10: Created Equal?

A. So Much for Convention

1. Class title 1 (Mary Wollstonecraft and Amelia Opie)
2. Section title A (transformation of the above)

The reason why these two women circle round one another is that they are connected. As far as possible, I intend to structure today's class on Women around such **nexuses**—small groups of artists and others joined by family or other ties. Each will have an animated title slide like you have just seen. I should also say at this point that since I did an entire course on Women last semester, several quite large sections today will be repeats from that; I hope you will excuse me.

3. Mary Wollstonecraft and Amelia Opie

The reason these two women look alike is that they were painted by the same artist, **John Opie** (1761–1807). His wife **Amelia Opie** (1769–1853) is the one on the left. We have met her before as the author of the Abolitionist primer for Children, *The Negro's Complaint*, or *How to Make Sugar* (1826).

4. Opie: *The Negro's Complaint*, or *How to Make Sugar*

But Amelia did far more than write children's tracts. She was a prolific novelist, whose books challenged prevailing conventions. Here are brief summaries of the first two.

5. Opie novels

Her first, *The Father and Daughter* (1801), is a very early and basically sympathetic treatment of the "fallen woman." The eponymous heroine of the second, *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), also enters into a sexual relationship outside marriage—but because she has a philosophical objection to it, not because she has been seduced.

6. Married Women's Property Act cartoon

[Parenthetically, I should say that there were practical as well as philosophical reasons for a bold nineteenth-century woman to reject marriage. Until the **Married Women's Property Acts** of 1870 and 1882, a wife and all her possessions became the property of her husband upon marriage. Reform began earlier in the US, with a series of Act beginning in 1839, but they were incremental.]

7. William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft

Amelia Opie based the character of Adeline upon her somewhat older friend **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759–97), and the philosopher **Frederick Glemurray** in the novel is a tribute to the real-life philosopher, publisher, and social activist **William Godwin** (1756–1836), for whom Wollstonecraft also defied convention to enter into a sexual partnership outside of marriage—though they did marry, largely for legal reasons, when Mary became pregnant. One reason why the relationship defied convention was that Mary Wollstonecraft had already made herself notorious for her views on women's independence, and her willingness to act upon them, as you'll hear from this rather bouncy video from **Jacqui Rossi.**

8. Mary Wollstonecraft video (Jacqui Rossi on the *Biography* channel)
9. Mary Wollstonecraft quotations

Rossi does not even mention her affair with the painter **Henry Fuseli**; Wollstonecraft was indeed a figure of scandal. But her lasting legacy comes from the publication of writings such as ***A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*** (1792), a foundation text of feminist thinking. Here are a few quotations from it.

10. The Shelleys

Unfortunately, Mary died of septicemia a few days after the birth of her daughter, also called Mary, leaving the girl to be raised by her father. But the mother's genes produced another remarkable woman willing to defy convention and think outside the box. **Mary Shelley** (1897–1851) not only wrote the mould-breaking *Frankenstein* (1818), but eloped with the poet **Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792–1822) at the age of 16, and traveled with him in voluntary exile for the better part of four years in France, Switzerland, and Italy in the company of luminaries such as **Lord Byron**, until Percy's death in 1822. It is hard to know whether to applaud this as another splendid act of thumbing the nose at convention, or a rather despicable act on his part, to abandon his first wife **Harriet** (whom he married young and came to resent), who drowned herself while Percy and Mary were abroad, allowing them to return briefly to England and marry. But let me end this section on a positive note with his love poem, *Love's Philosophy*. It is short enough for me to give it to you as a comparison between two quite different readings, by **Tom Hiddleston** and **Iain Batchelor**; which do you prefer?

11. **COMPARISON 1:** PB Shelley: *Love's Philosophy*

B. The Angel's Handbook

12. Section title B (the Patmores)

These are the poet **Coventry Patmore** (1823–96) and his wife **Emily Andrews Patmore** (1824–62). To be fair, they were very close in age; this is a sketch for a much later portrait by **John Singer Sargent** (1856–1925). But I wanted the color, and I rather liked the image of the young wife being an object of adoration. For Coventry Patmore wrote what became the virtual handbook of Victorian marriage, a long sequence of poems called *The Angel in the House,* published between 1864 and 1872. The tone of adoration, almost idolatry, is set in the opening section, excerpted here. Patmore falls back on the old trope of the artist's inadequacy to do justice to his love; he might almost have been writing in the Renaissance. And the portrait of Emily is by the Pre-Raphaelite painter **John Everett Millais** (1829–96), who might also have been working in the early Renaissance.

13. Patmore: *The Angel in the House*, excerpt 1

So far, so conventional. But go a little further to some of the most often quoted lines in the piece, which focus not on the husband's relationship to his wife, but *her* relationship to him. The picture of Emily was taken as an illustration to the poem by **Julia Margaret Cameron** (1815–79) one of the first photographers to handle the camera like an artist's brush.

14. Patmore: *The Angel in the House*, excerpt 2

What do you make of that? It looks very much like the double standard, doesn't it? His attentions may stray elsewhere, but she simply waits until he returns, then… "*leans and weeps against his breast, And seems to think the sin was hers*." In all fairness again, though, it may not be fair to assume that Patmore is saying that this is what all wives should do; he may simply be praising Emily for doing what most other women wouldn't.

15. Isabella Beeton: *Book of Household Management*, illustrations
16. Isabella Beeton: *Book of Household Management*, text

Emily Patmore was also a writer. In 1859 she produced a domestic handbook of a different kind: *The Servant's Behaviour Book,* or *Hints on Manners and Dress for Maid Servants in Small Households*, writing under the pseudonym **Mrs Motherly**. Alas, I can't find even a usable photo of it, but I do have some images of the much more famous book published two years later by **Isabella Beeton** (1836–65): *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861). *Mrs. Beeton's* has become such a monument to Victorian culture that it is a shock to discover that she died when barely 30. We think of it as a cookbook with a plethora of dishes in elaborate presentations, but it may be even more important as a social document. Mrs. Beeton's view of the upper-middle-class wife as the General of the Household is yet another important facet of the Victorian view of women.

C. Art in Reflection

17. Section title C (the Rossettis)
18. The Rossettis and Elizabeth Siddal

The Patmores were friends with many of the **Pre-Raphaelites**, the group of artists gathered around painter and poet **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** (1828–82) in 1848, seeking to return to the simpler and more sacred view of art of the Fifteenth Century. This is Rossetti, his sister poet **Christina Rossetti** (1830–94) and, sandwiched between them, the favorite Pre-Raphaelite model **Elizabeth Siddal** (1829–62). She is the member of this particular nexus I want to examine more closely.

19. Millais: *Ophelia* (1852, Tate)

We first see Lizzie Siddal as a girl of 17, modeling for **Millais'** *Ophelia*—another feminine archetype that appealed to the Victorians: vulnerable victim in need of men's protection. She modeled for many other Pre-Raphaelite artists, and ended by marrying Rossetti himself in 1860.

20. Three images of Lizzie Siddal
21. Siddal: *Lady Clare*, with Rossetti: *Regina Cordium*

Here are three views of Lizzie Siddal. Counterclockwise from bottom left, in a sketch by Millais, in another by Rossetti, and her own self-portrait. For this is the point, **she was also an artist**. Her style, admittedly, is very close to her husband's; it is not clear if he was actively helping her, or she absorbed by being so familiar with that *ambience*. How much of an independent spirit is here yearning to get out? Artistically, I doubt we'll ever know—though she eventually ended her life with an overdose of laudanum. But there is evidence on a personal level we get from comparing two poems, one by Christina Rossetti describing her brother's infatuation, the other by Siddal herself—yes, she was also a poet—putting words into her husband's mouth. I'd like us to compare them.

22. **COMPARISON 2:** Christina Rossetti: *In an Artist's Studio*
23. **COMPARISON 2:** Elizabeth Siddal: *The Lust of the Eyes*
24. — the two poems together

What did you think? Together, they seem to add up to a view of marriage in which the husband idolizes his wife as an angel, but ignores her as an independent inividual.

25. Christina Rossetti: *Goblin Market*, title

So far, we have seen several different aspects womanhood: bluestocking, major-general, victim, and idol. I want to stick with Christina Rossetti for a little longer to explore one more: sexual being. It may seem odd to do this with a poem, *Goblin Market* (1859), that reads like a story for children, yet it carries implications appear to be directed entirely at adults. It is the story of two sisters, **Lizzie and Laura**, who hear the call of the Goblins selling their fruits. One resists, the other doesn't. Here are the first five minutes, recorded by some Englishman on his iPhone, but he does not give his name! I put it all on the web. I have added illustrations: this one and the title page are by her brother Dante Gabriel; the others are from later 19th and early-20th-century illustrators. After we have heard it, I'll tell you how it ends, and then ask what on earth you make of it?

26. Christina Rossetti: *Goblin Market*, opening
27. Arthur Rackham: *Goblin Market*, illustration

What happens is that Laura wakes up the next morning to find that while her sister Lizzie can still hear the Goblins' call, she herself cannot. From that moment on, she begins to decline until it seems that she must die. Lizzie in desperation finds a silver coin and goes herself to the Goblins. But she refuses to taste any of their fruit herself. Instead, she lets the Goblins gorge themselves with it and lick her all over until she is covered with the juice. Then she goes back to Laura who in turn licks the juice off her. This time, the juice tastes terrible, and Laura is thrown into a paroxysm of convulsions. But she does recover, and both sisters live to tell the cautionary tale to their children!

So what did you think that was *really* about? There have been various interpretations: an allegory of capitalism, a tract about drug addiction, a parable of girls encountering puberty, or simply a covert poem about sex. I am inclined to think the latter.

D. High and Low

28. Section title D (Tissot and Holl)
29. Women by Tissot and Holl

Finally for this hour, two artists working in London at the same time, but who pursue opposite approaches. Most of the work we have been seeing in this class and the previous one has belonged to a bourgeois milieu, produced to cater to the taste of upper-middle-class patrons who want to see their own lives depicted in paint. Though born in France, **James Tissot** (1836–1902) hit this market spot-on when he moved to London in 1871. By contrast, English artist **Frank Holl** (1845–88), chose to paint the lives of people who lived in cottages rather than mansions. Neither artist confined himself to women, of course, but in both cases it is the women who catch the eye and make one wonder.

30. **COMPARISON 3:** the pictures below
31. **COMPARISON 3:** Frank Holl: *Far Away Thoughts* (not dated, 1870s?)

So here is a Tissot/Holl comparison, each showing a single woman lost in her thoughts. What can we tell about the context of each? Is there a story or just a general mood? And does this affect your estimate of the greatness of the picture? The **Holl** is called *Far Away Thoughts*. I find it interesting for what it does *not* tell us: who it is in the bed, the past story of the young woman or how she has come here, the possibilities for her future. I find its open-endedness empathetic, in a way I don't with the Tissot.

32. **COMPARISON 3:** James Tissot: *Waiting; in the Shallows* (1874)

Technically, the **Tissot** is amazing. Every detail is in place, painted with the utmost skill. It conveys a mood, of course, but its precision and double title—*Waiting*, and *In the Shallows*—suggest some story to be winkled out; in this respect, it fits the late Victorian category of **problem picture**. For whom is the woman waiting? Has he not arrived, or slipped away for a moment, or is he actually already there, sitting where we are? Why that prominent single glove? And what is implied by *In the Shallows:* the start of an adventure that will take them out into deeper water, or the humdrum end of one? I shall post an article that goes into these questions and more, providing numerous details to back them up.

33. Three pictures by Frank Holl

Holl did paint story pictures too, but they are mainly moments in time, rather than something to suggest a past or a future. I'll throw in three more of them, in each case showing the picture first without a title, so you can have fun guessing. Or perhaps not fun, for each of them shows women reacting to tragedy that is not of their making.

34. Frank Holl: *No Tidings from the Sea* (1871, Royal Collection)
35. — the same, with title

Would you know what is going on here without the title? Perhaps the fishing net might suggest that it is about a husband, son, and father feared lost at sea. This was painted on commission from Queen Victoria, who apparently liked pictures that stirred her emotions.

36. Frank Holl: *Her Firstborn, Horsham Churchyard* (1876, Dundee)
37. — the same, with title

This is obvious, an all-too-common Victorian tragedy, the funeral of a child. Only the title perplexes me. If this is *Her Firstborn*, who are the other children? The coffin is too small to hold an elder sibling. Or perhaps this is a *second* wife; mothers died in childbirth all too often also.

38. Frank Holl: *Newgate—Committed for Trial* (1878, Holloway College)
39. — the same, with title

A prison with a wife and children visiting the man behind bars. Again, it is the women who bear the brunt. It is not clear, however, how many stories are being told; the seated woman with the baby seems an echo of the group in front, but what about the tall woman in the background with the policemen?

As you know, I like to end each hour with a video. I have chosen a different clip from the BBC production of *North and South* (1855) by **Elizabeth Gaskell** (1810–65) that I have shown before. It is a scene where the middle-class protagonist **Margaret Hale** (**Daniela Denbeigh-Ashe**) pays a visit to **Bessy Higgins** (**Anna Maxwell Marshall**), daughter of the local union leader (**Brendan Coyle**). Other than that Bessy is dying of a lung disease, I won't try to explain the context, but the production does a good job, I think, of portraying the working-class Manchester environment.

40. Gaskell: *North and South*, Margaret visits Bessy
41. Class title 2 (Luke Fildes: *Applicants for Admission…*, modified)

E. The American Woman

42. Section title E (E. L. Henry rotation)

This is a painting by **Edward Lamson Henry** (1841–1919), a specialist in genre scenes; I think it is called *Afternoon Quiet,* but I don't know its exact date or location. Nobody is going to call it is a great work of art; Henry specialized in creating a nostalgic view of old-style American values that mostly ignore the progress of industrialization. But for that very reason—and because so many of his works feature women—he may be useful as a catalog of the changes that have taken place over the course of the century, and a kind of index for our further exploration.

43. **COMPARISON 4:** the two pictures below
44. **COMPARISON 4:** E. L. Henry: *A Sunday Visit* (1902)
45. **COMPARISON 4:** E. L. Henry: *The New Woman* (1892, White River Valley Museum)

Here is one comparison: a youngish woman on her own, facing a group with a man and two other women. The date of the first is irrelevant; it seems to represent the 1840s or so, when Henry was only a child. But the date of the second is relevant indeed, for it seems to represent something new in the artist's own lifetime; it was in fact painted in 1892. What do these tell us of changing attitudes to Womanhood in the course of the century? The 1840s picture is called *A Sunday Visit*, and represents family or neighbors coming to call in some middle-class community such as Amherst or Concord. The woman on the sidewalk is presumably the young mistress of the house behind her; she represents the virtues of domesticity and good order. The woman on the Bicycle, though, is an example of the New Woman on the last decade of the century (the painting is dated 1892), taking charge of her life both mentally and physically, and wearing the practical garments designed by **Amelia Bloomer** (1818–94).

46. E. L. Henry: *Memories* (1873)

Or look at this, and let me ask you: Is the woman looking forward or looking back? It is in fact called *Memories*, which explains the open trunk and the garment half pulled out of a drawer. But what most struck me when I first saw it was the woman looking out of the window. What is out there? Surely there should be something more…?

47. — the above with categories of Womanhood

I read a 2005 academic article by **Susan M. Cruea** from Bowling Green State University; I'll post it on the website, but it is a long read. Summarizing the work of other scholars, she traces four phases of American Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The **True Woman**, the **Real Woman**, the **Public Woman**, and the **New Woman**. The True Woman is essentially the "Angel in the House" of the Victorians, and we needn't go into it any further here; I'll look at the Public Woman and the New Woman in a moment. According to Cruea, the transition from True Woman to Real Woman, though it might have happened anyhow, was given impetus by the Civil War and the need for many young women to earn a living by going out to work.

48. **COMPARISON 5:** E. L. Henry: A Country *School* (c.1890, Yale)
49. **COMPARISON 5:** Winslow Homer: *The Red Schoolhouse* (1873, NGA)

This last example by E.L. Henry shows one career open to women—as indeed it still is—teaching. But with that, I leave this relatively minor artist and turn to a portrayal of a young teacher two decades earlier by a truly major one: **Winslow Homer** (1836–1910). Let's compare them. The Homer picture is simpler and less anecdotal; the woman is also more independent, more interesting as a person. This is the Real Woman phase in Cruea's scheme. Homer has given her an almost heroic quality, which you frequently see in his views of women.

50. Homer: *Inside the Bar* (1883, NY Met)

In the early 1880s, Homer spent two years in the fishing village of **Cullercoats**, on the NE coast of England. The women he painted there have to work for a living, physically and often under extreme conditions; they would not even figure on Cruea's scheme which, like much else that I am showing in this class, is concerned with middle-class ladies wondering what to do with themselves. Like **Frank Holl** at about the same time, Homer is fascinated by ordinary people, except that instead of Holl's pathos, Homer paints women who can stand up for themselves and have no need of our pity.

F. Transcendendent Women

51. Section title F (Alcott and Fuller)

It is not surprising that the **Transcendentalist Movement**, with its emphasis on the innate goodness of each human being, should have nurtured women for whom the domestic confines of **True Womanhood** were not enough. **Louisa May Alcott** (1832–88), for example, was the daughter of **Bronson Alcott**, one of the central members of the group and the close friend of **Emerson** and **Thoreau**. But he was hopeless with money, and she took to writing in part to help support her family. As **Jo March** does in *Little Women* (1868), its semi-autobiographical heroine and, as played by **Saoirse Ronan** in the opening scene of **Greta Gerwig's** 2019 movie, as an attractive an example of the **Real Woman** as you are likely to find.

52. Alcott: *Little Women* (Greta Gerwig film 2019), opening scene
53. Alcott: *Work: a Story of Experience*

In 1861, well before *Little Women*, Alcott began a novel to be called *Success.* This also had an autobiographical heroine, **Christie Devon**, and would have devoted a chapter to each of the jobs she took since leaving home: Servant, Actress, Governess, Companion, and Seamstress. She abandoned it, but took it up again after the Civil War to become a much deeper and more socially conscious book called *Work: a Story of Experience* (1872). It is interesting, though, that Christie does not take up work just in order to make money, but for the development of her soul, as this quotation suggests. At the end of the book, she will marry a man closely based upon Thoreau, and discover the beauty of work in making a loving home of her own. In an earlier chapter, though, she is courted by a wealthy idler who falls in love with her, and almost accepts him. Then he discovers that she has been an actress (!), but tells her he is prepared to forgive her. Here is her response:

54. Alcott: *Work: a Story of Experience,* reading from Chapter Four
55. Thomas Hicks: *Margaret Fuller* (1848, Washington NPG)

The other figure I had in my section title video was even more closely connected to the Transcendental Movement; she was in fact something of a mentor to Alcott. This is **Margaret Fuller** (1810–50), a prodigious intellect known when barely in her thirties as "the best-read person, male or female, in New England," and the first woman to be permitted to use the Harvard library. **Emerson** appointed her as the first editor of his Transcendantalist Journal, *The Dial*. It was in the Dial that she published her 1843 book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, now hailed as the first great work of American Feminism, much as

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* was in Britain half a century earlier. Fuller went on to make her living as a journalist, writing for the *New York Post*, which sent her to Europe to cover the Italian War of Independence. While there, she began a relationship with the Italian patriot **Marchese Giovanni Angelo Ossoli**; it is not clear if they actually married. For some reason, all the pictures we have of her suggest a rather wilting figure, not the fearless pioneer she turned out to be, so I will turn instead to this brief biopic to flesh her out.

56. *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Revolutionary*, trailer

G. Women Who Moved a Nation

57. Section title G (Stanton and Anthony)

Now for the Public Woman. These two, **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (1815–1902) and **Susan B. Anthony** (1820–1906), met in 1851 and became were close friends and joint organizers in the Women's Movements in the second half of the century. But the momentum began with Stanton.

58. Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840

In London in 1840 for their honeymoon, she and her husband Henry Stanton, also a staunch abolitionist, attended the International Anti-Slavery Convention that I mentioned before. The Stantons were outraged when the delegates, mostly male, voted to exclude women from their deliberations, even if they had been sent as delegates from their local organizations, and to seat them in a separate room.

59. Joseph Kyle: *Lucretia Mott* (1842, Washington NPG)

Among the excluded delegates was Quaker minister and social activist **Lucretia Mott** (1793–1880). Before hearing her preach in London, Stanton had never imagined that a woman could take such a role in mixed company. The two became close friends, and in 1848, taking advantage of Mott's visit to the Stanton home in **Seneca Falls**, NY, the two organized the first Woman's Rights Convention. I'll let the New York Historical Society take it on from there.

60. Seneca Falls Convention
61. *Portrait Monument* in US Capitol (1920): Stanton, Anthony, and Mott

The video did not mention Susan B. Anthony, because she did not meet Stanton until three years later. But as soon as they did, a new compound was formed: Elizabeth contributing her oratory, Susan her organization. Once more, I'll let a video fill us in, this time from the *Encyclpedia Britannica*.

62. Susan B. Anthony video
63. Currier and Ives: *The Age of Brass* (1869)

As the Woman's Rights movement gained momentum, it is not surprising that it caused alarm in the male patriarchy; this Currier and Ives print is humorous, but it speaks to a real sense of alarm. The goal at the end of this road, Universal Suffrage or the right of women to vote, would not be reached until well into the next century, with the ratification of Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. [The next step should have been the Equal Rights Amendment, passed in 1972, but never ratified by sufficent states.] Actually, many American women got the right to vote in State elections earlier than this, but the Nineteenth Amendment was a Federal guarantee. The progress to Suffrage in America was closely paralleled by that in Britain, which granted voting rights in 1918 to women over the age of 30 with property, and in 1928 to all women. In both countries, the movement began mid-century and slowly gathered momentum.

64. Ethel Smyth and Emmeline Pankhurst

There are two women, exact contemporaries, whom I would mention in connection with the Suffragette movement in Britain. One is **Emmeline Pankhurst** (1858–1928) who, with her daughters **Christabel** and **Sylvia**, organized the mass demonstrations before the First World War—touring America as well as Britian—that finally swung public opinion in their favor; more on that in a moment. The other is the composer **Ethel Smyth** (1858–1944). In contrast to the feminine appearance of Pankhurst, Smyth (who was bisexual) always dressed in mannish clothes above the waist, with a skirt below. She was a major composer and eventually became Dame Ethel Smyth. One of her lesser works was her *March of the Women* (1910), that was sung at Suffrage demonstrations; here are its first and third verses.

65. Smyth: *March of the Women*
66. Pankhurst arrest and force-feeding

The Pankhursts were among the first in Britain to apply the tactics of civil disobedience. They deliberately provoked arrest and then staged hunger strikes in prison. The authorities responded at first by force-feeding through a nasal tube. But when news of this caused public outrage, the government responded with the so-called **Cat-and-Mouse Act**, which allowed for the temporary release of prisoners when their life was endangered, with incarceration resuming as soon as they had recovered. This should be all the background you need to the montage of Suffrage posters—including a few *anti*-Suffrage posters—I have put together to end the class. The background music is the Scherzo of Ethel Smyth's *Serenade in D*, an earlier work from 1889.

67. Smyth: *Serenade in D,* scherzo, with montage of Suffrage posters
68. Class title 3 (The Outcome!)