

CONSTRUCTING VICTORIAN GIRLHOOD: TENSIONS, PRECEDENTS, AND
SUBVERSION IN IMAGES OF LITTLE GIRLS

By

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The unwavering gaze of the young girl catches the viewer's eye, refusing to relinquish it. Her posture and stare communicate strength unusual for her years. The reed in her left hand and the crown of berries on her auburn hair denote her rule, as does the brilliant fleur-de-lis cloth in the background and the rich saffron brocade of her dress. At first glance she appears to be a Renaissance saint, but she holds a bouquet of berries instead of a martyr's palm and her dress is not in the Cinquecento style. Who is this girl, and why is she important? Why does her figure merit pride of place in the painting, elevated, centered, brought forward so that she gazes down benevolently on the viewer?

The girl in *My Crown and Scepter*, 1891, (Figure 1) is the spirit of innocence, the fleeting image of childhood that nineteenth-century artists sought so diligently and hopefully as the world around them became more confusing and corrupting.¹ The sitter is Phyllis Gotch, daughter of Thomas Cooper Gotch, who painted this portrait on a whim to entertain his daughter, aged eight.² Gotch's representation of the female child as the abstraction of youth is an example of the Victorian preoccupation with girlhood and the adult constructions that invested it with both tension and power. By the late nineteenth century, questions about women's rights and the possibility of the "New Woman" meant that the untroubled traditional female nude was less often the ideal vehicle it had once been for artistic license. Women were changing with the times, and artists and writers turned instead to little girls, whose bodies offered both a blank slate on which they could comment on

¹ Pamela Lomax, *The Golden Dream: A Biography of Thomas Cooper Gotch* (Bristol: Sansom and Company, 2004), 99.

² *Ibid.*, 99.

the world around them, and a reassuringly innocent reminder of the seemingly less confusing past. For artists, little girls became illusions of nostalgic eighteenth-century innocence, purity, and pre-industrial simplicity during a time of vast social and technological changes.

Recent scholars, such as James R. Kincaid and James Christen Steward, link the Victorian interest in childhood within literature and art to adults' need to escape the fear of industrialization, urbanization, and other changes that were rapidly taking place after the 1770s.³ In his book *Child Loving*, Kincaid places particular emphasis on the constructed aspect of childhood—the manner in which adults manufacture the idea of childhood. His theory of adult construction is useful because he reminds the reader that Victorians did not see images in the same way that we do today.⁴ Paintings or photographs of little girls that appear erotic to us in the twenty-first century were not necessarily considered so in the nineteenth. Most importantly, Kincaid reinforces the fact that, instead of empowering children, the focus on childhood shares characteristics with the white, patriarchal control of women and Africans—"others."⁵ Adults, instead of looking at childhood as it really was, molded it into a cultural phenomenon that required strict adherence. This manifested itself in sexualized Victorian images of upper-class girlhood at a time when the majority of children in Great Britain were working-class and suffering

³ James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood 1730-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 211.

⁴ James R. Kincaid, *Child Loving*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

horrible working conditions.⁶ Kincaid reminds us that children—both in the nineteenth century and now—are forced into predetermined roles.⁷

Though I believe that Kincaid's writing on the construction of childhood is informative from an historical point of view, it is only a starting point. Kincaid does not address specific images of childhood in Victorian art, the similarities between children's literature and art in this period, or the overwhelming Victorian emphasis on girlhood. Such exclusions leave art historians asking questions. Why do so many nineteenth-century photographs and paintings feature little girls? Is there any precedent for this trend? Why do depictions of little girls combine eroticism and innocence in the same image? If girlhood is a construction, as Kincaid says, exactly how did Victorian men and women construct little girls, and what were their goals? Are there subversive elements or comments on societal norms?

To answer these questions, I will first provide some historical background on the social and political changes that were taking place in the late nineteenth century so that the reader will understand why girlhood became an important theme. I will briefly address the work of Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds, as their work was particularly influential and served as a precedent in the next century. I will then look at the work of Sir John Everett Millais—one of the most famous painters of the nineteenth century—who made a successful career out of painting little girls. I will also look at the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron. Photography was a nineteenth-century invention that had significant implications for painting, and I believe it is important to consider images made by males and

⁶ Kincaid, *Child Loving*, 75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

females of both media. To bring an interdisciplinary direction to my research, I will also be exploring the Victorian interest in children's literature, particularly Lewis Carroll's 1865 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its importance. Finally, I will examine the paintings of Thomas Cooper Gotch—a painter whom I believe to be the last artist of girlhood in the Victorian period. This paper will focus specifically on artistic and literary works between 1860 and 1900—a time when images of girlhood were becoming more prevalent and children's literature was undergoing important changes. I will argue that artists and photographers created works based on eighteenth-century precedents that could comment on nineteenth-century problems. They echoed the dialectical tensions experienced in Victorian society and some of them inserted subversive criticism into their work. The female child is important because she was the perfect vehicle through which to explore the tensions and changes of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Unlike the new feminist ideas surrounding the bodies of adult women, girlhood remained a tabula rasa awaiting glorification, sentimentality, or eroticization. Representations of little girls offered both an escape for adults overwhelmed by contemporary social, economic, and political changes, and a means of communication or control for artists who wanted to make a statement about society's effect on girlhood.

During Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), children under age fourteen comprised roughly one-third of the population of Great Britain.⁸ Life expectancy began to rise steadily with improvements in medicine and sanitation. With more children surviving infancy, childhood planning and entertainment became more

⁸ Susan P. Casteras, *Victorian Childhood: Paintings from the Forbes Magazine Collection* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 4.

important. Toys, children's literature, and parenting manuals were widely available and affordable. Juvenile clothing became much less restrictive, and girls were no longer expected to wear corsets before adolescence.⁹ Both boys and girls were encouraged to engage in healthy physical activities. Companies published books such as Herbert Spencer's *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (1854-59) for parents.¹⁰ However, the aforementioned progress only affected middle- and upper-class children. For the majority of families, the nineteenth century was far from a Golden Age because it was full of disease, abusive work, and poor living conditions.¹¹ With children making up so much of the nation, government officials became concerned with the poor education system and its possible degenerative repercussions for the future of the country. Great Britain controlled a vast colonial empire, one that required strong leaders. If the next generation was going to prolong England's imperial control, children required better education.

The British government passed the Education Act in 1870, which created school boards to build and maintain secular schools in areas where they were needed, divided the country into school districts, and made primary education more accessible for middle-class children.¹² Another act in 1880 attempted to enforce

⁹ James Laver, *Children's Fashions in the Nineteenth Century* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1951), 2.

¹⁰ Lynne Meryl Rosenthal, "The Child Informed: Attitudes Towards the Socialization of the Child in Nineteenth-Century English Children's Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1974), 194.

¹¹ Thomas E. Jordan, *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), xi, 13, 35-37, 65.

¹² Donald Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914* (New York: Longman Publishing 1994), 92-98.

compulsory attendance between ages five and ten, extended to age twelve in 1893.¹³ Child labor laws were making it possible for working-class children to attend, as well. At the same time, literacy was growing and publishers were more frequently marketing to youth. By the end of the century, adults were studying childhood more closely. Horace Scudder, author of *Childhood in Literature and Art, with Some Observations on Literature for Children, a Study* (1894), offers a nineteenth-century view of literary and artistic trends. He claims that childhood, “discovered at the close of the last century,” permeated Victorian literature and art.¹⁴ He mentions the influence of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough on the works of Sir John Everett Millais and Kate Greenaway, who created a “paradise of children,” as well as William Wordsworth’s emphasis on childhood as a distinct stage of life.¹⁵ Though Scudder does mention Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he views him as a sentimentalist with a primitive idea of childhood.¹⁶ Scudder’s writing provides valuable insight into the Victorian mindset, and he shows twenty-first century readers which artists and authors were seen as most closely linked to ideas about childhood in the nineteenth century.

This growing interest in childhood is evident in the art and literature of the period. Slowly, authors created young female literary characters that moved from being mere domesticated and submissive automatons to multi-faceted individuals who reflected the tensions experienced by real little girls. The tension most clearly

¹³ Jordan, 321-331.

¹⁴ Horace Elisha Scudder, *Childhood in Literature and Art, with Some Observations on Literature for Children* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1894), 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 149.

¹⁶ Ibid., 180.

manifested was the pull of the old angel-in-the-house ideal versus the modern “New Woman.” “The angel in the house” comes from Coventry Patmore’s 1863 collection of poems of the same title. The book contains such poems as “Love and Duty,” in which a man falls in love with a woman because she lives a pure life and is so “radiantly good.”¹⁷ The poem, “A Distinction,” is written in the voice of a man who loves his wife because she has no pride and is always trying to please him.¹⁸ The rest of the book follows in a similar vein—expounding upon the qualities of a good wife in patriarchal terms that emphasize purity and service.

The New Woman, however, was self-sufficient, had independent thoughts, could find a niche outside of limited domestic roles, and could acquire a college education. The term “New Woman” was first used in 1894 to represent a modern generation of females who wanted patriarchal ideas about femininity (and its inherent restrictions) to change.¹⁹ Periodicals such as Henrietta Muller’s *Women’s Penny Paper* (1888-90) and *Woman’s Herald* (1891-99) used the journal to address what Muller called “New Womanhood” and females’ place in public life.²⁰ Periodicals for girls and young women described new social, economic, and political roles for their readers, as well as the more traditional domestic roles.

Children’s books and magazines inundated young women with educational and career-centered goals. The *Girl’s Own Paper*, published 1880-1908, and then

¹⁷ Coventry Patmore, “Love and Duty,” in *The Angel in the House* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011), 14.

¹⁸ Coventry Patmore, “A Distinction,” in *The Angel in the House* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2011), 14.

¹⁹ John E. Mackenzie, *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain* (London: V&A Publications, 2001), 104.

²⁰ Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 121.

under the title of the *Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine*, 1908-1927, was one of the most-circulated magazines of the period. It was a penny weekly that had a readership of around 250,000 in the 1880s and a middle- and upper-class female audience of teenagers and twenty-year old readers.²¹ The periodical regularly offered a combination of fiction, poems, recipes, patterns, and fashion forecasts. It provided the necessities for a domesticated girl, as well as articles for working and educated young women.²² In one letter to the editor, reader and kitchen maid Jane Cooper said, ". . . I don't know that I ever read anything I liked so much as The Girl's Own Paper, for there's a bit of all sorts in it. . ." ²³ The periodical's editor, Charles Peters, promoted elevating young women with education and printed information on school and career opportunities for his female readers.²⁴ Much of the content, however, continued to emphasize a male's idea of the perfect female. Girls were now expected to maintain a sort of double identity. They could be intellectual but ladylike, good mothers or women with vocational opportunities outside the home, reliant on the patriarchal power of men while harboring the budding promise of independence. These tensions permeated Victorian society.

Concerns about female sexuality were also reflected in government rulings. Female activists and social groups were worried about prostitution, the spread of disease, and the young ages of girls on the street. The Contagious Diseases Act of

²¹ Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), 134.

²² Kirsten Drotner, *More Next Week!: English Children and their Magazines, 1751-1945* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1985), 141-2.

²³ Jane Cooper, "A Letter from a Kitchen," *The Girl's Own Paper* 53 (Saturday, January 1, 1881), 215.

²⁴ Drotner, 179.

1864, which allowed prostitutes to be arrested and checked for venereal disease, was a symptom of these fears.²⁵ Josephine Butler was an early feminist who opposed the Contagious Diseases Act and also campaigned for a higher age of consent, and it was raised from twelve to thirteen in 1875.²⁶ William Stead, an investigative journalist and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, succeeded in getting it raised again to sixteen in 1885.²⁷ As a result, the legal period of girlhood was lengthened. Ideas about childhood—and girlhood, in particular—were changing rapidly with laws concerning the age of consent enforced to protect them. Childhood innocence was starting to be seen as something to safeguard. Artists responded to this interest in girlhood sexuality/freedom versus innocence/tradition in two ways: by exposing cultural disquiet through sexualized images of little girls and by looking back to depictions of purity and innocence in the eighteenth century. They began to look to a much “simpler” past—one defined by the art of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough.

Adult conceptions of childhood simplicity—whether in the eighteenth century or today—are rarely straightforward reflections of reality. Literary critic James Kincaid offers valuable insight into the way society inevitably manufactures false ideas about children:

When we invented the modern child, we made it live in another country, a country we then decided to make exotic and heartbreakingly attractive, so attractive we did not know how to deal with it—except by invading it,

²⁵ Judith R. Wolkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 71-73.

²⁶ Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 14, 16, 37.

²⁷ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 65.

eroticizing it, protecting it with heavy arms ...—done everything but leaving it alone.²⁸

Kincaid's assertion addresses two important points central to Victorian views of childhood. It relates to the constructed nature of childhood, which effectively separated children from the adult world, and the question of how to deal with this idea of childhood they created. Rather than reflecting the real lives of children, notions of childhood varied according to the adults who constructed them in literature and the visual arts. By "attractive," Kincaid refers to the innocence that so often permeated images of children, and then notes that innocence is often combined with some form of "invasion,"—usually either sexuality or "protection," often characterized by sentimentality. Images of childhood were devices created to comfort, inspire, or excite adults. It is a construction produced by and for adults' wishful thinking, and it became an even more complex assemblage as Great Britain continued to feel the discomfiting and displacing effects of progress. Victorians turned to childhood in an effort to escape the disconcerting pressures of adult life.

Childhood was not always seen as a source of comfort for adults. Before the late 1600s and early 1700s, it was not viewed as a particularly special period of life. The idea of childhood gradually changed in response to Enlightenment literary ideals in the eighteenth century. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau is usually credited as the first writer to emphasize childhood as distinct from adulthood and worthy of special guidelines.²⁹ In his 1762 book, *Emile, or, Treatise*

²⁸ James R. Kincaid, "Dickens and the Construction of the Child," in *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, ed. Wendy S. Jackson (New York: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2000), 30.

²⁹ L. Rosenthal, 32.

on *Education*, he further suggested that properly raised children could bring much-needed social and political change to a country ruined by corrupt society.³⁰ He stressed the natural innocence of children and their distinctive, un-adult qualities. While Rousseau's French readers were either incensed or intrigued by the author's unusual ideas, his British readers, according to historian Lynne Rosenthal, ultimately "failed to grasp fully the central significance of *Emile*," which was translated into English in 1762.³¹ I would argue that, rather than rejecting Rousseau altogether, British readers took certain ideas—innocence, nature, and childhood—and absorbed them so thoroughly that any attribution to Rousseau was submerged.

Unlike the French, Britons did not necessarily connect Rousseau's ideas to freedom or political change. Edmund Burke, an Irishman who had studied Rousseau for years and spoke with him when the Frenchman visited London in 1766-67, called his philosophy "a selfish, flattering, seductive, ostentatious vice."³² This attitude was most likely linked to the British connection of Rousseau with radicalism and the French Revolution, which made many Britons wary of the French philosopher. Burke was widely read, and the damage had been done. The *Quarterly Review* of April 1814 took a similar anti-revolutionary view when it published an excerpt from Charles Lacretelle's *Histoire de France* (1808-26) in which the author argued that Rousseau "transgressed all [justice, benevolence, and probity]," losing sight of reality through his pride and "inflaming the passions, and ... blotting out the

³⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 209.

³¹ L. Rosenthal, 59.

³² Edmund Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 169.

line which separates virtue from vice.”³³ “The line which separates virtue from vice” suggests that, even though Rousseau may have had some positive ideas, his methods of relating them led to political upheaval and inevitably canceled any good he might have done. Lacretelle, writing after the French Revolution, had the bias of recent hindsight and the persuasion of popular opinion following the bloody tragedies of the Reign of Terror and the beheading of the French king and queen. Others were able to see Rousseau’s theories more objectively. Some, like Sir James Mackintosh in his *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791), disagreed with Burke and said that Rousseau was not to blame for France’s political problems.³⁴ Despite Mackintosh’s exoneration of Rousseau, popular opinion and the corroboration of other popular writers only reinforced Burke’s negative view of Rousseau. For example, in *The Friend* (1809-10), Samuel Coleridge labeled Rousseau “the dreamer of lovesick tales, the weaver of speculative cobwebs . . . the victim of morbid vanity ... ”³⁵ By calling Rousseau a “dreamer of lovesick tales,” Coleridge links the philosopher to the French trend of *sensibilité*, an eighteenth-century aesthetic and literary fashion that encouraged feelings of sensitivity and overwhelming emotion. It is likely that many British men would have found this too effeminate.

Negative opinions about Rousseau continued into the Victorian period. Mid-nineteenth-century writers such as Sir Walter Scott reinforced it, despite praise from William Hazlitt, Lord Byron, and John Ruskin.³⁶ As a result, Victorians

³³ Charles Lacretelle, “Histoire De France, Pendant Le Dix-Huitieme Siecle,” *The Quarterly Review* 11, no. 21 (April, 1814): 175.

³⁴ Lacretelle, 172.

³⁵ Gosse, 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 180-183, 189.

amended Rousseau's ideas about children as innocent and natural.³⁷ The main difference between the Rousseauian and Victorian child was that the former was used to educate his elders, while the latter was exploited through eroticization.³⁸ Victorian images of girlhood in painting and photography became an amalgamation of how life supposedly used to be, along with sexual references reflecting the tension of nineteenth-century girlhood. John Everett Millais's *Cherry Ripe*, 1879 (Figure 11), for example, combined the innocence of Reynolds's *Penelope Boothby*, 1788 (Figure 12) and sexual connotations. But before they could reach a point where this combination was possible, artists first had to begin painting children with distinct childlike qualities.

Before the writings of Rousseau, children were rarely depicted as we think of them today—with lifelike proportions, energetic bodies, or childish emotions. Children in pre-seventeenth-century paintings were usually upper-class sitters representing a dynastic line or unknown models in religious, moral, or allegorical images. Works such as Reynolds's *Cupid as a Link Boy*, c. 1733 (Figure 6) would have been unlikely before the beggars of artists such as Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Jusepe de Ribera, and Frans Hals in the 1600s. The idea of painting an unknown, homeless street urchin for visual pleasure and wit seems to echo a shift in the way childhood was viewed. What changed? Historians such as Philippe Ariès propose a radical change in the way society thought of children and childhood. In his hugely influential book *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès claimed that “until the twelfth century

³⁷ L. Rosenthal, 60-61.

³⁸ Laura C. Berry, *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 16.

[art] did not know childhood or did not attempt to portray it.”³⁹ That is, children were rarely depicted alone or in child-like situations, which gave them the look of miniature adults. Later art historians such as Linda Pollock and Erika Langmuir have argued that “Representing children schematically . . . does not signify perceiving them in this way.”⁴⁰ While I agree that parents did not necessarily see their offspring as less important or less childlike because of the way they were depicted in art, there is a visible change in the importance of the child in seventeenth-century art. Before that time, artists tended to focus on adult qualities, rather than childlike curiosity, play, or emotions.⁴¹ An example is Hans Holbein the Younger’s portrait of *Edward VI as a Child*, c. 1538 (Figure 2). The child portrait is the fourth type of child depiction Philippe Ariès notes in his book (after the angel, the infant Jesus, and the naked child).⁴² In Holbein’s painting, Prince Edward is dressed in the adult fashion and is making a gesture of magnanimousness with one hand while holding a rattle in the other. Though he is located in the center of the canvas, his face not animated as a child’s would be, and his pose is too adult-like. Holbein gave the painting to Henry VIII as a gift, and it appropriately met expectations of royal portraits at the time. Because of his important position as future king of England, Holbein painted Edward with more physical control than he would have had at age one.

³⁹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 33.

⁴⁰ Erika Langmuir, *Imagining Childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴² Ariès, 34-38.

Looking through fifteenth- and sixteenth-century images, I notice that most children are depicted as the infant Christ, a young Saint John the Baptist, royal children, or putti. With the popularization of secular subjects in painting in the 1600s, the types of children depicted become more diverse. Girls begin to appear more frequently in family portraits around the seventeenth century. Consider Anthony van Dyck's painting of the *Children of Charles I*, 1635 (Figure 3)—painted for an English audience—in which the oldest son and daughter receive similar visual emphasis in the composition. Informal poses became more popular, making children look less like adults.⁴³ Gainsborough's paintings of his daughters in the eighteenth century and Thomas Lawrence's image of *The Calmady Children*, 1823 (Figure 4), depict non-royal little girls with believable proportions, unique features, and active bodies. Faces became less idealized as artists chose to emphasize real personalities and emotions. Hierarchies of genre also became less formal and started to merge together in the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Paintings of children developed into a mix of genre and portraiture, grand manner history painting and the everyday experience. Little girls were popular subjects because they presented the possibility of combining feminine virtue and innocence with sentimentality, ideal beauty, and lessons of morality. Examples of this may be seen in Sir Joshua Reynolds's fancy pictures and Thomas Gainsborough's Cottage Door images.

The mixing of genres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a result of changing cultural norms. Children were seen as important subjects, and therefore required more emphasis. Accordingly, even non-royal child sitters were

⁴³ Steward, 98.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

more often depicted on larger canvas, at full-scale, and without accompanying adult sitters. They also moved closer to the picture plane and took up more of the foreground, making the child more important than an idealized landscape in the background.⁴⁵

Gainsborough's portraits of his daughters are an example of this new child-centric portraiture. He often depicted his children, Margaret and Mary, in playful and informal activities. In *The Painter's Daughters with a Cat*, 1760-61 (Figure 5), Gainsborough centered his daughters in the foreground of the double portrait. Margaret, left (age nine or ten), and Mary (age ten or eleven) are caught in a tender sisterly caress, the older girl sheltering the younger as Margaret leans against Mary's shoulder.⁴⁶ This is an unfinished, uncommissioned portrait, possibly painted for technical practice, so the artist had no obligation to complete it. The faces of the girls are the most fully realized and volumetric areas of the painting, revealing personalities and emotion. Their slight pink coloring and windswept hair inserts a feeling of life into the piece, just as their soft gazes seem to communicate with the viewer. This painting exemplifies several elements that Victorian artists would pursue in the next century. These include depictions of sibling interaction, increased naturalism and emotion resulting from the study of living models, the connection of distinct personalities to each sitter, and the painting of contemporary girls separate from the context of marriage and motherhood. Despite his obvious skill in depicting his young daughters, Thomas Gainsborough was better known in

⁴⁵ Mirjam Neumeister, ed., *The Changing Face of Childhood: British Children's Portraits and their Influence in Europe* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2007), 21.

⁴⁶ Michael Rosenthal and Martin Myrone, eds., *Thomas Gainsborough 1727-1788* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 184.

the nineteenth century for portraits of upper-class adults and his Romantic Cottage Door series of poor children (also imitated by Victorian artists). This eighteenth-century preference for elite portraiture and sentimental images of the lower classes continued into the nineteenth century. Gainsborough's counterpart and rival, Sir Joshua Reynolds, however, was the most emulated eighteenth-century master of child portraits.

Academic Victorian artists after circa 1850 saw the eighteenth century as the height of great British art, one that deserved to be emulated in the hopes of returning to less confusing times. The French Revolution (1789-99), Napoleonic Wars (c. 1803-15), rapid Industrial Revolution (c. 1750-1850), various power shifts in France, Russia, Prussia, Spain, and Japan, and the coronation of the first female British monarch since Queen Elizabeth I (Victoria crowned 1837) left many people shaken and uncertain about the future of Great Britain. The English old masters of the previous century offered a patriotic direction that Victorians could emulate while their country was constantly shifting. Reynolds was the most popular portraitist in eighteenth-century England, and he introduced a range of new ideas to British portraiture through his role as the first Royal Academy President and author of the influential *Discourses on Art* (1769-90). By combining portraiture with the abstract ideals of history painting, he was able to raise the status of portrait painting. He combined the old precedent of physical idealization with a contemporary interest in portraying children. Perhaps his most significant impact on later Victorian paintings of children resulted from his innovative fancy pictures and their highly successful formula that Reynolds perfected in the 1750s: young

girls as symbols of virtue.⁴⁷ Victorian artists attempted to regain the romanticized past by turning to Reynolds' eighteenth-century precedents, but they were unable to let go completely of nineteenth-century anxieties. As a result, they combined the social instability of Victorian England—represented by girlhood—with the fancy pictures of the 1700s. Observing Reynolds's eighteenth-century fancy pictures allowed artists to comment on the societal destruction of innocence through sexual exploitation.

Definitions of a fancy picture differ because the genre contains several variations in models (identifiable or not), reasons for painting (commissioned or not), and types of narrative. I would describe a fancy picture as an image that seems to include another level of meaning past mere likeness, is sometimes commissioned, and frequently uses an identifiable sitter as the metaphor. Fancy pictures are often based on older images and are usually sentimental. They generally have a narrative that is more important than the identity of the sitter because the painter aims to express a certain idea or feeling—innocence, for example. Philip Mercier popularized the combination of genre and narrative invention in the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ His paintings often depict identifiable sitters doing everyday things like playing music, drinking, or sewing. The critic George Vertue coined the term “fancy picture” in 1737 in reference to Mercier's paintings, and Reynolds used it in his *Fourteenth Discourse* to describe Gainsborough's combination of genre and

⁴⁷ Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79.

⁴⁸ Barbara Anderman, ed., *British Paintings of the Sixteenth Through Nineteenth Centuries* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 168.

character study.⁴⁹ It often includes historical or unusual elements of dress, abstract allegorical themes, or a link to a particular story or image of an historical figure. These paintings are usually close-cropped representations of one or two figures situated close to the picture plane.

One of Reynolds's most famous fancy pictures is his 1774 *Cupid as a Link Boy*, c. 1773 (Figure 6), featuring a young boy who looks about nine or ten. He is located in the center of the composition, and his body dominates the majority of the canvas. Dark wings identify the boy as cupid, and he holds a lit torch to represent his job as a link boy. Link boys were eighteenth-century street urchins who earned money by leading people home after dark with the use of lit links, or torches, before the invention of gas lighting.⁵⁰ The painting was intended as a pendant for Reynolds's c. 1773 *Mercury as a Cut Purse* (Figure 7), which features a boy of similar age and social status, holding a purse he has stolen in the streets.⁵¹ Both paintings contain sexual overtones. *Mercury's* stolen purse is positioned near the genital area, as is *Cupid's* torch. Since they were intended as pendants, it is possible that *Cupid* represents sexual excitement through his upright torch and *Mercury* the following flaccidity indicated by his limp purse.⁵²

A Strawberry Girl, 1773 (Figure 8), is similar to *Cupid* and *Mercury* in that the figure is located in the center of the composition in front of a generic background, and she is young, poor, and solemn. The sitter is contemporary girl—Reynolds's

⁴⁹ Milo M. Naeve, *John Lewis Krimmel: An Artist in Federal America* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 31.

⁵⁰ Postle, 95.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

niece Theophila Palmer, of whom Reynolds painted a portrait in 1767 and who lived with the artist in London.⁵³ Like link boys, strawberry girls were poor children who sold fruit to passersby.⁵⁴ Though the image is not as sexually overt as *Cupid*, the girl holds her strawberries in the folds of an apron centered over her womb, possibly representing the sale of sexual goods that were sometimes equated with ripe fruit.

How are Reynolds's images a precedent for nineteenth-century images? His fancy pictures share several elements with Victorian fancy pictures. Models in both centuries combine a portrait of a contemporary child with a literary, historical, or symbolic figure. Reynolds's *Cupid*, for example, conflates a street urchin with a mythological character just as Gotch's *My Crown and Scepter* combines a depiction of the artist's daughter with the symbolic persona of a ruling female. Both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fancy pictures tend to borrow from historical artistic sources. Reynolds's *Master Crewe as Henry VIII*, 1775-1776 (Figure 9), takes Hans Holbein the Younger's *Henry VIII*, 1540 (Figure 10), and presents a young boy in a similar pose and outfit, much as Sir John Everett Millais's 1879 *Cherry Ripe* (Figure 11) emulates Reynolds's 1788 *Penelope Boothby* (Figure 12). Artists in both centuries incorporate sexual innuendos into fancy pictures, though it becomes much more typical in Victorian images of little girls.

Reynolds combined traditional idealization of the figure with commercial intuition, and he exemplified the iconic British male artist—one who could raise the

⁵³ Postle, 82.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

status of British art and be socially and commercially successful.⁵⁵ Nineteenth-century artists emulated Reynolds, hoping to have careers like the eighteenth-century British master's. Millais is one Victorian artist who achieved this goal. He would be called the “first painter of his country,” due to his emulation of Reynolds's fancy pictures.

Millais was at first hesitant to continue the work that Reynolds had started and was skeptical of the nineteenth-century interest in girlhood:

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... change... A child represents beauty in the abstract.⁵⁶

This observation by Millais reflects the overwhelming Victorian trend of a particular type of image featuring little girls. Millais is being somewhat cynical—he wrote this after several failures at the Royal Academy, and the context of his words gives the reader an idea of his distress. Rather than representing an embrace of what he sees as the pervasive aesthetic of the nineteenth century, Millais is offering a sarcastic interpretation of popular art. He criticizes the limited view of what is acceptable in painting, denoting the Victorians' intense interest in pictures of little girls of a certain type. He implies that an artist may be criticized for wavering even a little and painting a girl who is not exactly the right age (or look or class). Salon reviewers harshly criticized *Autumn Leaves*, 1856 (Figure 13), in particular, even though it depicted four young girls. The *Art Journal* called it “devoid of all beauty,”

⁵⁵ Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian Artist: Artists' Lifewritings in Britain, c. 1870-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75.

⁵⁶ Christine Riding, *John Everett Millais* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 34.

due to its Pre-Raphaelite style models.⁵⁷ Pre-Raphaelite paintings are characterized by literary references, a thorough attention to detail, the use of bright whites, and the suppression of idealization in favor of truth to nature. Critics, accustomed to seeing perfected feminine features, thought Millais were more of a rigid anatomist than an artist, recording exactly what he saw.⁵⁸ The female figures in *Spring (Apple Blossoms)*, 1859 (Figure 14), were similarly criticized. The above quotation marks an important change in Millais's career. This is about the time that he decided to give his public what it wanted. Though he abandoned his former Pre-Raphaelite style, he inserted subtle criticisms of popular culture into his now apparently academically acceptable paintings.

To those readers better acquainted with Millais's early career in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, portraiture and strong critical success are two words unlikely to come to mind. Prior to changes beginning in the 1860s, Millais was a typical Pre-Raphaelite artist who vociferously contested the uninspiring path of contemporary British art and the (to his young mind) limited vision of painters such as Reynolds and Gainsborough. He regularly complained that, "Nobody seems to understand good work," even going so far as to believe there was a plot against his art at the Royal Academy.⁵⁹ By the mid-1860s, however, Millais saw the modern interest in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings offering a nostalgic escape, and he re-tooled his work to fit popular demand. Departing sharply from his

⁵⁷ Susan P. Casteras, "Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55 (Winter, 1992): 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ Riding, 37-38.

Pre-Raphaelite scorn for recent British art (in fact, everything after Raphael), he began looking to Old Masters like Reynolds for inspiration.

In 1863, Millais hit upon a winning combination with *My First Sermon* (Figure 15), which highlights the innocence of childish devotion, seen through adult eyes. The sitter—Millais's daughter Effie, age five—sits charmingly upright on a church pew, attentive and adorable in her porkpie hat, muff, and cape, legs hanging inches from the floor. The new Bible at her side, she stares determinedly ahead at what the viewer supposes must be the preacher. She is situated near the center of the canvas, her full form is depicted, and surrounding elements are played down in the effort to make her the central focus. Her bright red cape and the intense light on her face pushes her form forward against the indistinct haziness of her surrounding corner. As in a fancy picture, she is clearly the main attraction.

The artist emphasizes Effie's doll-like form by referencing eighteenth-century paintings of children. Reynolds' paintings of *Lady Caroline Howard*, c. 1778 (Figure 16), *The Age of Innocence*, 1788 (Figure 17), *A Strawberry Girl*, 1773 (Figure 8), and *Lady Caroline Scott as "Winter,"* 1777 (Figure 18) use similar compositional devices, depicting sitters three-fourths or full length, situating them close to the picture plane, and emphasizing youth and innocence through dress, attributes, or blushing. Though working in an eighteenth-century format, Millais was unafraid to exploit nineteenth-century printing capabilities to replicate images cheaply for a vast audience. The painting proved extremely popular, and it was widely reproduced and sold in print form.

Millais followed up *My First Sermon* with the humorous pendant painting *My Second Sermon* (Figure 19) the following year. Effie is now portrayed asleep, hat discarded to one side, her initial interest in being initiated into a “grown-up” service forgotten. Millais’s emphasis on girlhood turned out to be quite lucrative. Ernest Gambart bought the first painting for 420 pounds, and then the dealer William Agnew bought it from Gambart, paying Millais 200 pounds for the copyright.⁶⁰ The two images were sold as a pair of popular engravings, and magazines such as the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News* continued to reproduce them in the special editions over the next two decades.⁶¹

One may well consider *My First Sermon* as marking Millais’s rise to fame. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury noted its sweetness, saying that viewers should feel moved “by the touching representations of playfulness, the innocence.... the piety of childhood.”⁶² Significantly, Millais was elected a member of the Royal Academy that same year. His willingness to capitalize on the naturalness and informality of children and the public’s obsessions with collecting these images of childhood ultimately led to his financial and professional success. He would rely on similar pendant works that combined portraiture and genre in later works such as *Sleeping and Waking*, c. 1865-6 (Figures 20-21).

Along with a growing number of nineteenth-century paintings of girlhood, Britons were also inundated with exhibitions of eighteenth-century art, which was becoming the epitome of “Englishness” for Victorian viewers. *The Anthropological*

⁶⁰ Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith, *Millais* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 173.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Review of April 1, 1870, notes that while English painters are generally better than Continental painters, no contemporary artists matched the excellence of the great portrait painters Van Dyck and Reynolds.⁶³ The Royal Academy began regularly displaying Old Master paintings every winter season, beginning in 1870.⁶⁴ The Victorian definition of Old Masters included art from the eighteenth century and before. *The Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal* included a short description of the “Exhibition of Works of Old Masters” at Burlington House in 1879. It describes the show as “a rich treat,” including works by artists as diverse as Gainsborough, Reynolds, George Romney, J. M. W. Turner, Titian, Hans Holbein the younger, and Meindert Hobbema.⁶⁵ In February 1892, *Myra’s Journal* reviewed the Royal Academy exhibition at Burlington House, which included works by Anthony Van Dyck, John Constable, John Sell Cotman, and Sir Joshua Reynolds.⁶⁶ *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicles* reviewed the December 1870 exhibition held by the Society of British Artists; it included “two excellent portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds.”⁶⁷ The magazine also noted that the National Gallery rearranged its Old Masters rooms for better effect, and “the pictures have never to our taste been better placed.”⁶⁸ This shows that viewers were going to galleries, and curators were becoming more aware of what Victorians wanted to see.

⁶³ J. McGrigor Allan, “The Theory of the Arts,” in *The Anthropological Review* 24 (April 1, 1870): 144.

⁶⁴ Rosenfeld and Smith, 172.

⁶⁵ “The Man About Town,” *The Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal* 874 (February 8, 1879): 135.

⁶⁶ *Myra’s Journal* 2 (February 1, 1892), 32.

⁶⁷ “Fine Arts,” in *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (Saturday, Dec., 4, 1870): 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Millais was also strongly influenced by foreign Old Masters—particularly Diego Velázquez. Though he had never visited Spain, he was inspired by the Spanish artist's *Las Meninas*, 1656 (Figure 22), and a study of the Infanta Margarita, which he saw during his 1859 visit to Paris.⁶⁹ In his diploma piece for the Royal Academy, *Souvenir of Velázquez*, 1868 (Figure 23), Millais maintains the formatting of an eighteenth-century fancy picture, but he incorporates a dusky, unfinished-looking background, deeper tones, and luxuriously painted materials. The image combines eclectic interests, including the more abstracted backgrounds of Aestheticism, the painterly brushwork of both Gainsborough and Velázquez, and a sort of “fancy dress” that references Spanish fashions.⁷⁰

The work has a quiet solemnity about it. His sitter—a random girl who he met at church—sits enveloped in a dark space, her black dress blending into the background. Her surroundings, devoid of excessive information, mirror her somber, somewhat dazed gaze. She sits on two cushions, holding a single orange still attached to its branch against the ebony velvet of her skirt.⁷¹ Her loose hair is reminiscent of seventeenth-century Spanish models. She seems neglected and sad, her clothes approaching mourning fashion except for the pink silk details. The painting updates a classic by changing the mood and shows Millais' ambition as a painter of serious artworks. With *Souvenir of Velázquez*, Millais created a new version of a Reynolds fancy picture but without the intentionally posed and

⁶⁹ Rosenfeld and Smith, 178.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

lighthearted quality of a child playing “dress-up.”⁷² Most of his images of children would have this quality of nostalgia, combined with a seriousness of expression. He reconstructed the past to meet the Victorian interest in children, while also imitating English eighteenth- and Spanish seventeenth-century art.

Souvenir of Velázquez is key to the duality often seen in Millais’s work: he is both willing to look to the past, reflected in his derivative borrowing of pictorial elements, and original because of his understanding and manipulation of his buyer’s interests. He was able to tailor his technique to fit each representation successfully, and the results proved popular in many cases. A typical example is his painterly brushstroke in *Souvenir of Velázquez*, reminiscent of Velázquez and Gainsborough, in addition to the idealization that is evocative of Reynolds’s studies of children. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings of little girls provided Millais with both the retrospective element so popular in art at the moment, and a challenge to make representations of little girls modern. Unlike Velázquez, Millais gave girlhood centrality without the necessity of royal status. Millais is at once paying homage to the Old Master and trying to surpass him with his own ideas and techniques by using childhood as commentary on the changes in the social perception of childhood.

By 1880, Millais had achieved his place as one of the wealthiest and most preeminent portrait painters in England.⁷³ How did this happen? By studying the changes in his oeuvre, I have pinpointed three basic changes. First, he recognized that, to have success, he would have to tailor his efforts to public interests. He did

⁷² Rosenfeld and Smith, 178.

⁷³ Riding, 13.

this primarily through his paintings of girls. Second, he acknowledged the potential of art in a capitalist society; by allowing his works to be reproduced in magazines and advertisements, his exposure and income increased astronomically. Third, he realized that Victorians craved art that exuded a sense of nationalism. He found it in the past, particularly in the art of Reynolds.⁷⁴

The best known and most commercially successful fancy picture that Millais undertook was *Cherry Ripe*, painted in 1879 (Figure 11). It was this work that sealed his international reputation as the leading British artist of the period. The picture, published in the 1879 Christmas edition of *The Graphic*, sold out overnight after a print run of 60,000 copies.⁷⁵ Apparently, Victorians were fascinated with Millais's ability to combine past and present, innocence and sexuality. Millais was very aware of how to best manipulate his audience, and he did so consciously.

I have, up to now, generally painted in the hope of converting [my audience] to something better, but I see they won't be taught, and as I *must* live, they shall have what they want, instead of what I know would be best for them. A physician sugars his pill, and I must do the same... For my part, I paint what there is a demand for. There is a fashion growing now for little girls in mobcaps. Well, I satisfy this while it continues, but... I am ready to take some other fashion of the last century which people now are quite keen on.⁷⁶

Written after Millais finally abandoned his utopian Pre-Raphaelite compositions in order to survive economically, the above quote gives modern readers insight into

⁷⁴ Millais's foray into the work of Velázquez represents a temporary retreat from the British masters. Ultimately, I believe Millais was much more loyal to the style of Reynolds because of its nationalistic appeal and emphasis on sentimental childhood.

⁷⁵ Jackie Wullschlager, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and A. A. Milne* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 19. Rosenfeld and Smith (182) list 500,000 copies.

⁷⁶ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Victorian Centerfold: Another Look at Millais's *Cherry Ripe*," in *Victorian Studies* 35 (Winter, 1992), 204.

the difficulty painters had in pursuing art that did not accord with the prevalent tastes. Millais notes the growing interest in depicting little girls in eighteenth-century dress and, though he decides to go along with it, he hopes that popular demand will soon shift to something else. “Mobcaps” refer to a female’s white gathered hat that was popular in the eighteenth century; Penelope Boothby wears one in Reynolds’ 1788 painting (Figure 12) to reinforce her informal attire. Millais’s metaphor of sugaring a pill is a reference to the nineteenth-century penchant for escapism through paintings that evoke simplicity and purity. His final words, “some other fashion,” are a sarcastic reference to the popular demand for retrospective images (such as *Cherry Ripe*), rather than an appreciation for more modern styles of art.

Cherry Ripe was closely based on Reynolds’s *Penelope Boothby*, 1788 (Figure 12), of 91 years before and Robert Herrick’s seventeenth-century poem of the same title.⁷⁷

Cherry-Ripe, ripe, ripe, I cry,
Full and fair ones; come and buy.
If so be you ask me where
They do grow, I answer: There
Where my Julia’s lips do smile;
There’s the land, or cherry-isle,
Whose plantations fully show
All the year where cherries grow.⁷⁸

At first, the poem seems to be about a market crier selling his fruit and trying to make it sound as appealing as possible to passers-by. However, by the third line, it becomes obvious that this is not a hawker selling goods. By line five, the reader can

⁷⁷ Rosenfeld and Smith, 182.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

deduce that the speaker is male and that “cherry ripe” refers to someone named Julia. This suggests that the man is speaking of his girlfriend and potential lover. “My Julia” implies possession, and the following lines sound like a man trying to get his girl into bed. By calling attention to her “ripe” body and the fertility of her “plantations,” the speaker is trying to take advantage of the moment, before she over-ripens and becomes an old maid, no longer desirable to anyone.

Edie Ramage, the sitter in *Cherry Ripe*, wears an outfit similar to that worn by Reynolds’ *Penelope*.⁷⁹ According to her uncle, the editor of *The Graphic* on whose cover the painting appeared, Edie had gone to a fancy-dress ball costumed as *Penelope Boothby* the year before Millais’s painting was made.⁸⁰ The day after the party, Millais agreed to paint her for 1,000 guineas—an enormous sum.⁸¹ Her editor-uncle reproduced it in a color lithograph for the 1880 Christmas edition, and other enthusiasts immediately pirated the image.⁸²

Millais, building on the poem and Reynolds’s painting, commercialized and sentimentalized the eighteenth-century fancy picture.⁸³ Working from the eighteenth-century portrait of *Penelope Boothby*, Millais painted Edie in a similar outfit, echoed the formal elements of Reynolds’s painting, and changed the background. The original source is still clearly visible, but Millais made the portrait into a fancy picture by combining it with references to a well-known painting and a historical figure. Though the sitter is identifiable and her uncle commissioned the

⁷⁹ Rosenfeld and Smith, 182.

⁸⁰ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Paul Mellon Center, 1998), 218.

⁸¹ Rosenfeld and Smith, 182.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

image, the whole focus of the painting was centered on the story of Penelope—her innocence and untimely death—rather than on merely capturing a likeness of Edie.

Several key differences occur between *Penelope Boothby* and *Cherry Ripe*. *Penelope* is a portrait, and *Cherry Ripe* is a fancy picture. Reynolds's version is much more innocent looking, while Millais's employs a coquettish gaze, suggestive hand placement, and the sexual connotation of cherries. Pamela Tamarkin Reis notes the "open" position of the arms in *Cherry Ripe*, versus the "closed" and crossed arms of *Penelope Boothby*. Reis connects the black lacy gloves with female genitalia.⁸⁴ An alternative interpretation involves the "v" shape of her hands signaling virginity, supported by her self-restraint in not touching the cherries. Cherries are representative of young girls, virginity, and the hymen.⁸⁵ Reis notes that the word "cherry" was first used in print to reference a young girl in 1850, and it was first published in relation to the hymen in 1889.⁸⁶ The image could insinuate either that the child is "ripe for the picking," or that she is choosing to remain pure, despite her suggestive gaze.

Millais, after years of failed attempts to entice the public with paintings such as *Autumn Leaves* and *Spring (Apple Blossoms)*, finally gave in and produced the combined sexual innuendo and questionable innocence so desired by the Victorian public. He created *Cherry Ripe*, replete with the desired return to nature in a world wrought by industrial changes, a retrograde fancy picture that echoes the tension of Victorian society by combining erotic suggestion with innocent-looking clothing and

⁸⁴ Reis, 203.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 204.

a young sitter. However, I do not think that Millais gave in without a fight; I believe that he had his say, too. This is a man who, from entering the academy as the youngest student ever admitted, helped found a group of painters that rejected the tenets of the academy. This implies that he was very aware of the types of art one could make and the implications of rejecting or adhering to popular ideas. Though he eventually gave in to public demands, I believe that the inclusion of cherries next to the poisonous foxgloves meant that he wanted to make a comment about the dangers of constructing girlhood and using children to sell magazines and ideas. A preliminary sketch made in watercolor reinforces the fact that Millais carefully planned out the composition and its implications.⁸⁷ Further supporting evidence of his critical interpretation of constructed childhood may be seen in the different elements that he inserted into the painting and which are absent from Reynolds's image. The gaze, cherries, and hand placement are significantly missing from the eighteenth-century painting. The nineteenth century had different social and commercial problems than the previous century, and so commercially appealing (i.e. sexualized) images of children would not have been necessary in a period when children were not yet so widely exploited for advertising purposes.

Technically, *Cherry Ripe* exemplifies the loose, bravura brushwork that Millais began using in the late 1860s. Formally, he adheres to the compositional requirements of a fancy picture. Edie is situated in the center of the closely cropped composition. Millais has stretched Reynolds's three-quarters form to include her entire body. The little girl, who appears to be a few years older than Penelope, is

⁸⁷ Rosenfeld and Smith, 182.

painted in brighter colors, her pink sash an echo of the silk in *Souvenir of Velázquez*. Millais supposedly included her legs to reinforce the youth and sweetness of the child whose feet, like Effie's in *My First Sermon*, hang well above the ground and are turned slightly inward in a shy gesture.⁸⁸ Her eyes, unlike Penelope's, look directly at the viewer, and her head, chin tilted down, appears too large for her thin body. Her diaphanous white dress, which allows hints of brown and black to show through from the under painting, appears almost unfinished like those of Mary and Margaret in Gainsborough's painting of his daughters. This lends the image an in-the-moment quality: one second she innocently resists the cherries, while the next she may give in to temptation. Edie's face is the most finished portion of the painting, but the rest of her seems to be slowly seeping into the darkness of the background. Millais chose to increase the amount of foliage behind his sitter, drawing a more precise link between nature and innocence. However, his forest is much more threatening than Reynolds's, which holds a hint of twilight to the right. Millais's is completely black, a canopy of darkness weaving closer and closer to its innocent sitter. Oddly, no other art historians have mentioned this eerie element, but I believe it is significant. Besides evoking the negative effects of society on girlhood, there is a particularly important element at the center left of the canvas. Millais has deftly inserted the shadowy, wine-colored foxglove flower, which is highly poisonous, very near the temptingly edible cherries. Again, this placement is indicative of Millais's interest in inserting his own views into the painting: sexualizing images of young girls can be toxic to society's perception of innocence

⁸⁸ Pointon, 218.

by compromising its purity, just as society offers many dangerous temptations to little girls.

Cherry Ripe apparently appealed to the Victorian interest in girlhood because it was still popular seventeen years later when the Pears's Soap Company reprinted it in its Christmas yearly.⁸⁹ Various records show that *Cherry Ripe* reached all the British imperial colonies through *The Graphic* cover, and so it became linked to the essence of "Englishness" and British might.⁹⁰ The 1880 Christmas cover of *The Graphic* (Figure 24), designed by Randolph Caldecott, features a representation of *Cherry Ripe* surrounded by colonial caricatures.⁹¹ In this context, *Cherry Ripe* represents peace and goodwill in the midst of foreign savagery.⁹² The image represented both a promise of peace and a message of Great Britain's power. By referring to Reynolds's eighteenth-century painting, *Cherry Ripe* more than hints at the greatness of British painting and the supposed consensus around images of little girls.

At the same time that Millais had begun his career as a painter and Queen Victoria had ascended the throne, a new medium called photography was invented simultaneously in England and France. Louis Daguerre created the daguerreotype in 1839, and Henry Fox Talbot soon followed with the calotype in 1841.⁹³ At first, early photographers focused mainly on capturing still life elements, but with the rise of the carte-de-visite craze in France in 1854 and England in 1857, photography

⁸⁹ Pointon, 218.

⁹⁰ Rosenfeld and Smith, 182.

⁹¹ Ibid., 183.

⁹² Ibid., 182.

⁹³ Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentlemen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 131.

focused more and more on the human figure.⁹⁴ With the creation of Frederick Scott Archer's collodion process in 1851 and the rapid improvement and mobility of cameras, photography became a much simpler process in which pre-treated light-sensitive glass plates allowed even novice hobby photographers to take pictures of excellent quality.⁹⁵

The invention of photography created problems in the art world. Photography became a source of competition for painters by offering more affordable images in a shorter amount of time. It challenged the definition of art by questioning whether the new medium meant the end of painting.⁹⁶ Both painters and photographers wondered if photography was solely a mechanical and documentary method or a creative and artistic one, as well. As a result, photographers split into three groups. Historian Naomi Rosenblum identifies these factions as a) those who believed photography was not art; b) those who thought that photography was useful to painters but not as significant as painting; and c) those who believed photography was just as important as art and should be classified as such.⁹⁷ The first and second groups were dominant at photography's birth. The first group focused on the mechanical details and the second included painters such as Edgar Degas, who used photography to strengthen his paintings but

⁹⁴ Robson, 132.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 4th edition (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2008), 209. The painter Paul Delaroche announced that the birth of photography signaled the death of painting.

⁹⁶ Robson, 131.

⁹⁶ Christopher M. Gernerchak, *Everyday Extraordinary: Encountering Fetishism with Marx, Freud and Lacan*, vol. 4 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 28.

⁹⁷ Rosenblum, 209.

ultimately remained loyal to the latter medium.⁹⁸ The third group made efforts to create painterly effects in each photograph. They did this by copying fine art's emphasis on lighting and composition, surface textures, indistinct, hazy photographs, and by intentionally painting over or adding marks to the surfaces of their negatives.⁹⁹

Significantly, photography came to the fore at the same time that images of children experienced a marked rise in popularity. Both childhood and photography were used for commodification in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and photography increasingly served to fetishize the idea of girlhood.¹⁰⁰ A fetish is a sexual desire that is linked unnaturally to a specific object or circumstance—in this case, girlhood—which gives the object unusual value or power.¹⁰¹ Commercial fetishism, as conceptualized by Karl Marx, happens when something of no value is given value through the capitalist system.¹⁰² For example, paper money has no value in and of itself, but the capitalist system imbues it with a dollar value, as well as socio-economic values connected to class, celebrity, security, and success. Similarly, girlhood was commercially fetishized through the mass marketing of products to young girls; dolls, fashion plates, and books that featured images of little girls became so popular that the interest in girlhood rose with the sale of those items, giving them power to influence society. The cult of girlhood included both

⁹⁸ See Malcolm Daniel, *Edgar Degas, Photographer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999).

types of fetishes—little girls came to represent the tensions inherent in society, as well as an escape to the past—and images of girls took on a much higher monetary value than they would have, otherwise.¹⁰³

This fetishizing of girlhood was not limited to adult males. Though both men and women participated in the construction of girlhood, Victorian female artists' images of girls are often overlooked. Women photographers faced even more difficulty gaining recognition and finding patronage. They were often seen as mere amateurs dabbling in a mostly male medium.¹⁰⁴ Photographers like Julia Margaret Cameron, however, were able to combine traditional ideas of upper-middle-class femininity with assertive commercial practices to attract buyers.¹⁰⁵ Women photographers like Cameron and Lady Clementina Hawarden were aware of girlhood trends in fine art and often used erotic content to make their images more commercially viable.¹⁰⁶ Other than the hurdle of selling their photographs, how did women photographers like Cameron differ from male photographers? How did a woman's photographs of little girls in this period relate to Victorian construction of girlhood?

Cameron was dissatisfied with trends in Victorian photography. Unlike her mechanical-minded peers, Cameron was more interested in using the camera to make an artistic statement, rather than relying on the instrument's automatic

¹⁰³ The cult of girlhood began around 1860 and relates to the excessive adulation of little girls. William Baker and Kenneth Womack, eds., *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 63.

¹⁰⁴ Wendy Slatkin, *In Her Own Words: A Primary Sourcebook of Autobiographical Texts by Women Artists in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Seattle: Create Space, 2010), 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

properties. Cameron was unusual for several reasons: She was a woman photographer in a predominantly male environment, experimented with photography as art, and had not received academic training as an artist. Distinct from professionals like Millais and Gotch, she was seen as a novice, and her work was derided for being feminine and for striving to be artistic at a time when photography was often denied the status of art. However, Cameron was intimate with the literary and artistic elite of Victorian England and would have been aware of the photography versus art argument, as well as the major trends in literature and painting. She and held regular salons, which she called “feasts of intellect;” her next-door neighbor was the famous Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and his family often sat for her.¹⁰⁷ Despite her lack of training or popularity with male photographers, Cameron was commercially successful and prolific. She produced around 1,200 photographs over 14 years, using sitters from children to adults, their content religious to secular.¹⁰⁸ Rather than using the camera to document reality, Cameron often relied at least peripherally on literary sources to create allegorical or fictional scenes. Her style was different, as well; she used the popular collodion print process, which is somewhat ironic, as its main benefit (other than affordability and ease) is a sharper image.¹⁰⁹ Cameron used it to create experimental and blurry images, and she insisted on printing her own negatives to maintain this artistic

¹⁰⁷ Julian Cox and Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Cox and Ford, vii.

¹⁰⁹ Victoria Olsen, *From Life: Julia Margaret Cameron and Victorian Photography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 136.

control.¹¹⁰ Cameron also retained authority by mainly photographing her family and closest friends. When many photographers were focused on the real and quantifiable, she was interested in capturing a timeless aura of childhood, which she emphasized with her typical blurry images. Contrary to popular practice, she believed that using head braces to control movement during long exposures would lessen the ethereal effect of her photographs.¹¹¹ The otherworldly feeling that results from her characteristically blurry images is visible in nearly all of her images.

In Cameron's photograph, *Cupid Reposing*, 1872 (Figure 25), the identity of the sitter is uncertain, but it may have been Daisy Taylor—the same model who Cameron used in some of her most erotic child photos. She looks to be about five years old, her nude body partially seated and partially reclining with her right buttock facing the viewer. Her body is presented in an adult pose. In fact, it is strongly reminiscent of Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*, 1814 (Figure 26), in which a mature and somewhat elongated woman in a turban exposes her backside to the viewer, a knowing eye providing the work with a punch of eroticism. Cameron's cupid, however, looks dreamily into the distance, her face tired rather than contemplative. The model's hair is mussed out of place, her wings disconnected from her back, an awkward, angular bow to her left. She is a child playing a mythological role, props at her side. The imperfections of the image actually make it appear more true to life. Unlike the perfectly still *Penelope Boothby* or Edie Ramage in *Cherry Ripe*, who are painted with every hair in place, Cameron's *Cupid* exposes the fictions of artistic representation through the lens of the camera. Daisy is a

¹¹⁰ Olsen, 144.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

believable little girl who moves, gets tired, and messes up her hair. However, Cameron's image contains fictions of its own. This is not a document of Daisy going about her actual daily life, but a construction that contains an adult's directorial choices (nudity, position, expression).

Daisy hides her sexuality by turning her back, and Cameron intended this, since she often used male and female child models interchangeably. The regular swapping of girl and boy models, combined with the obvious and somewhat artless props, makes *Cupid Reposing* appear innocent. Cameron viewed children as easily available models, replete with the natural innocence that would enhance her photos of angelic literary characters.¹¹² She believed that children were inherently pure, and the literary character and dreamy quality of her work have the effect of taking the edge off the reality. Because many male photographers (such as Lewis Carroll) adhered to the clarity and documentary quality of the camera, their work can be uncomfortably realistic. Cameron's intentional disavowal of that same photographic quality results in pictures that are more poetic and dreamlike than those of her male contemporaries. The moving, spiritual emphasis in her work creates a deliberate barrier between images of little girls in works such as *Cherry Ripe* and a more aesthetically pure and innocent form of art.¹¹³

In one of Cameron's more unusual images, *The Double Star*, 1864 (Figure 27), she references Horatius Bonar's poem, *The Ages to Come*, 1854, as well as Sir John Herschel's research on double stars, which Cameron became familiar with when she

¹¹² Cox and Ford, 373.

¹¹³ Note the irony of the mechanical object (the camera) producing an image that is more moving than many paintings.

met him in Cape Town.¹¹⁴ The two little girls are Alice and Elizabeth Keown.¹¹⁵ They appear in a very tightly cropped vertical space with a reference to the night sky in the background. Alice and Elizabeth are joined together in an embrace, Elizabeth's left hand awkwardly fondling Alice's flat breast. Alice is completely undressed in the bust-length image, and Elizabeth is only barely covered by the flimsy piece of fabric bunched between the two. The girls are touching one another's faces in what appears to be their naive idea of a passionate kiss. Their eyes half closed, hair matted and disheveled, they appear tired of their role-playing.

Art historian Julian Cox links the girls' nakedness to Cameron's goal of showing "innocent lovers" who "test the notion of chaste eroticism."¹¹⁶ I agree with Cox that Cameron saw children's nude bodies as innocent, containing a latent sexuality. But Cox does not comment on the fact that the two models are sisters. Why did Cameron choose two girls to represent the double star? Despite Cameron's practice of using male and female children interchangeably, the erotic gesture in *The Double Star* is more intimate than that in similar images such as *The Turtle Doves*, 1864 (Figure 28) and *The Infant Bridal*, 1864 (Figure 28), which seem sexually tame in comparison. Was *The Double Star* simply a result of using the models that were available that day, or were girls chosen on purpose? Did Cameron tell Elizabeth and Anna exactly what to do? Cameron left no documents containing this information.

¹¹⁴ Olsen, 81. See <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O129350/photograph-the-double-star> for information on Horatius Bonar's poem. Also see Horatius Bonar, *The Eternal Day*, vol. 1 (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1854), 69-70. The poem is about the everlasting life referenced in Psalm 16:11. Bonar names the double star "life and joy," and he emphasizes the indivisibility of the two.

¹¹⁵ Cox and Ford, 380-1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

Considering that the image is linked to a poem that references Biblical eternal life, the girls are sexless personifications of life and joy, and their caresses as chaste and spiritual.¹¹⁷

Not all of Cameron's photographs involve child nudity or sexuality. At least half of her oeuvre relies on religious or romanticized scenes, ones in which her sitters are fully clothed. Some reference the beauty of the innocent girl-child and her close connection to God. Perhaps the best example of this type of work is Cameron's portrait of *Beatrice Cameron*, 1872 (Figure 30). Relying even more closely on Rousseauian ideas of natural purity and echoing the sentimentality of Reynolds's 1788 painting, *The Age of Innocence*, *Beatrice Cameron* capitalizes on the earlier Victorian construction of girlhood that promoted female domesticity, submissiveness, and religious training. Like a fancy picture, the image is closely cropped, centers the artist's daughter in the middle of the composition, portrays her full-length, indicating importance, and involves adult-constructed role-play. Beatrice, clad in a full-length white nightgown, kneels on her white bed, her small hands clasped in prayer and her head tilted towards the viewer to allow a good view of her pious face. The negative's background area has obviously been modified to create a sort of dark halo around the child, playing up the contrast between light and dark, good and evil. The image can be interpreted as a glowing (almost literally) illustration of John Locke's *tabula rasa* child—the essence of childish purity that can inspire jaded adults—as opposed to a child born in sin. *Beatrice* is a depiction of the ideal daughter, or a premonition of the temporality of girlhood.

¹¹⁷ See footnote 114.

From the beginning of her interest in photography, Cameron's works were linked to her femininity by critics, essentially gendering her work.¹¹⁸ Her penchant for taking photos in her home was seen by her largely male contemporaries as a feminine quirk, a bit of "housewifery run amok."¹¹⁹ Her interest in unfocused photographs, diametrically opposed to a more popular emphasis on the unique clarity offered by the camera, was criticized as female emotion and lack of control coming out into her work.¹²⁰ While this made it more difficult for her to gain the respect of other members of the Photographic Society, it also allowed her to take full advantage of her position. If a male had made *The Double Star*, it might have been questioned for its audacious eroticism—especially from today's viewpoint. But Cameron, being "merely" a woman in her male colleagues' eyes, could get away with it, pushing the boundaries through the odd "power" of her sex. In other words, because many of her masculine contemporaries viewed Cameron's photographs as feminine (i.e., weak) and therefore dismissible, she was able to use her femininity to further explore visual constructions of girlhood.

Her work, a study of the human presence, was a form of escape from the soulless mechanization of the nineteenth-century world and a return to a more "natural" element. In this way, Cameron did more than echo the interests of her time. She interpreted them through a romanticized retrospective lens. Cameron was jovial, demonstrative, and impetuous. She experimented by tampering with the natural sharpness of the photographic image, which her male contemporaries

¹¹⁸ Carol Armstrong, "Cupid's Pencil of Light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the Maternalization of Photography," *October* 76 (Spring, 1996), 127-128.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

criticized and attributed to unstable feminine emotion.¹²¹ Cameron regularly showed her images in the Photographic Society exhibits and at other venues.¹²² The Victoria and Albert Museum (then the South Kensington Museum) bought 80 prints only a year and a half after she had received her first camera.¹²³ Cameron's work was often scorned in a predominantly male field, but this would change in the twentieth century when her style would become more popular and her eroticization of children excused because of her gender.¹²⁴ She approached pre-pubescent nudity protectively, through the use of literary, Biblical, and mythological references. To grasp better what trends in mid- to late-Victorian fiction were like and how they compared to contemporaneous works of art, it is helpful to look at the popular children's literature of the period. The cult of girlhood affected Victorian writing, as well as art. One of the most recognized children's books of the nineteenth century is Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).¹²⁵ It revolutionized children's literature, which experienced important changes in the 1850s and 60s. Authors such as Carroll were beginning to reinvent upper middle-class female characters that went beyond the limits of domesticity.¹²⁶ With *Alice* (a story without

¹²¹ Armstrong, 137.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 156.

¹²³ "Men Great Thro' Genius. . . Women Thro' Love:" Portraits by Julia Margaret Cameron," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 56.4 (Spring, 1999), 33-34.

¹²⁴ Olsen, 170.

¹²⁵ I am choosing to focus on Carroll's literary work instead of his photography. I believe that Cameron's oeuvre is more relevant to contemporary visual culture because her work was exhibited to a much wider audience, and her role as female photographer is inspiring from a post-feminism movement point of view.

¹²⁶ Fiona McCulloch, *The Fictional Role of Childhood in Victorian Children's Literature*. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 25.

boys), a little girl is given the freedom to have her own adventure. Despite conforming to the Victorian penchant for constructing girlhood, Carroll—like Millais—inserted subtle criticisms of the Victorian lifestyle into the book through creative games and nonsense.

The character Alice is an obvious adult construction. James Kincaid argues that Carroll is the child, in this instance, while the fictional Alice is a false child.¹²⁷ By this, he means that Carroll usurped Alice's youth in order to relive his own through the story. Catherine Robson similarly claims that *Alice* was Carroll's effort at recovering his "lost girlhood."¹²⁸ Robson believes that Carroll and other male Victorian authors were forced to grow up too quickly and tried to recover their youth through a female character. *Alice* confuses the notion of girlhood rather than making it more accessible. While Carroll does instigate games with childlike abandon as the character, Dodo, I argue that, rather than taking on the Dodo persona to satisfy some part of his own unsatisfactory youth, Carroll was voicing his opinion that children should be children—play games, enjoy nonsense. He questions childhood conventions by undermining the everyday adult-constructed normality of Alice's life, thereby subverting the very idea of childhood in children's literature.¹²⁹

Alice is a somewhat confused little girl, partly wanting to grow up, and at other times acting just like a child. Perhaps Carroll was again making a point through Alice's character: If adults are constantly imposing their ideas of what

¹²⁷ James R. Kincaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 196.

¹²⁸ Robson, 3-4.

¹²⁹ McCullough, 25, 30.

childhood should be, children will become confused about how to respond in certain situations. While Alice is very secure in the knowledge that adults have taught her, Alice's body regularly exhibits confusion as to its state. Alice worries, "I wonder if I've been changed in the night? . . .Who in the world am I?"¹³⁰ She immediately tries to prove that she is herself by remembering facts from school lessons, and Carroll's criticism of the useless facts that girls learn in school is insinuated.

It is important to note that, like the sitters in Millais's paintings and Cameron's photographs, the fictional Alice is upper- middle-class. The reader is given hints of this at the beginning of the story. It opens with Alice and her sister doing nothing—a distinctly leisure-class form of relaxation.¹³¹ Then Alice starts worrying that she has changed into someone named Mabel, who "lives in a poky little house" with "next to no toys to play with."¹³² Alice emphatically does not want to be this person, presumably because she is poorer than Alice. Other class clues include her studies in French and music (but absolutely *not* washing [clothes]), good manners that reflect careful teaching by a nanny, and her offense at the bad table manners of the Mad Hatter, dormouse, and March Hare at the following tea party.¹³³ Though the rabbit makes the mistake of calling Alice "Mary Ann," slang for a female servant, the Queen of Heart's gardeners recognize her status by addressing her as "miss."¹³⁴ Alice, though young, has already been taught to which class she belongs.

¹³⁰ Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. Martin Gardner, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2000), 22-23.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 23-4.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 26-70, 97.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

Carroll wrote in a letter that his target audience was the middle class, saying, “below that I don’t think it would be appreciated.”¹³⁵ This reinforces the fact that, when rewriting the original manuscript, he deliberately tailored the story to have a particular effect on a specific group of people. The middle class was the fastest growing part of the population at that period. Perhaps Carroll knew that writing for them would have a greater effect on changing the stifling ideas of childhood that he quietly criticizes in the book—most often by making the adult characters appear the most ridiculous.

Alice is important to the study of girlhood in the visual arts because it reminds the reader that writers and artists were interested in girlhood at the same time. Issues in literature and art are often connected, and Carroll’s book reinforces the fact that people were questioning ideas about childhood in nineteenth-century British culture. But *Alice* also does something that painting and photography cannot: Because readers get involved in a story by identifying with the characters and experiencing challenges with them, the writer has more space to get into the reader’s head, criticize societal problems and suggest solutions, and leave a lasting impression. *Alice* highlights the rigidity of controlling Victorian constructions of childhood by inverting the reader’s expectations.¹³⁶ A painting, such as Millais’s *Cherry Ripe*, can insert subversive elements, but it ultimately lacks the clear voice of a literary author. Carroll used this to his advantage. Instead of writing the typical

¹³⁵ Wullschlager, 16.

¹³⁶ Robin Melrose and Diana Gardner, “The Language of Control in Victorian Children’s Literature,” in *Victorian Identities: Social and cultural Formations in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, eds., (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1996), 160.

adult construction of “normal” childhood, Carroll inverted it to make a point: childhood, itself, is a fiction.

More than fifteen years after Millais’s *Cherry Ripe* and Cameron’s *The Double Star*, depictions of little girls were yet again experiencing a change. Academic painters fought the upheaval of traditional painting values, which was largely due to the Aestheticism of James Abbott McNeill Whistler. His “compositions,” such as *Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl*, 1862 (Figure 31), and *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875 (Figure 32), had created a new sect of artistic followers striving towards abstraction. Meanwhile, Sir Frederic Leighton, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Albert Joseph Moore, John Singer Sargent, and John William Waterhouse continued a brand of academicism that appeared retrograde by the 1890s. Thomas Cooper Gotch, one of the last of these traditionalists, has often been overlooked due to his French training, an unusual combination of academic style and symbolist content, the refusal of the Royal Academy to grant his academician status, despite regular contributions to their exhibitions, and the dispersion of his oeuvre throughout the British Empire. However, he should be reconsidered for his unusual and timely depictions of girlhood.

A member of the Newlyn School, the Royal Society of British Artists, a founding member of the Royal Colonial Society of British artists, and a founding member of the New English Art Club, Gotch was respected by many in the late Victorian and Edwardian art world.¹³⁷ In my opinion, Gotch’s work represents the culmination of the Victorian cult of girlhood because, by the end of the nineteenth

¹³⁷ Richard Green, *British Painting 1890-1939* (London: Richard Green, 2005), 84.

century, he was painting the girl child enthroned—the conclusion to works by Millais and Cameron before him. His compositions removed the need for sexuality in images of girlhood. He replaced the tension between sexuality and innocence with a new form of tension: His images appear to empower girls by enthroning them as goddesses, but he really perpetuated the construction of girlhood by further idealizing it.

A case in point—and one that combines the purity of *Beatrice Cameron*, the material characteristics of the Renaissance, and the construction of innocence in the eighteenth century—is *Alleluia*, 1896 (Figure 33). This imposing painting, filled with gold leaf, is roughly six by seven feet in its ornate gold architectural frame. The work is meant to be an awe-inspiring whole, an image of purity and admiration. Far more than an illustration of Psalm 47's call to praise God, this painting is a call to worship the idea of the girl.¹³⁸ Phyllis Gotch, located in the central niche resembling a halo, clasps her hands together in prayer. She is the only figure surrounded in radiating rays of gold, and her body is elevated above the rest, the pinnacle of girlhood purity to which the others aspire. The twelve girls around her—perhaps representing the twelve disciples—sing from a scroll of hymns. Just as the sparkling mosaics at Ravenna inspire religious feeling, *Alleluia* arouses the worship of the perfect female child with its shimmering gilt background and jewel-like damask robes. Gotch does, in fact, combine religion and the cult of girlhood. By conflating the idea of an embellished altarpiece, the architectural halo form of a saint's niche,

¹³⁸ Art historian Rebecca Virag suggests the link between Psalm 47 and this image. See Rebecca Virag, "Thomas Cooper Gotch: *Alleluia*," accessed January 20, 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gotch-alleluia-n01590/text-summary>.

the replacement of Mary or Christ with his daughter, and the heavenly chorus of girls, Gotch glorified “the innocence and sanctity of childhood.”¹³⁹ His representation of “all you nations” features only the pale beauty of English skin, despite the inclusion of Asian and Italian fabrics.¹⁴⁰ This Anglo-centrism was popular with artists and writers throughout the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. It is evident in the cover of the Christmas edition of *The Graphic*, 1888 (Figure 24), when *Cherry Ripe* is literally located in the center of the composition, surrounded by stereotyped oriental characters. Perhaps instead of depicting the possibility of peace for the world through the innocence of interracial heavenly voices, Gotch, like Millais, was making a point about the future peace and the continuation of (white) Great Britain, sustaining its heavenly-ordained strength as the leader of conquered nations.

The consecration of Phyllis in the center of the composition echoes similar themes in *My Crown and Scepter*, 1891 (Figure 1), and *The Child Enthroned*, 1894 (Figure 34). *The Flag*, 1910 (Figure 35), is even more symbolic of the future led by youth and innocent girlhood. *The Child Enthroned*, perhaps Gotch’s most-recognized painting, once again places Phyllis at the center of the composition. This time, she is seated on a throne, a golden orb behind her head denoting divinity. Though the embellished tapestry and halo behind her head comes from a tradition of Madonna and Child paintings, all other details are secular. Phyllis’s heavily embroidered robe, rich satin dress, and foot pillow further enhance her regal status. Gotch continued the eighteenth-century tradition of a fancy picture by placing his daughter in the

¹³⁹ Green, 84.

¹⁴⁰ Ps. 47:1 (New International Version).

center of the closely cropped canvas and combining portraiture with allegory. However, by positioning her body facing straight forward, emphasizing symmetry, having her gaze unrelentingly at her audience, elevating her so that she looks down on the viewer, and inserting a respectful space between the goddess and her viewers/worshippers, Gotch has succeeded in both appearing to empower and further complicating the construction of girlhood. No longer subject to sexualized imagery, she reigns, trapped on the pedestal that the Victorians created for her. Gotch has taken the traditional Virgin Mary with her blue robe and golden halo, but has removed other religious items; crosses, Baby Jesus, religious texts, and accompanying saints are conspicuously absent, making the figure ambiguous. Phyllis has more in common with formulaic ancient Egyptian statues, her frontal posture rigid and elevated for worship. Unlike *Cherry Ripe* and *The Double Star*, *The Child Enthroned* is devoid of sexual connotations. The sitter's body is entirely covered, and Gotch does not specifically reference a historical figure, despite similarities with the Virgin Mary or religious saint. Without identifiable attributes, all that is left is her identity as a girl, and that is what the viewer/worshipper is supposed to contemplate.

Victorian artists and writers used young girls' bodies to question the world around them in a variety of ways. The eighteenth century influenced almost all of them, but each had his or her particular goal—often evidenced through some form of subversion. John Everett Millais, dejected at having to sacrifice his Pre-Raphaelite ideals in order to make a living, painted images like *Cherry Ripe* that were both sentimental and cynical. Through his work, he questioned the destructive effect that

modern life had on girlhood. Lewis Carroll used *Alice* to poke fun at the absurd expectations of adults and their confusing effect on children. Instead of using the medium to question the sitter, Julia Margaret Cameron used girlhood to reinterpret photography through a feminine point of view. Instead of looking at the camera as a mechanical tool like her male contemporaries did, she pushed boundaries by taking the expected (girlhood) and combining it with the unexpected (unfocused, artistic images). By the end of the nineteenth century, representations of girlhood were again undergoing changes. Thomas Cooper Gotch effectively removed the need for sexuality from images of girls by focusing on the power of girlhood. Like Millais and Cameron, Gotch was inspired by the past. But rather than finding a niche in eighteenth-century art, he derived inspiration from the Italian Renaissance after living in Florence, 1891-2.¹⁴¹ His paintings of girls combine a sort of fancy picture scheme with images of deities, presenting children in fifteenth-century costume, their natural purity a reflection of the Virgin Mary's. However, Gotch also incorporated contemporary interests by repeatedly enthroning his young female sitters as modern goddesses, deities of the cult of girlhood. He endowed his models with what appears to be feminine agency and power, but which is actually a continuation of an adult-constructed ideal.

Exploring girlhood from an interdisciplinary and art historical point of view helps twenty-first century viewers to better understand the Victorians and their obsession with girlhood. For some, depictions of little girls were a vehicle of escape from frightening contemporary changes—war, industrialization, commercialism,

¹⁴¹ Lomax, 173.

the failure of old regimes, and the fear of the future—to a simpler, more understandable past. For others, girlhood offered a way to explore of criticize tensions such as sexuality versus purity, the ideal versus the real, and the past versus the future. Most importantly, girlhood provided adults with a way to control some fragment of their confusing lives through the power of construction.



Figure 1

Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931)

My Crown and Scepter

1891

Oil on canvas

37.48 x 26.89 in.

Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering

Image from Pamela Lomax, *The Golden Dream: A Biography of Thomas Cooper Gotch* (Bristol: Sansom and Co., Ltd., 2004), 21.



Figure 2

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8-1543)

Edward VI as a Child

c. 1538

Oil on panel

22.38 x 17.31 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Image from www.nga.gov



Figure 3

Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641)
The Three Eldest Children of Charles I
1635
Oil on canvas
16.93 x 20.87 in.
The Royal Collection, London

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 4

Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830)

The Calmady Children

1823

Oil on canvas

30 7/8 x 30 1/8 in.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 5

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

The Painter's Daughters with a Cat

c. 1760-1

Oil on canvas

29.76 x 24.76 in.

The National Gallery, London

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 6

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

Cupid as a Link Boy

c. 1733

Oil on canvas

40 x 35 in.

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 7

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1782)

Mercury as a Cut Purse

c. 1773

Oil on canvas

30 x 25 in.

Faringdon Collection, Faringdon

Image from www.buscot-parkc.om



Figure 8

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

A Strawberry Girl

R. A., 1773

Oil on canvas

29.96 x 24.84 in.

The Wallace Collection, London

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 9

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

Master Crewe as Henry VIII

1776

Oil on canvas

55 x 43.5 in.

Private collection

Image from Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 182.



Figure 10

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8-1543)

Henry VIII

1540

Oil on panel

34.8 x 29.3 in.

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 11

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

Cherry Ripe

1879

Oil on canvas

52.99 x 35 in.

Private collection

Image from Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith,
Millais (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 183.



Figure 12

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

Penelope Boothby

1788

Oil on canvas

Dimensions unknown

Private collection

Image from www.stanford.edu



Figure 13

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

Autumn Leaves

1856

Oil on canvas

41.06 x 29.13 in.

Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

Image from www.manchesterartgalleries.org



Figure 14

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

Spring (Apple Blossoms)

1859

Oil on canvas

44.49 x 69.41 in.

Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 15

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

My First Sermon

1863

Oil on canvas

Dimensions unknown

Guildhall Art Gallery, London

Image from www.kevinalfredstrom.com



Figure 16

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

Lady Caroline Howard

c. 1778

Oil on canvas

56.36 x 54.62 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Image from www.nga.gov



Figure 17

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

The Age of Innocence

c. 1788

Oil on canvas

30.12 x 25.12 in.

Tate Britain, London

Image from www.tate.org.uk



Figure 18

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)

Lady Caroline Scott as “Winter”

R. A., 1777

Oil on canvas

55.51 x 44.09 in.

Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch and
Queensberry, United Kingdom

Image from Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the
Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in
Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1993), 192.



Figure 19

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
My Second Sermon
1864
Watercolor based on the original
Dimensions unknown
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Image from www.vam.ac.uk



Figure 20

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

Sleeping

c. 1865-6

Oil on canvas

35 x 27 in.

Private collection

Image from www.kevinalfredstrom.com



Figure 21

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

Waking

1865

Oil on canvas

Dimensions unknown

Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Perth

Image from Tate Britain: <http://213.121.208.204/britain/exhibitions/millais/rooms/room5.shtm>



Figure 22

Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)

Las Meninas

c. 1656

Oil on canvas

125.2 x 108.66 in.

Museo del Prado, Madrid

Image from www.museodelprado.es



Figure 23

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

A Souvenir of Vélazquez

1868

Oil on canvas

40.43 x 32.44 in.

Royal Academy of Arts, London

Image from www.racollection.org.uk



Figure 24

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896) and Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886)

Cherry Ripe on the cover of *The Graphic*
Lithograph

Dimensions unknown

Christmas, 1880

Image from Laurel Bradley, *From Eden to Empire: John Everett Millais' "Cherry Ripe."* 34.2 (Winter, 1991): 191.



Figure 25

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

Cupid Reposing

1872

Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative

13.7 x 11.5 in.

George Eastman House, New York

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 26

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867)

La Grande Odalisque

1814

Oil on canvas

36 x 63 in.

Musée du Louvre, Paris

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 27

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

The Double Star

April 1864

Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative

9.96 x 7.9 in.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Image from www.collections.vam.ac.uk



Figure 28

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

The Turtle Doves

1864

Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative

7.4 x 5.67 in.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Image from www.vam.ac.uk



Figure 29

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

The Infant Bridal

c. 1864

Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative

9.6 x 7.6 in.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Image from www.collections.vam.ac.uk



Figure 30

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

Beatrice Cameron

1872

Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative

13.9 x 10.4 in.

George Eastman House, New York

Image from www.geh.org



Figure 31

James Abbott McNeill Whistler
(1834-1903)

Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl
1862

Oil on canvas

83.88 x 42.5 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Image from www.artstor.org



Figure 32

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)
Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket
1875
Oil on panel
23.75 x 18.38 in.
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit

Image from www.dia.org



Figure 33

Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931)

Alleluia

Exhibited 1896

Oil on canvas

52.48 x 72.48 in.

Tate Britain, London

Image from www.tate.org.uk



Figure 34

Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931)

The Child Enthroned

1894

Oil on canvas

39.37 x 23.23 in.

Private collection

Image from www.kevinalfredstrom.com



Figure 35

Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854-1931)

The Flag

1910

Oil on canvas

24.4 x 20.87 in.

Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering

Image from Pamela Lomax, *The Golden Dream: A Biography of Thomas Cooper Gotch* (Bristol: Sansom and Co., Ltd., 2004), 141.

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Vita

Emily Christine Brown was born September 14, 1985, in Texarkana, Texas. She is the daughter of Dr. Stephen Brown and Pamela Brown and the sister of Mr. Adam Brown, Dr. Matthew Brown, and Mrs. Alicia Holdridge. A 2004 graduate of Pleasant Grove High School, Emily earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2009 from Baylor University where she majored in Art History and minored in Photojournalism.

In August 2010, Emily enrolled in the Art History graduate program at Texas Christian University. In Fall 2011, she served as curatorial intern to Nancy Edwards at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth where she researched Italian art and prepared Power Points for docent lectures. In Spring 2012, Emily served as education intern to Terri Thornton at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth where she researched Lucian Freud for an upcoming exhibition and found correlating figural works in the museum's permanent collection. At TCU, Emily worked in the Visual Resources Library, served as research assistant to Dr. Mark Thistlethwaite, and worked as a teaching assistant to Dr. Frances Colpitt and Dr. Mark Thistlethwaite.

Emily received Graduate Student Tuition Scholarships and Kimbell Fellowships while working toward her degree. She received a Sunkel Travel Grant from TCU that allowed her to study the paintings of Thomas Cooper Gotch in London in the summer of 2011. Emily hopes to secure a position that will allow her to work with college students and other adult audiences in a museum setting.

Abstract

The mid- to late- nineteenth century is characterized by immense industrial, cultural, technological, medical, and political changes, as well as an overwhelming obsession with girlhood. This interest in the little girl was an escape mechanism resulting from the disconcerting changes affecting nineteenth-century Britons. Victorian painters, photographers, and children's authors such as Sir John Everett Millais, Thomas Cooper Gotch, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Lewis Carroll used societal tensions, such as innocence and sexuality, old art and new art, and weakness and powerfulness in their representations of girls as a means to both participate in and subversively criticize the period's adult-constructed girlhood craze. Though often working from eighteenth-century precedents—particularly the images of Sir Joshua Reynolds—these four creators uniquely succeeded in commenting on and affecting Victorian views of girlhood that would last to the end of the century.