delight of nacreous skin,
And a wealth of whiteness fair.

Her rounded breasts, pale globes
Of snow, wage insolent war
With her camellias and her robes
Of whiteness nebular.

In such white wars supreme
She wins, and weft and flower
Leave their revenge's right, and seem
Yellowed with envy's hour.

On the white of her shoulder bare.
Whose marble Paros lends,
As through the Polar twilight fair.
Invisible frost descends.

What beaming virgin snow.
What pith a reed within.

²¹ Théophile Gautier, *Emaux et camées* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1881): 33-34.

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

What Host, what taper, did bestow
The white of her matchless skin?

Was she made of a milky drop
On the blue of a winter heaven?
The lily-blow on the stem's green top?
The foam of the sea at even?

Of the marble still and cold,
Wherein the great gods dwell?
Of creamy opal gems that hold
Faint fires of mystic spell?

Or the organ's ivory keys?
Her winged fingers oft
Like butterflies flit over these,
With kisses pending soft.

Of the ermine's stainless fold.
Whose white, warm touches fall
On shivering shoulders and on bold,
Bright shields armorial?

Of the phantom flowers of frost
Enscrolled on the window clear?
Of the fountain drop in the chill air lost.
An Undine's frozen tear?

Of May bent low with the sweets
Of her bountiful white-thorn bloom?
Of alabaster that repeats
The pallor of grief and gloom?

Of the feathers of doves that slip
And snow on the gable steep?
Of slow stalactite's tear-white drip
In cavernous places deep?

Came she from Greenland floes
With Seraphita forth?
Is she Madonna of the Snows?
A sphinx of the icy North,

Sphinx buried by avalanche,
The glacier's guardian ghost.
Whose frozen secrets hide and blanch

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

In her white heart innermost?

What magic of what far name

Shall this pale soul ignite?

Ah ! who shall flush with rose's flame

This cold, implacable white?²²

²² Théophile Gautier, "Symphony in White Major," in *The Works of Théophile Gautier*, trans. by F.C. de Sumichrast (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1906), 24:60-63.

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

Figure 21.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
20 Earl's Terrace, Kensington W.
8 June 1884

Dearest Mamma.

At least I am here. Mrs. Barstow, the Lewis Campbells, & Miss Sellar got here yesterday about 7, after a tolerable passage. I had unfortunately told Mary to meet me at Victoria, & then discovered that the train went to Charing X. Also I lost my luggage ticket; but then said "If you don't mind people thinking you may have stolen someone else's luggage, we don't mind whether you have or not." The luggage was examined left dynamite should be secreted; fancy if they had suspected dynamite in my little Salonique cigarette box!

Mary is looking quite as usual, &, indeed, stronger, although she has an awful cold. Everyone is very friendly.

The two days in Paris were a great success. I spent about 5 hours altogether at the Louvre, and we went all of us to see Sarah Bernhardt at the *Porte St Martin* as Lady Macbeth. She didn't at all suit the part: fancy a sort of caline Lady Macbeth of nineteen, perpetually throwing her arms round Macbeth's neck! But she looked most lovely. I thought the play singularly dull & unimpressive.

Fancy the dropscene curtain being covered with advertisements, & feasting one's eyes, immediately after Duncan's murder & Banquo's apparition upon red & blue announcements 'ne voyager pas sans Guide Conti'. 'Corsets à ressorts' 'Résultat obtenu: chevelure d'un mètre 75 centimetres' "Nouveautés en chapeaux de soirée, etc."

Mrs. Barstow and I lunched at John's house. Had we announced ourselves the previous day we should have had the honour of lunching with Paul Bourget and Oscar Wilde & his bride, of whom Bourget says "j'aime cette femme – j'aime la femme annulée et tender." John was very nice. His picture of Mme Gotreau is a solemn fiasco in the eyes of the world; you see it surrounded by shoals of astonished & jibing women. When it was first seen, the outcry was such that Mme Gotreau went into *crises* and her Mother rushed to John & said, "Vous avez perdu ma fille!" – still he is prouder of it than the Jaléo & I think it is, though bizarre and even unpleasant, a very grand work. He is tending entirely towards a return to 15th century ideals.

John has taken a studio close by here & is coming over on the 10th.

Appendix B: Letters and Documents

I found a very civil letter from Blackwood here, & this one from Pater. I shall go to Oxford on the 18th.

It was bitterly cold and raining in Paris; here it is warm & muggy.

I am rather tired; but will write in a day or two. I shall try & get to Mrs. Clifford this afternoon.

Goodbye and so much love.

Remember me to Mr. Benn (Alfred Benn)

Yr. V.²³

²³ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 142-43.

Figure 22.

Vernon Lee to Mathilda Lee-Hamilton
Amiens
Saty. Evening,
5 September 1885

Dearest Mamma.

I got your kind little card last night. I think it is very good & considerate of you & Eugene to wish me to have a sufficiently long stay at Venice. I feel myself it is an opportunity not to be deflected. But I must look round me there before I can tell how long I think I should wish to stay. It is very good of you to propose going to Florence; I need scarcely say it would spare me much fatigue & expense, though I should not mind going to the Baths.

Your portrait will cost, I fear, an awful lot. It is, in its frame, immensely bulky & heavy. I had to have a case made for it, which cost 17/-, and the man said it weighed about 200lbs. It's the frame that weighs such a lot. I have sent it by slow train, in hopes of somewhat diminishing the expense.

I have got the mincing machine, & am bringing it in one of my hats.

Mrs. Robinson & Mabel came in yesterday from Epsom to bid me goodbye & to bring me some pears from their garden. They have certainly been very kind.

I left this morning at 11. Mr. R. was at Victoria to see me off. I was very sorry to say goodbye to dear little Mary. Sometimes it comes home to me how terribly precarious her health is. Mrs. Alfred Austin rather frightened me with stories of the sudden results of condition of anaemia like Mary's. You will write to her, won't you, & tell her you want her to come to Florence in the Spring.

John also is much improved tho' aged. He tells me that his picture of Mme Gauthereau has had much the same affect in checking his success that Miss B. has had with me. And I think this had made him much more serious. I like him greatly.

Yesterday I lunched at his studio with Miss Burckhardt, the girl he was supposed to be engaged to. She is very charming, not absolutely pretty, but with something of the eyes & voice of Mme Meyer.

So much love,
Yrs. V.²⁴

²⁴ Willis, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, 199.

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