Performing Identities in the art of John Singer Sargent

Leigh Culver
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Abstract
In the elegant society portraits by John Singer Sargent, body language created social identities. The fallen dress strap and obvious makeup in Madame X, for example, declared her a “professional beauty”; the costume of Charles Stewart proclaimed him a British lord. Critics often conflated appearance and character in Sargent’s images, yet Sargent used theatre and masquerade in numerous works to problematize essentialist links between appearance and character that were fundamental to turn-of-the-century class, gender, and racial stereotypes. This dissertation concentrates on the art Sargent produced after Madame X, as he recovered from the scandal it provoked in 1884 and as he established his patron base in England and America. Many of Sargent’s later works can be seen as a response to the issues raised by Madame X concerning the relationship between appearance and character. An analysis of theatrical elements in Sargent’s paintings elucidates the function of these images in variously maintaining and challenging notions of social identity.

Chapter One discusses the critical reception of Sargent’s art in the context of a turn-of-the-century culture engaged in classification and performance activities. These activities are interpreted as strategic responses to a pervasive anxiety about the instability of class, gender, and racial identities resulting from modern conditions. This chapter looks specifically at the celebration of Sargent as a skilled delineator of “racial” types, the varied analyses of his own “national” identity, the debate over his artistic merit, and the concern about his “artifice.”

Chapters Two through Four consider how Sargent responded to the discourses about his art through his portrayals of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth (Chapter Two), Jewish and aristocratic patrons (Chapter Three), and costumed family members and friends (Chapter Four). The visual structures of the paintings, in relation to evidence about the social culture in which Sargent painted and exhibited, suggest his artistic intentions even if Sargent himself rarely spoke of them. Through his work, Sargent called attention to the dialectic between reality and artifice and, consequently, the constructed nature of art and identity.

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PERFORMING IDENTITIES
IN THE ART OF JOHN SINGER SARGENT

Leigh Culver

A DISSERTATION

in

History of Art

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1999

[Signatures]

Supervisor of Dissertation

Graduate Group Chairperson

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For Eric and My Parents
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ABSTRACT

PERFORMING IDENTITIES

IN THE ART OF JOHN SINGER SARGENT

Leigh Culver

Elizabeth Johns

In the elegant society portraits by John Singer Sargent, body language created social identities. The fallen dress strap and obvious makeup in Madame X, for example, declared her a "professional beauty"; the costume of Charles Stewart proclaimed him a British lord. Critics often conflated appearance and character in Sargent's images, yet Sargent used theatre and masquerade in numerous works to problematize essentialist links between appearance and character that were fundamental to turn-of-the-century class, gender, and racial stereotypes. This dissertation concentrates on the art Sargent produced after Madame X, as he recovered from the scandal it provoked in 1884 and as he established his patron base in England and America. Many of Sargent's later works can be seen as a response to the issues raised by Madame X concerning the relationship between appearance and character. An analysis of theatrical elements in Sargent's paintings elucidates the function of these images in variously maintaining and challenging notions of social identity.

Chapter One discusses the critical reception of Sargent's art in the context of a turn-of-the-century culture engaged in classification and performance activities. These activities are interpreted as strategic responses to a pervasive anxiety about the instability of class, gender, and racial identities resulting from modern conditions. This chapter
looks specifically at the celebration of Sargent as a skilled delineator of "racial" types, the varied analyses of his own "national" identity, the debate over his artistic merit, and the concern about his "artifice."

Chapters Two through Four consider how Sargent responded to the discourses about his art through his portrayals of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth (Chapter Two), Jewish and aristocratic patrons (Chapter Three), and costumed family members and friends (Chapter Four). The visual structures of the paintings, in relation to evidence about the social culture in which Sargent painted and exhibited, suggest his artistic intentions even if Sargent himself rarely spoke of them. Through his work, Sargent called attention to the dialectic between reality and artifice and, consequently, the constructed nature of art and identity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Defining Sargent and His Art</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Performing Identity in <em>Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth</em></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Typing and Ambiguity in Sargent’s Portraits of Jews and Aristocrats</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: The Real and the Imaginary in “the semblance of a picture”: Sargent’s Zuleika and Cashmere series</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


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43. Photograph of Jean-Louis, Guillaume, and Conrad Ormond, Peuterey, Val Veny, 1907. Private collection.


49. John Frederick Lewis, An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo, 1869. Oil on panel. Private Collection.


51. John Singer Sargent, Reclining Figure, c. 1908. Watercolor on paper. Private Collection.


79. Photograph of Sargent painting *The Brook* at Peuterey, Val Veny, c. 1907. Private Collection.
Chapter 1

Defining Sargent and His Art

Woe to Mr. Sargent’s sitter who uses pearl powder ever so little, or wears a conventional smile! It is just this mask of the actor, of the diplomatic personage, or the woman of society that he delights in painting, conveying by some touch about the eyes or mouth the fact that it is a mask, and does not quite suit the wearer.¹

This 1891 declaration from the Art Amateur was typical in suggesting that the portraitist John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) could reveal essential truths about his sitters’ characters. People might convince others that they were someone they were not, this article implied, but they could not hide from Sargent. He would see through their act and proclaim it as such in paintings for all to see.

Numerous stories recount how Sargent revealed mental states, character flaws, and positive aspects of personality that even a sitter’s friends and family had not recognized until Sargent’s portrait divulged the truth to them.² Such a presumed ability to set the record straight about who someone “really” was both lured and discomfited potential patrons, depending on their sense of self in relation to society’s perception of them. Nevertheless, Sargent’s reputed ability to depict the truth helped to make him the most successful society portraitist of the Gilded Age, and by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, having one’s portrait painted by Sargent, in and of itself, was deemed an authentic marker of good taste and social accomplishment.

While Sargent’s portraits reputedly enabled viewers to discern the “true” nature of sitters simply by examining physical appearances, Sargent’s images also exposed the
limits of this very activity in certain instances. Those portraits that called attention to "masks"—to the artifice of a person's social identity—represent one such instance; his genre paintings of role-play represent another. While such theatrical pictures declared the reality of their fictions, they also embodied the potentially troubling or freeing suggestion that character cannot necessarily be determined by outward appearances, for appearances can be falsely manipulated. This dissertation considers examples of Sargent's art and reception that grapple with issues of artifice and performance from the period following the scandal caused by his exhibition of Madame X, as he establishes his patron base in England and America, until 1910, after he abandons most of his portrait production.3

I begin by outlining some of the social issues that informed the reception and production of Sargent's art. Namely, I suggest that a pervasive cultural anxiety about the instability of class, gender, and racial identities—resulting from the effects of increasing imperialism, immigration, and urbanization—prompted various classification and performance activities on both sides of the Atlantic. Commentators' definitions of Sargent's sitters, the artist himself, and his artistic style, can be understood within this cultural climate of typing and performance. This chapter looks specifically at the celebration of Sargent as a skilled delineator of "racial" types, the varied analyses of his own "national" identity, the debate about Sargent's "imagination," and the concern about his "artifice." Subsequent chapters consider how Sargent responded, through his paintings, to the issues raised by his critics. I first turn to consider the impact of Madame X (Fig. 1) in establishing many of the parameters of discussion about his art.
"Madame X"

It can be argued that the critical discourse about Sargent's ability to reveal the "truth" about a sitter's artifice first originated in response to this image, which created a scandal at the 1884 Paris Salon. The public's reaction to Madame X colored many ensuing evaluations of his work. The full-length painting portrays the American expatriate and renowned beauty, Virginie Gautreau, wearing a black evening dress with low décolletage. Her pale face is turned away from the viewer; her cameo profile shines white against a dark background. Her body, by contrast, turns towards the viewer. Her arms counter the direction of her head, one arm reaches forward to grasp her dress while the other contorts backward to grasp the edge of a round table. The twisting of her body and contortion of her back arm, particularly visualized in the tense extension of her thumb, suggest self-conscious posturing for aesthetic effect.

Numerous accounts have relayed the now familiar details about the making of this portrait and the public's response to it. Sargent had requested permission to paint Gautreau in the hopes that her portrait would prompt future commissions. He was particularly attracted to her "beautiful lines" and declared that "if the lavender or chlorate-of-potage-lozenge colour [of her skin] be pretty in itself" he would be "more than pleased." His resulting image, however, was met with great public outcry. Sargent's friends, Ralph Curtis and Vernon Lee, in letters to their families, described the crowds of "astonished" and "jeering" women who stood before the painting sputtering exclamations...
such as “Oh quel horreur!” according both Curtis and Lee, Gautreau’s mother was furious with Sargent, exclaiming, “Ma fille est perdue—tout Paris se moque d’elle.”

Several critics identified the sitter as a type, a “professional beauty,” who “herself was superficially a work of art.” Critics mentioned that Gautreau had turned all heads at social events and that her beauty was often noted in contemporary gazettes. Viewers of the painting, however, found the pallor of Sargent’s representation of her skin in bad taste, because in contrasting with her pink ears, it made obvious the use of facial powders and thus the artifice of her beauty. Her red hair, presumably dyed with henna, her fallen shoulder strap, and her theatrical posturing focused further attention on the artifice of her appearance for the sake of seduction. One critic felt that in his “wilful exaggeration,” Sargent had shallowly aimed for sensation and notoriety rather than true artistic achievement. Brownell, on the other hand, felt that Sargent’s mistake was in his choice of sitter. He argued that Sargent’s “naturalistic method,” his focus on realistic renderings of appearance, was not well suited to an artificial subject. Artificial subjects needed to be painted in an artificial style, Brownell suggested. Realistically painting artifice, on the other hand, resulted in “bad portraiture,” “bad art,” and “bad naturalism.”

Sargent’s presumably “realistic” rendering of “artifice” continued to prompt critical debate throughout his career. Judith Gautier’s reaction to Madame X exemplifies the type of activity writers indulged in when attempting to come to terms with the particular tension between “artifice” and “reality” they saw in Sargent’s work:

Is it a woman? a chimera, the figure of a unicorn rearing as on a heraldic coat-of-arms or perhaps the work of some oriental decorative artist to whom the human form is forbidden and who, wishing to be reminded of woman, has drawn this delicious arabesque. No, it is none of these things, but rather the precise image of a modern woman scrupulously drawn by a painter who is master of his art.
Gautier begins with a question that considers numerous other-worldly or
allegorical possibilities for meaning elicited by the abstract or unnaturalistic qualities of
Sargent's design. Ultimately, Gautier dismisses these possibilities to conclude that
Sargent has simply painted a "precise image of a modern woman." Gautier seems to agree
with Brownell: Sargent has maintained the naturalistic method of which he is "master";
the "visionary," unnaturalistic aspects of the painting, she goes on to argue, are simply
due to the "visionary beauty" of Gautreau herself. As will become apparent in
subsequent chapters, critics often resorted to this listing of possibilities to exemplify the
process of labelling made complicated by the particular combination of artifice and realism
in Sargent's art.

Dismayed by the scandal provoked by Madame X, Sargent told Curtis that he
wanted to leave Paris for awhile, and with the encouragement of Henry James, in
particular, Sargent settled permanently in London soon thereafter.14 Paintings like Mrs.
Henry White (Fig. 2), created at the same time he had been working on Madame X,
helped to assure potential patrons that he could produce a respectable portrait. Sargent
portrayed Mrs. White, the wife of an American diplomat in London, in a more
conservative evening dress. The white dress serves to accentuate the natural flesh tone of
her skin, and her pose is free of tense and stylized contortions. Despite portraits like this
one, however, writers persisted in suggesting that it was dangerous to sit for Sargent,
particularly if you were a woman.15 Vernon Lee reported that Henry James told her,
"Since Mme Gauthereau [sic] and one or two other portraits, women are afraid of him lest
he should make them too eccentric looking."16 Women such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, on the other hand, whose money and philanthropy made her immune to any potential fallout from scandal and who enjoyed shocking her public, hoped that Sargent would create their portraits as comparably sensational as Madame X had been.17

Several identities were at stake with each grand portrait Sargent produced: the sitters’ identities as upstanding social figures of good breeding and taste, Sargent’s identity—both as an artist and a respectable gentleman (of generally comparable good breeding and taste), and the viewers’ identities in relation to sitter and artist. Sargent’s large-scale portraits, while painted to hang in the sitters’ residences, were also intended for public display at annual exhibitions at the Royal Academy, New Gallery, and/or Paris Salon. Each resulting portrait can be understood as a collaboration between artist, sitter, and by implication, public audience, for the decisions of the artist and sitter were undoubtedly influenced by their understanding of the opinions and tastes of their audience. Given this, however, the collaborations differed in nature from portrait to portrait. Portraits like Madame X and Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, discussed in Chapter Two, were not commissioned; rather, Sargent requested permission to paint them. While these sitters certainly had agency in the resulting images, their portraits can be understood as embodying Sargent’s own artistic interests and concerns to a greater degree than commissioned works where the sitter approached Sargent with the request to be painted. Correspondence and anecdotes about the making of his commissioned portraits reveal that Sargent’s sitters at times made specific demands about what was to be included in their portraits and how they were to be represented.18 Henry James,
however, warned one Sargent sitter that she could not “collaborate,” “cooperate” or “assist” Sargent with her portrait, “it’s his affair—yours is only to be as difficult as possible...” 19 Several sitters recalled that, with varying degrees of comfort, they allowed Sargent to make all aesthetic decisions—even down to the choice of costume and pose. 20 The theatrical elements in Sargent’s images thus can be understood as a function of both Sargent’s aesthetic decisions and his sitters’ suggestions or acquiescence in light of their understanding of audience. 21

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The idea of identity as performative has been most clearly theorized by social scientist Erving Goffman, in his influential 1959 study, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Suggesting that public life is role-play in which individuals enact prescribed parts, Goffman outlined various techniques individuals use in professional and social life to create an impact that influences or impresses others. Goffman’s theories assume that an essential subject exists behind the performance, behind the mask, and that the roles performed, the appearances assumed, are predetermined scripts, prefabricated types that are easily read. 22 This assumption has most recently been called into question by Judith Butler, who claims that no essentialized subject exists prior to performance. 23 The subject, in other words, cannot be constituted outside of performance. She argues that the body, rather than a “passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed,” is instead a “construction.” 24 Butler focuses on “performativity” as it destabilizes “foundational categories of identity” (specifically “sex, gender, and desire,” which she understands as inextricably intersecting with race, class, and ethnicity) by revealing such
categories as "constructions." Goffman and Butler's theories, while formulated much later than the time in which Sargent painted, can nevertheless help us articulate certain performative instances created by Sargent and his sitters.

Breaking down barriers of nation, class, and gender

Social historian Richard Sennett has claimed that Western nineteenth-century cosmopolitan society was uniquely invested in the notion that one's true character, one's identity, could be read through appearance. He argued that several conditions brought about by modernity had eroded the semblance of a stable social order. As Sennett has described, the new ability to mass produce clothes and quickly disseminate information about fashion through large circulation publications prompted a homogenization of dress that made differentiation of class through appearance a more subtle operation. Max Beerbohm's 1908 satiric cartoon suggested that the appropriation of dress happened both ways along the class spectrum. "A Study in Democratic Assimilation" (Fig. 3), depicts a "Scion of Proletariat" and a "Scion of Nobility" who are easily distinguishable by dress in 1868 but who by 1908 have each taken on aspects of the other's dress and bearing so that they appear identical. Such homogenization of dress was at least partly reflective of shifting class structures due to the change from an agricultural to an industrial economy, whereby former merchants turned industrialists became wealthy while aristocratic land owners became less so.
In addition to changes in the economic structure of society, an expansion of women's rights during this period broke down "separate spheres" between the sexes. In the period between 1885 and 1910, women fought for and gained increasing legal rights and political voice. They held jobs traditionally reserved for men; they attended college; they were involved in political parties; they sought suffrage; and they participated in strenuous outdoor physical activities such as biking and mountain climbing. Women's fashions changed to reflect and accommodate their new professional, public, and athletic activities. These changes, perceived by some people as making women appear more like men, were met with varying degrees of applause or condemnation.28

Boundaries were visibly collapsing not only between different classes and sexes, but also between races, nations, and cultures. Because of increases in immigration, imperialist activities, and general cultural and economic exchange between nations, more and more people were being exposed to those outside their own culture. People appropriated the dress and manners of other cultures for their own, varied purposes. Peoples of different races and nations intermingled professionally and socially, resulting in an increase in interracial and interfaith marriages that served to diffuse the perceived "purity" of race and class.

Issues of race, class and gender are inextricably linked—such terms are constructed categories in themselves that, in reality, are fluidly interrelated. Racial constructs, for instance, often correlate with class hierarchies and gender stereotypes. One "race," for example, might be stereotyped as "effeminate" or assumed to be "lower class" in essence. The lower classes of a given population may consist predominantly of members of a
specific “race” because of longstanding prejudices that, in turn, are further reified in the face of class and gender distinctions. The breakdown of specific barriers between races, classes, or genders thus had broader ramifications for the social structure of a given nation as a whole.

Satiric cartoons during this time often focused on the perceived collapse of race, class, and gender distinctions. In visualizing the effects of this collapse, cartoons often strove to elicit laughter and ridicule in order, perhaps, to diffuse their audience’s tensions and anxieties about these issues. Because such issues were addressed in the comfortable context of good fun, the potentially volatile implications of their visual message could be temporarily dismissed. Cartoons thus called attention to these modern social changes, but they also functioned, for some people, as a reassurance that such changes need not be taken seriously. For others, these exaggerated images perhaps served as ammunition in the fight to maintain the traditional social order. Cartoons, as we shall see, provided just one strategic mechanism of response.

Classifying efforts

In Modernity and Ambivalence, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the modern social and cultural conditions I have outlined above prompted a “relentless war against ambivalence.” He defines ambivalence as follows:

Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions.
The inability to easily read a person's character, race, class or gender through appearances, for instance, triggered this ambivalence. The "war" against it was fought with various ordering, classifying, and naming activities that paradoxically produced further ambivalence and thus "yet more classifying effort."31

Such "classifying effort" can be seen in a wide range of activities in turn-of-the-century popular culture. International spectacles such as world's fairs, Olympic Games, and beauty contests fostered controlled comparisons between nations that ultimately served to maintain or establish hierarchical power relations.32 Comparably, writers for popular periodicals engaged in extended analyses about the presumed essential traits of race, class and gender. Physical attributes (namely male strength and female beauty), character, and cultural products (including artworks) were examined for what they presumably revealed about nation, race, class, and gender. The conjectures these articles made often contradicted one another or detailed so many exceptions, variations, and subclassifications that the conclusions reached seem ultimately useless and unverifiable.33

A 1907 Cosmopolitan article, "Bernard Shaw on American Women," offers just one example of the cultural obsession with classification activities. In this text, the famous Irish playwright is rendered in cartoon as a Sherlock Holmes investigator or scientist, studying a single "species"—"American Woman"—under a magnifying glass as if looking at a butterfly specimen. In fact, however, the text reveals that it is the "American Woman" journalist who is investigating Shaw. This unnamed woman begins her article with a minute description of his appearance as indicative of his mental abilities and nationality—his thin, pale physique is deemed typical of "genius," his facial features
typically “Irish.” She sets the agenda of their discussion about female types, and their conversation is littered with analyses about the comparative essential character, dress, and taste of women from different countries. The woman journalist baits Shaw, for instance, with gross generalizations about the nature of American versus English women, and Shaw delights in wittily finding exception. Readers are privy to an entertaining discussion that sheds light on little except the wit of the two discussants. At the end of the article, a second cartoon has transformed the “American Woman” butterfly specimen into a camel-riding tourist gazing at the Egyptian sphinx whose head is that of Shaw. The bookend cartoons metaphorically suggest the ways in which the “other” is examined and understood as a scientific or tourist curiosity. This article and its illustrations represent just one example of the plethora of articles in popular periodicals that engaged in typing activities.34

Various “sciences” at this time, with their presumably “objective,” “empirical” methods of analysis, proved to be particularly persuasive weapons in the “war against ambivalence.” Throughout the nineteenth century, pseudo-sciences such as phrenology and craniology had proliferated as classifying strategies meant to resolve any ambiguities about a person’s character. Such “sciences” claimed that one’s mental health, criminality, and general character—linked to stereotypes of race, class and gender—could be interpreted from the bumps on one’s head or the shape of one’s face.35 Artists utilized these sciences in creating narrative paintings where figures could be easily identified by “types.”36 While these “sciences,” for the most part, had fallen into disrepute among
intellectuals by the turn-of-the-century, the language and assumptions of phrenology and
the activity of typing were still part of the popular culture in Europe and America.³⁷

Medical and psychological studies also provided ammunition for the maintenance
of “separate spheres” for men and women. In the face of women’s suffrage movements
and changing gender roles, for example, scientific treatises asserted that women’s
biological and psychological make-up rendered mental or physical exertion harmful to
their health and reproductive capacity.³⁸

At the same time, the work of physical anthropologists focused on identifying and
classifying essential races according to comparative studies of hair, skin color, nose and
jaw shape, and head measurement. Anthropological societies and publications,
multiplying throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, provide
evidence of the institutionalization of this field of study. Adapting Darwinian theories of
evolution to notions of fixed racial types, British anthropologists such as John Beddoe,
Alfred Haddon, A.H. Keane, and J.T. Cunningham argued that the formation of distinct
racial types from one ancestor had happened early on in human history, but that three or
four racial types had remained stable for centuries.³⁹ Presented, however, with seemingly
endless diverse variations in physical measurements of peoples’ heads, for example,
anthropologists created more categories and subcategories of classification and
rationalized that some diversity within categories was indicative, not of the fallibility of
such categories, but of outside factors such as “migration, intermixture, and changing
environments.”⁴⁰ In a remark similar to Bauman’s argument, anthropological historian
George Stocking has noted, “Paradoxically, the more precise and extensive the observation

13

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and the measurement of mankind, the more tenuous was the 'reality' of the races they
served to define." Yet as Nancy Stepan has summarized, "To a typologist, every
individual belonged to an undying essence and bore in some way the characteristic
features of this essence, however much these features were disguised. The task of the
scientist was to explore not variation, but the stable essences behind variation."

Such was the task of Sargent, as many of his art critics saw it. As Sarah Burns has
discussed, Sargent’s vision was compared to that of a scientist, able to grasp “physical
truth.” Like a physical anthropologist, Sargent could capture and delineate a person’s
essential traits, without the noisy interference from variable, non-essential features of
appearance, or so critics claimed. Thus, it was believed that viewers could learn more
about a person’s “true, essential” nature from Sargent’s representation than they could
from knowing the actual person. Sargent’s “science”—evidenced in his oeuvre as a whole-
reassuringly provided proof of existing, essential types. James Getscher and Paul Marks
summarized the claims of one 1905 review as follows: “[Sargent] not only captures
individuals, but is able to precisely characterize whole social groups, such as Jews or
grande dames, so that in future years reproductions of his work, like Mrs. Meynell’s
portfolio, will have scientific value.”

Performing selves

Along with an increase in classifying activities outlined above, costumed activities
proliferated among the leisure classes and functioned as another way for people to
address their fears and desires about the perceived disintegration of race, class and gender distinctions. In numerous theatrical venues in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, performance served to reify notions of selfhood. Stage actors and actresses were encouraged to play roles that matched their "real" personalities. Comparably, men and women, dressed for masked balls or "tableaux vivants" were expected to enact roles that matched their "true" physical or character type. Costumes transforming people into literary or historical characters were declared successful as they reinforced the wearers' "true selves" more fully than if they had been dressed in contemporary garb. Costume balls thus functioned to maintain or assert identity constructions already in place and, by extension, hyperbolized the existing social structure.

Certainly costumed events at this time also enabled a temporary subversion of identities comparable to the eighteenth-century carnivalesque "world turned upside down" described by scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Terry Castle. The popularity among northern European and American women of dressing as Turkish harems in revealing, exotic costumes, for example, is one such instance. In the guise of a harem "other," western women could display otherwise repressed sensuality within the comfortable realm of play.

Publicity in newspapers and periodicals about the costume events of the social elite, however, emphasized the extent to which individuals chose disguises that simply accentuated who they really were. Lily Bart, the heroine of Edith Wharton's 1905 novel, The House of Mirth, exemplified the ambitions of many socialites at that time who participated in role-playing activities. Dressing as Joshua Reynold's "Mrs. Lloyd" for a
“tableau vivant,” Bart was the sensation of the evening as she “had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself.”

Sargent and his cohorts participated in many such costumed events. Alice Comyns Carr, one of Sargent’s close friends, wrote about numerous role-playing activities enjoyed by the social circles in which Sargent moved. In her memoirs, Carr recalled several costumed events in public spaces like the Grosvenor Gallery, private parties like Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s masked ball, and spontaneous evenings like those at Ightham Mote, where guests would dress for dinner in theatre costumes brought down from London. Carr, less successful than Wharton’s fictional Lily Bart, recounted one failed attempt to disguise herself for a masquerade ball as Portia. Carr recalled that her disguise was easily recognized. One journalist told her, “Mrs. Comyns Carr should cover her little hand if she wishes to remain incognito.” She explained, “I wondered if the easy compliment did not carry with it an implied rebuke because so diminutive and insignificant a person as myself had attempted so stately a role.”

The investment in the notion of playing one’s “true” self—both on stage and off—may be indicative of what Auerbach has described as Victorian anti-theatricality—a fear of performance as it suggests the instability of an “essential” selfhood. In Private Theatricals, Auerbach argues that Victorian humanists were invested in the notion of an essential, “real” self that theatricality undermines as it “connotes not only lies, but a fluidity of character that decomposes the uniform integrity of the self.” If people on and off stage simply played characters that matched their “real” self, the threat dissipated.
To render convincing performances or disguises, the upper and middle classes relied on various popular methods of "expression." The foremost of these was the Delsarte system of expression, named after the French actor, François Delsarte. Delsarte had developed what he considered a scientifically based semiotic system from his years of studying the body language of people in various situations. Fundamental to his theories was the notion that body language was not just reflective of a person's interiority but that it could also influence or alter that interiority. In other words, by assuming certain poses, one's presumably "authentic" inner self would alter to correspond to what was being communicated by outward appearance.

Delsartism became a fad in America in the 1870s due to lectures and classes given by Steele Mackaye, a famous American actor. By the end of the century, numerous publications on the Delsarte method had been published by Mackaye's pupils, and instructors like Genevieve Stebbins and Edmund and Henrietta Russell helped to make Delsarte a household name. Not only did professional dancers, public speakers, and actors learn the Delsarte method of expression, but by the 1890s, training in the Delsarte system was considered an important part of upper and middle class education for both men and women.

While I have found no direct evidence to show that Sargent knew of Delsarte, knowledge of the Delsarte method was so broad and pervasive among his friends, colleagues, and clients, and so influential in the theatre and dance worlds of which he was an enthusiastic patron, that it would be surprising if he were not aware of this method. Oscar Wilde, for example, was a Delsarte enthusiast, as was Ruth St. Denis, a dancer.
Sargent particularly admired. Most significantly, the female members of families who patronized Sargent—the Vanderbilts, Astors, Whitneys, and their friends—took Delsarte classes from Henrietta Russell in the 1890s. According to one 1891 article, Mrs. Russell taught “these ladies how to bow, smile, walk and sit down.”

Certainly, his clients’ understanding of Delsarte could have influenced the artistic poses they assumed for their portraits. Most importantly, the Delsartian notion that one’s exterior appearance can alter one’s interiority would have been crucial for how Sargent’s clients might have understood the purpose of their portraits. Sargent’s sitters could have perceived that they might actually become what they appeared to be.

Thus far, I have outlined a culture of performance at the turn of the century in which performance itself was seen as a means of defining and clarifying selfhood. However, the success of the act, on stage, in “tableaux vivants,” or in pictures, was contingent on one’s exterior appearance being convincing and persuasive to an audience. This happened only in varying degrees in Sargent’s work.

Critical discourse about Sargent and his art

The reception of Sargent and his art can be understood within the context of typing and performance outlined above. The rest of this chapter considers several themes in the discourse about Sargent and his art that participate in and respond to the cultural climate described thus far. Namely, I examine how critics typed Sargent’s sitters, the
artist himself, and his artistic style; I also consider their response to the presumed artifice of his art.

My understanding of Sargent's reception is gleaned from a study of the exhibition reviews, articles, and books on Sargent's art published in England and America between 1885 and 1910. Sargent figured prominently in annual exhibition reviews of the Royal Academy and New Gallery in London as well as the Society of American Artists in New York. Commentary on his portrait paintings also cluster around the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the 1894 and 1895 "Fair Women" portrait exhibitions in London, New York, and Boston, as well as solo exhibitions at Boston's St. Botolph's Club in 1888, Boston's Copley Hall in 1899, and London's Carfax Gallery in 1903. The first Sargent monograph, published in 1903 with an introduction by his friend, Alice Meynell, also prompted numerous articles and reviews.

Contemporaries writing about Sargent ranged widely from news reporters and gossip columnists to academic scholars, literary writers, and curators. Some were fellow artists, others are friends and acquaintances. Some, like Royal Cortissoz and M.H. Spielmann, were perceived as conservative in their advocacy of academic styles. Others, like Charles Caffin, Roger Fry, and D.S. MacColl, were considered progressive modernists. The variety of observations and interpretations of Sargent's work by these critics over more than twenty years certainly cannot be overemphasized. It is significant, however, that despite the range of their artistic knowledge, theoretical sophistication, and aesthetic taste, Sargent's critics persistently focused on the issue of "realism" and the exercise of naming "types" from external appearances. In part, this is due to the fact that
Sargent’s critics often repeated their stories and comments from year to year, and they frequently reified each other’s assessments. The parameters of their discourse reflect and participate in the larger social historical discourses about typing and performance. In the discussion that follows, I highlight a few key commentators, namely Alice Meynell, Roger Fry, and D.S. MacColl, who best articulate key issues in the reception of Sargent and his art.\textsuperscript{59}

Typing Sargent’s sitters

As already mentioned, many art critics likened Sargent to a scientist based on the perception of the accuracy of his eye, presumably revealed in portraits that appeared lifelike.\textsuperscript{60} Significantly, Sargent’s paintings allowed viewers the opportunity to examine every detail of dress and facial structure in a way that obviously would have been inappropriate to do before the actual person. Many critics reported how they would visit a Sargent portrait three or four separate times, examining it from near and far, in the process of fine-tuning their evaluations. The fact that viewers could closely scrutinize such “accurate” depictions without compunction enabled their classifying efforts, and the presumed veracity of Sargent’s images empowered them to verify as natural the identity constructions his portraits seemed to uphold. They variously categorized his sitters by race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, occupation, and personality. Alice Meynell’s celebration of Sargent as a skilled delineator of “racial” types, in particular, offers a paradigmatic example of how critics facilely labeled Sargent’s portraits while remaining

20
vague about the evidence or process by which they arrived at their conclusions. An in-depth examination of Meynell’s text on Sargent, as exemplary of the way viewers described his portraits, illuminates the problems inherent in such classifying activities.

Sargent had suggested that Meynell, a friend and renowned author, write the introduction to the first book of his art—a large album of sixty-one full-page, black-and-white art reproductions published in London in 1903. Sargent expressed his delight in Meynell’s resulting essay in a letter to her and sent the album as a Christmas present to various friends and family. Sargent, as well as book reviewers, felt Meynell’s text to be a judicious, objective and thoughtful review of his art. As Sargent was satisfied with her essay, we can surmise his general consensus with her views of his work.61

Claiming that “Mr. Sargent has keen sight for the signs of the races,” Meynell spends much of her essay identifying various “racial types” in Sargent’s images.62 According to Meynell, Spain is embodied in El Jaleo, the Far East in Javanese Dancer, America in Theodore Roosevelt, and France in Madame X. El Jaleo, for example, conveys “something neither Italian nor Oriental, but proper to the spirit of the populace of this one peninsula, a somewhat deep-toned gaiety, a laugh in grave notes, and a kind of defiance, at least in the women”; Javanese Dancer conveys “the flat-footed, flat-handed action of the extreme East—a grace that has nothing to do with Raphael”; Roosevelt, in “the eye” and “the figure and head,” conveys “the national habit” of America; and Madame X signifies the French character in “the firm and solid profile, with decision, not weakness, in its receding forehead and small chin.” Madame Gautreau, the sitter for this last painting, however, was not French, but rather, an American residing in France.
Expatriates like her presented a challenge to notions of an essential national identity, yet Meynell erases Gautreau’s national ambiguity by declaring her physiognomically French. Variousy drawing on evidence of personality (“spirit”), body language (“grace”), and physical features (“the eye,” “the...profile”), Meynell ultimately sees these four images as uncomplicated, naturalized embodiments of race (nation), and has little trouble identifying the types these images were presumed to represent so completely.63

Significantly, the racial types most distant from Meynell’s own Anglo-Saxon heritage—those of Spain and the Dutch colony of Java—are representations of performers and are most blatantly artificial in their presentation. Their theatrical body language and costume distance these figures from their audience and objectify them as curious spectacles, in keeping with the way in which individuals like Sargent and Meynell understood other nations.64 Meynell, comparably, could have chosen a portrait of a performer—Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth—as the embodiment of her own English nation. Not only does she not do so, but, in contrast with all the other nations she names, she finds herself unable to point to a single image as a complete embodiment of English national character.65 Instead, she offers two different portraits as embodiments, not of England, but, more specifically, of Englishwomen. “There is one of Mr. Sargent’s portraits, a most charming one, of a lady very slightly and beautifully faded, sitting, with her slender hands in view. There is nothing to connect her with Italy, and the fancy is quite gratuitous; but she is so peculiarly English that one can hear her mispronounce, with a facile haste, some Italian word with a double consonant in it.” Meynell’s description of this portrait is so vague that it could be representative of any of a number
of images in the album, yet she insists the sitter’s image is so particular that we might imagine even her accent. Mrs. Charles Hunter is also put forth as typically English, because of her “suggestion of refinement and fresh air, courage, spirit, enterprise and wit.” In fact, Meynell gives a wider range of descriptors for this one Englishwoman than she does to any of the other “racial” types, and she suggests, with these two examples, a complexity and breadth of character denied to the portraits said to personify other nations.66

Meynell also insists that to have the “nicest sense of the aspect of an English lady” one has to have been “an Anglo-Saxon living abroad.” In other words, to truly understand and appreciate her “race,” one needs to be a member of that race and needs to be exposed to other races. Ironically, Meynell does not feel the same compunction about understanding other races. She does not suggest, for instance, that one needs to be Javanese in order to truly understand and appreciate the characteristics of the Javanese. In fact, she seems to have an easier time identifying the racial character of those most removed from her own Anglo-Saxon, northern European identity. In contrast to the French and English, for example, she claims, “the Hebrew portraits present more obviously, but also not less subtly, the characters of race; so do all those...in which Italians are studied” (emphasis mine). Significantly, she does not specify what those racial characteristics are; she leaves that to the imagination of her readers. Any specification could lead to counterclaims and contradictions. By simply declaring that racial characteristics are “obvious,” she structures her readers’ experience of Sargent’s portraits—
-readers are prepared to search among the book’s reproductions to locate these “obvious” but unnamed traits for themselves.67

After Meynell outlines the racial categories she claims Sargent epitomized so well, she then discusses Sargent’s portrayal of “personal traits,” those features she claims are so individual that they cannot be typed by pre-existing categories but instead serve to highlight the uniqueness of a sitter. Significantly, she illustrates her assertions with a consideration of Sargent’s portrait of Coventry Patmore, the famous Victorian writer and poet, who was her lover at the time.68 This portrait, unlike the previous images she discusses, is seen not as an embodiment of race or nation, but rather, as an image of individuality.

Most tellingly, she is not entirely pleased with Sargent’s rendering of Patmore. “Mr. Sargent takes at times a sudden view, and thus makes permanent, too singly, one aspect of an often altering face.”69 She wavers back and forth about the image, at first considering that perhaps others will see the portrait differently than she does, that perhaps capturing “one aspect” is a worthy aim for portraiture, but then again, perhaps not for the image of this great man. She clearly feels too close to Patmore, knows him too well, to be entirely satisfied with Sargent’s image as a likeness or actuality.70 In her description of Patmore, she vacillates between an urge to order and classify and an expression of discomfort indicative of modern ambivalence and the naming process described by Bauman.

Meynell’s essay reveals that the activity of typing becomes more problematic when she is confronted with images of people of her own national identity and those with
whom she is intimate. “Racial” categories are revealed as fictive constructs as they collapse under the weight of her knowledge about specific individuals within her own “race.” Her essay typifies the relative ease with which one is able to label those most different from oneself and the difficulty in labeling people with whom one most identifies.

Following Meynell’s lead, American critics like Christian Brinton, William Coffin, and Charles Caffin also noted Sargent’s “keen eye for race distinctions.” Critics were not always so sure, however, of the racial type presented in Sargent’s portraits. One reviewer, for example, in describing a portrait of Sargent’s friend, Flora Priestley, stated, “whether American or Japanese it is hard to say.” (Priestley was in fact neither. She was a British expatriate, born in Florence, raised in Nice, and educated in Paris.) Nonetheless, even this comment suggests that the exercise of reading “race” in Sargent’s portraits was a common one throughout the time period under discussion. In succeeding chapters, I examine specific works of art by Sargent that suggest how Sargent responds to and participates in this discourse of typing.

Defining Sargent’s nationality

Art critics’ obsession with typing is perhaps no better exemplified than in the amount of ink spilt in attempts to label Sargent’s nationality, often in order to claim him for their own country. Sargent had ties to at least five countries: he was born and raised in Italy; his parents were American; he did his artistic training in France; he painted like the Spanish artist, Velasquez; and he lived much of his life in England. Sargent, however,
always claimed his identity as American. In 1907, he even turned down King Edward VII's offer of knighthood, choosing, instead, to maintain his American citizenship. Yet while his work brought him to America more frequently and for longer durations in the last decades of his life, he never made a home there. His claims to American citizenship aside, his expatriate lifestyle on both sides of the Atlantic led critics to debate at length whether his art and his personality were essentially American, French, or British. While Meynell and others seemed to easily identify national (or "racial") traits in many of Sargent's sitters, Sargent's interstitial position in terms of nationality provided a challenge to this popular pastime.\textsuperscript{75}

Commentators differed in their conclusions about Sargent's manner and appearance. Evan Mills, for example, gave a detailed description of Sargent's personal traits as exemplary of a "well-bred Englishman":

Mr. Sargent, although born of American parents and warmly claimed as an American in this country, has none of the traits that one would ordinarily look for as indicative of his nationality. Judging from his speech, manner, gait, and the countless little tricks peculiar to each country, Mr. Sargent appears to be a well-bred Englishman. He is phlegmatic and anything but brilliant in conversation, lacking totally the verve and quickness of adaptability that make the typical American interested and interesting anywhere and in any company. Bashful and retiring, he has no presence, and cannot collect his thoughts when suddenly called upon. Physically, also, he would pass for an Englishman, being thick in the shoulders, tall, florid in complexion, and bearing the marks about his eyes of full living.\textsuperscript{76}

Mills' list of American traits seem laudable compared to the traits Mills finds "foreign" in Sargent. Writing for an American audience, Mills doubtless did not need to worry that his biased stereotypes would be ill-received.
Sargent's childhood friend, Vernon Lee, had had a different view of Sargent's manners years earlier. She wrote to her mother in the early 1880s, "John is very stiff, a sort of completely accentless mongrel...rather French, faubourg sort of manners." Another friend, writing after his death, described Sargent's conversation as full of "deep-toned gayety [sic]"; this writer thus recalled the very words Meynell had chosen in defining the specifically Spanish "spirit" of La Carmencita. An American publication, on the other hand, implied that a specifically "American" bearing of "sturdy and patriotic manliness" was inbred in Sargent, and it concluded that he was "an American in everything except the accidents of birth and residence, and perhaps, some may say, in his art." 

Sargent's artistic style was also invoked as evidence of nationality, yet at times, writers even contradicted themselves from article to article. The English expatriate Charles Caffin, for example, labeled Sargent's artistic "versatility" as "American" in one text and "French" in another text. In his 1902 book, American Masters of Painting, Caffin began his entry on Sargent, "How shall one describe the method of John Sargent? It reveals the alertness and versatility of the American Temperament" (emphasis mine). In another article published by him one year later, however, Caffin changed his mind: "They [Sargent's portraits] lack the depth of seriousness of the Englishman's, the psychological insight of the German's, their manner and spirit is French, brilliantly versatile and epigrammatic" (emphasis mine). He then qualified this declaration, by stating, "Yet in grasp of facts as well as in mastery of style they pass far beyond such portrayals of modish millinery as Carolus and his kind affect, and equally stop short of
the excessive actuality of Boldini. They reflect always his refined taste, as exacting as it is discreet.” Having declared Sargent’s art as French, Caffin began to back away from such a definitive statement to end by tautologically claiming that his style was simply due to his “refined taste.”

American writer Christian Brinton also changed his interpretation of Sargent’s presumably unbiased observation of his sitters. In 1906, repeating the arguments of other critics, Brinton claimed that Sargent’s “objectivity” was due to the fact that he was a cosmopolitan who lacked ties to any one nation. Two years later, however, Brinton declared that “the real racial basis of his nature” had been overlooked by his cosmopolitanism, and that Sargent’s “lack of marked bias” was due, in fact, to his American instincts.

Like Meynell’s text about Sargent’s sitters, the inconsistencies and contradictions in writers’ attempts to match Sargent’s character and art to notions of an essential nationality or “race” suggest the constructedness of these very concepts. The activity of identifying national traits seems to have been prompted, to a level not seen in descriptions of other artists, by Sargent’s very resistance to categorization. Bauman’s theory of modern ambivalence is thus at work here, as Sargent’s expatriate life-style, offering “the possibility of assigning [him] to more than one category [of nationality],” triggers ambivalence which prompts various classifying efforts, which, in turn, produces further ambivalence and “yet more classifying effort.”
But is he imaginative?

Giving Sargent’s art a stylistic label seemed an easier task, however. Trained in the Parisian atelier of Carolus Duran and influenced by Claude Monet’s Impressionism, Sargent was labeled a “realist” or an “Impressionist.” Some critics, however, questioned his ability to be imaginative and poetic—attributes deemed crucial to artistic greatness.

One painting provides an apt illustration of this issue. Mannikin in the Snow (Fig. 4) of 1889 depicts a single figure in a tattered red jester’s suit standing forlorn, directly facing us in the snow. The figure’s featureless face and lifeless stance lend a melancholy, bleak mood to the picture, reinforced by the gray stone walls and houses that serve as backdrop. The figure has often been identified as Pistol from Shakespeare’s The Merry Wives of Windsor, Henry IV, and Henry V. Upon closer inspection, however, we can see a wooden stand between the figure’s two legs, revealing him as a mannikin propped on a clothes horse. Sargent and fellow artist Edwin Austin Abbey had set up the mannikin outside a window after a snowstorm so that they could paint an outdoor scene while remaining comfortably warm inside. Historians like Royal Cortissoz have celebrated the fact that Abbey, in painting the subject, transformed the mannikin into a living, singing troubadour. Cortissoz understood Abbey’s choice as giving “free play to his imagination” by endowing “a senseless thing with life,” whereas Sargent, by contrast, had merely “made a record of exactly what he saw,” an accusation that has been made about Sargent’s works throughout his career. Although we do not have other responses to this particular painting, Sargent’s defenders would likely have argued that even in his

29
decision to paint the mannikin as mannikin, Sargent made choices about the scale of his work, his viewing angle, and the parameters of his composition that show his "imagination." The choices he made resulted in an image that suggests an imaginary narrative before it declares the reality of the artifice.

The Englishman Roger Fry, however, would have agreed with Cortissoz. Fry's continual public attack on Sargent's presumed lack of "imagination" culminated in his infamous 1927 declaration that Sargent was "striking and undistinguished as an illustrator and non-existent as an artist." By this time, Sargent was dead, and Fry had completed a distinguished career as a regular art critic for various English publications and as the curator of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Most notably, he had organized two landmark exhibitions in London of Post-Impressionist paintings in 1910 and 1912 that introduced Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and other modernist artists to the English public. A painter himself, Fry was considered avant-garde in his championing of formalist aesthetics. His public condemnation of Sargent relegated the painter as a "has been," whose works were "superficial" and devoid of ideas, meaning, and "esthetic values" important in the art Fry championed.

Fry's conclusions about Sargent's artistic merit had solidified over the years that he had written about Sargent in the press. Reviewing the annual art exhibitions of the Royal Academy and New Gallery for The Athenaeum between 1901 and 1906, Fry (like other critics) focused a large portion of his attention on Sargent's paintings, finding them, generally speaking, the best of a mediocre lot. In 1901, for instance, Fry declared, "Sargent dominates the present show as probably no one man has ever dominated it.
before." He was openly admiring of Sargent's "strenuous grip of the observed fact" and found that success did not spoil him; Fry was particularly impressed that despite Sargent's prodigious output, his work was never "tired," but always "strong" and "sincere." Fry was convinced that among the works exhibited at the Royal Academy during these years, only Sargent's works were likely to be remembered in posterity. While Fry's admiration was foregrounded in these reviews, he consistently complained that Sargent's "observation" was "unguided by imagination or a love of beauty." According to Fry, Sargent was a "practitioner" rather than a "poet"—he merely painted what he saw before him, and any visual interest or compositional successes were due to the felicitous arrangement of what was simply before his eyes.

That Fry, the critic most associated with avant-garde formalism in England during the early twentieth century, codified this argument about Sargent's work is particularly telling, for this was not the first time such an argument had been made. About a decade earlier, in 1891, William Blake Richmond, an English painter associated not with the avant-garde, but rather, with the traditional values of the Academy, had declared the following:

> Portrait-painting has nothing to do with real Art. What is portrait-painting but copying what you see?...Art is not what you copy, but what you create...Think of Velasquez's portraits. Why are they so much admired by the present perverse generation? Because they are so thoroughly realistic. Velasquez painted what he saw with his outward eyes, and he painted it exactly. But as for imagination, he had none; and from the truly artistic point of view he is, therefore, not one of the greatest painters at all.

The similarities in Richmond and Fry's arguments suggest surprising ideological affinities between the promoters of academic art and avant-garde formalism.
opposite ends in the continuum of aesthetic politics at the turn of the century, both Richmond and Fry championed the “ideal” and “poetic” to denounce the tenets of realism.

D.S. MacColl, the English art critic and admirer of Velasquez, was outraged by Richmond’s 1891 claims. An outspoken critic of the Academy and a champion of Impressionism then considered avant-garde, MacColl challenged Richmond and made an eloquent defense of Velasquez in a column for The Spectator. He argued that Velasquez’s “imagination” and artistry rested in his ability, not to “invent” pictures from his head, but to “discover” pictures in life. Proficient technique was not enough to be an artist, MacColl allowed. While Velasquez’s technique was impressive, his genius was located in his “vision”—his ability, not only to replicate what he saw, but also to choose his angle, to adjust his lighting, and thus to catch “some moment of the brute object when it is transfigured into a design and a radiance.” Velasquez, argued MacColl, “[stood] for all the characteristically modern painting that Mr. Richmond disallow[ed].” This art, according to MacColl, was:

...the art not of invention so much as of recognition, not of design but of accident,—it is the art of the accident of light...It considers that its business is to paint, not its own soul, but other people’s bodies...To the spectator who has no habit of eye for the charm of visible matter, such painting must appear unmeaning (as it is). He will see that it can do no good (as it will not); he will seek for an idea, and be vainly offered a sensation; he is accustomed to find his interest in causes, and is put off with an effect. But to any one with an eye for the visible, with the habit of seeing pictures where they are, and that is everywhere, how curious sounds the talk of realism as a name of scorn, of materialist as of something base, of the mere outward eye as of something best employed when shut!...he hears men talking of how he ought to be inventing, he, the explorer of undiscovered countries that lie within two moments in the pitch of light, a thought this way or that of colour, and that no man before him has seen, or will after.
So might one turn a cold ear to offers of a post in Cloud-cuckoo-town, who had just sighted the palaces and throne of El Dorado.

MacColl then went on to emphasize that “Nature” itself provided more beauty than an artist’s mind or soul. MacColl’s defense of Velasquez in the face of Richmond’s attack could have served as a defense of Sargent from Fry’s comparable attack decades later.93

In 1891, MacColl did use the example of Sargent’s art as ammunition against Richmond’s views, for Sargent was commonly viewed as a contemporary Velasquez. A month after his defense of Velasquez, MacColl wrote a review of the New Gallery exhibition in which he argued for Sargent’s genius in the same terms that he had argued for Velasquez’s genius. He pitted what he called the “Expressionist” aims of Burnes-Jones, Richmond’s proclaimed favorite contemporary artist, against the “Impressionist” aims of Sargent, and in passing, made a dig at Richmond’s painting, stating of it, “the expressive note, the look in faces and figures of something imposed by imagination, is by no means so strong” [emphasis mine]. Of Sargent, MacColl stated in this article, “It is customary to dismiss art of this kind as ‘mere technique.’” He went on to compare the work of J.J. Shannon and Sargent to suggest that the former’s paintings may be exemplary of “mere technique,” but Sargent’s “execution is of another order.” MacColl proclaimed Sargent’s “genius” and “invention” by pointing out that Sargent’s image was not “a string of detached facts, but facts ordered with such justice of relation and relief, such propriety of emphasis and intonation, that an impression of truth, and of truth as a whole, [was] produced.”94
In his review of the 1893 New Gallery exhibition, MacColl was still responding to Richmond’s 1891 claims. MacColl devoted half of his review to defining Sargent’s “imagination,” and it is worth quoting here at length. In praising Mrs. Hugh Hammersley (Fig. 29), MacColl said:

To indicate so much and subordinate so well is a high exercise of pictorial imagination...It is a work of the imagination that sees its object for what it is, that presses close to it, that does not pass it off under some alien form of poetry or misfitting convention. It is an imagination with the courage to treat the mondaine on her own admirable terms of fashion and elegance...When Mr. Hallé paints a modern lady...he hankers after the poetry of Mr. Burne-Jones or something equally malapropos; he tries to impose a mood upon her. Mr. Sargent sees before him a characteristic modern expression of life, and does not mix the drawing-room with Broceliande...I am aware that the term ‘imagination’ is often reserved for the attempt to put things into a curiously limited set of poetic frames. But surely nothing is less imaginative than poetry misapplied. To use verse, which is a highly special form of prose, where prose is more fitting; to use epic verse when there is nothing epic in the matter, is not to have imagination, but to want tact...if our portrait is to have any life at all, it must be the characteristic life of its subject. To accept that subject, to press close to it, to interpret the eternal beauty of life in a fresh disguise, and to fit to it the ever elastic accords of the picture art, is the task of the modern portrait-painter; and in the art of Boldini and of Sargent, something of this is done [emphases mine].

In the two reviews cited above, MacColl attempted to unlink the term “imagination” from the terms “poetry” and “invention” to argue for the legitimacy of Velasquez and Sargent’s portrait style as “imaginative.” He concluded his 1893 review with a manifesto of what modern portraiture should be. Portrait painters heeded his call, and the next two decades saw an increase in portraits in the style of Sargent and Boldini. However, when Fry began reviewing Sargent’s work several years later, he relinked “imagination” with
“poetry” and “invention” and returned to the argument that not only is painting from nature unimaginative, but the resulting image cannot be designated true “art.”

In the narrative that I have outlined, one might imagine that the critics MacColl and Fry would have little to do with one another, and likewise, that the artists Richmond and Sargent would not find common ground. Such was not the case, however. MacColl was not on friendly terms with a number of critics, but he and Fry were collegial correspondents and Fry was a consistent supporter and admirer of MacColl. According to Maureen Borland, for example, Fry gave a glowing review of MacColl’s 1902 book, *Nineteenth Century Art*, and was a witness for his support during the 1903 Chantrey Bequest inquiry.96 Their seemingly marked differences in opinion might be seen in light of one of MacColl’s letters to Fry, in which he states, “...there is something in journalism that forces the practitioner to burnish up points of differences as his brightest jewels...But all this is absurd to write about. It is the very devil to write articles at all, and the only way seems to be to sharpen a point of view against another. It is rather poisonous to the mind.”97 For both writers, Sargent’s art served as a means to promulgate the specific aesthetic values they promoted and on which they made their reputations. The reviews I have outlined above testify to the fact that qualitative descriptors like “imaginative” had no fixed meaning; labels could be used and manipulated to serve different purposes.

Just as the critics MacColl and Fry were friends despite differences of opinion with regard to Sargent and aesthetic criteria, Richmond and Sargent became friends as well, despite opposing artistic ideologies about portraiture. By 1910, Richmond and Sargent
were holiday painting companions. Richmond and his wife stayed with Sargent and other friends and family members at the Villa Torre Galli near Florence that fall. They all apparently “got on well together.”98 The Richmonds figured in several of Sargent’s genre paintings of that year. In fact, Sargent complained to Vernon Lee, “So many studies have been started here with the Richmonds figuring in corners that I feel tired.”99 Significantly, rather than being central to his subject, the Richmonds are relegated to the “corners” of his works. In these “corners” they serve not only as aesthetic elements in his design but, as we shall discuss in chapter four, they can also be understood as representations of a specific aesthetic stance in relation to realism and the imagination.

By the time Sargent was painting with Richmond in 1910, Sargent, too, was an academician, having been elected a full member of the Royal Academy in 1897 and having taught classes at the Royal Academy Schools. He had all but abandoned the portrait work that made him famous, and instead, was devoting himself to genre paintings and mural projects. Richmond, in disparaging portraiture, had cited Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel as exemplary of the highest form of creative, imaginative art and had stated that he hoped to write a book examining the “whole system of thought” in the chapel ceiling.100 While we do not know whether he shared those thoughts with Sargent in their many opportunities for conversation, recent scholars have suggested that Sargent culled from Michelangelo’s Sistine ceiling for sources for many of his mural figures.101 As Burns has stated, and Promey has convincingly shown, the “Boston Public Library decorations were an elaborate attempt to invent another Sargent--a deep, intellectual, transcendent, philosophical one.”102 His other mural projects participate in this enterprise. Likewise,
as discussed in Chapter Four, Sargent sought, on a smaller scale, to refashion his artistic identity through costume pictures of friends and family.

Revisiting “Madame X” and artifice

Significantly, the one painting by Sargent that Fry had found truly exceptional was Madame X. In a 1903 review of Meynell’s book in which Madame X was reproduced, Fry had declared it the one image that appeared “artistic” rather than merely photographic. Two years later, Sargent decided to exhibit the portrait for the first time since its 1884 sensational debut. In 1915, seeming to agree with Fry’s assessment, Sargent wrote, “I suppose it is the best thing I have done.”

On the one hand, Fry’s approval of Madame X seems perfectly in keeping with his aesthetic tenets. As Albert Boime has discussed, the figure’s exaggerated body posture manifests Sargent’s interest in style and artistry over realism. On the other hand, Fry’s approval of Madame X is curious in light of his displeasure with the “self-assertive bravura of pose, that effrontery of the arriviste, which Mr. Sargent has at times noted with such cruel accuracy.” Certainly Madame X would have been one of the first paintings Fry’s readers would have called to mind in this context. Fry’s approval of the portrait is also unexpected considering his consistent censure of obvious artifice. For Fry, an “artistic” work was beautiful and poetic, an “artificial” one, by contrast, communicated nothing but its own shallowness. While reviews of the painting in the
1880s had focused on the painting’s artifice, Fry, almost twenty years later, labeled this portrait “artistic,” not “artificial.”

Although *Madame X* was exempt from Fry’s condemnation, Fry denounced other Sargent portraits for their obvious artifice. While he felt Sargent’s realism was the sign of a mere illustrator, he, paradoxically, was virulent in attacking those works by Sargent that made obvious the artifice of his art-making enterprise. In 1902, for example, Fry criticized *The Acheson Sisters* (Fig. 5), saying:

In this picture we feel at once the artificiality, the elaborate mechanism of the arrangement, precisely because the artifice stops short with the general idea. We feel the constraint that these modern ladies were under when he induced them to behave with the aimless elegance of eighteenth-century beauties. Their habitual gestures would, we feel, be more prompt, more decided, less consciously effective. The lady who plucks the oranges would actually do so with a more nonchalant gesture, and she who holds them in her lap has here the air of appealing with the question how long she must remain in a position which she feels to be constrained and possibly ridiculous.107

As subsequent chapters will detail, other critics were comparably uncomfortable with portraits in which Sargent made apparent the seam between realism and artifice. Specifically, as I have already suggested at the beginning of this chapter, critics were disquieted by obviously staged portraits of sitters artificially costumed, self-consciously performing a role that seemed unnatural. In an anti-theatrical culture, critics felt that Sargent’s artistic performances should at least appear natural.
Imaging Sargent

In 1907, towards the end of his career as a portraitist, two images of the artist were presented to the public: a caricature by Sargent's friend, Max Beerbohm, of 1907 (Fig. 6) and a formal self-portrait by Sargent of 1906 (Fig. 7). These images convey very distinct “Sargents” and highlight differences between the way his audience constructed his identity and the way he constructed himself.

Max Beerbohm's cartoon, Mr. Sargent at work, suggests Sargent's performative nature. In describing the cartoon to his future wife, Beerbohm stated, “I have just done a rather good ‘Mr. Sargent at Work’ -- more or less suggested by a musical party he gave some nights ago. Two fiddlers and a 'cellist in the foreground, and a duchess on a platform in the background, and he in between, dashing at a canvas, with a big and swilling brush in either hand.” Beerbohm was particularly fond of this cartoon; it formed the frontispiece of his volume, A Book of Caricatures, published that same year. In a review of Beerbohm's book, The Spectator praised this cartoon, saying, “The authentic spirit of Mr. Sargent’s art is shown in the magnificently distorted energy with which he is assailing his canvas.”

Beerbohm focused on exaggerating physiognomic differences for expressive effect. The long, hooked noses and “hirsute variations,” as Beerbohm called them, of the musicians defined them, for a British audience, as ethnically “other” and contrasted with the delicate features of the Anglo-Saxon duchess. Sargent, while immaculately dressed in a tailcoat, appears loutish or brutish with bulging eyes, bulbous nose, low brow, and

39
lunging, corpulent body. On the two-dimensional picture surface, his hands are enormous in comparison to those of the duchess. Yet the brushes he holds exactly mimic her hands' small size and limp pose of refined delicacy. Sargent may be brutish, the cartoon suggests, but his brushes imply that he paints with the refinement of a duchess. His hands and brushes, on the two-dimensional picture surface, seem to be holding the duchess' robe together. Specifically, the shirt cuff of Sargent's upper arm appears, visually, as if a fastener for her cloak, while the brush held by his lower arm bridges the opening of her wrap and seems to help bring the two ends together. In this way, Sargent appears responsible for her pictorial arrangement. Sargent’s position in relation to the musicians and the platform make him appear like an orchestra conductor whose vigorous arm motions are responsible for the music played and, consequently, the operatic singing we might imagine erupting at any moment from the posed prima donna on stage. In other words, it is Sargent who is masterminding the whole event. The cartoon proclaims his studio as theatre, and his work as performance. It is a performance that is seen as both culturally refined and physically brutish.

Beerbohm thus effectively visualizes the public construction of Sargent’s artistic persona. As we have seen, writers focusing on Sargent’s visual accuracy had likened him to a scientist, a civilized, educated professional with a logical mind and cool distance. When discussing Sargent’s technical execution, however, art critics had evoked more physical, less refined character types. His execution was variously described as “careless,” “sloppy,” “devouring,” “scornful,” and “violent.” In his bravura brushwork and bold color choices, Sargent was likened to a vulgar brute, a wrestler, a conjurer or
trickster, a knife-thrower, and even a rapist. Even the seemingly more negative metaphors that suggested Sargent’s misogynistic cruelty, however, were often evoked to emphasize Sargent’s greatness—his audacity and his fearsome, awe-inspiring powers. Ultimately, critics admired Sargent for combining two seemingly disparate modes: cool, scientific accuracy and brash physical execution. He was thus viewed as both civilized and primitive, mental and physical, intellectual and instinctual, and as such, perhaps could potentially be all things to all people. Beerbohm’s portrayal of Sargent as a “performer,” embodies these seemingly polar attributes.

While cartoonists depicted Sargent on a number of occasions, few artists painted or sculpted Sargent’s portrait. Many more portraits exist of comparably renowned contemporaneous painters like James McNeill Whistler and William Merritt Chase. Sargent’s cousin, Mary Hale, recalled after Sargent’s death that he “disliked being drawn or painted or modelled.”\footnote{112} Even the few oil paintings he produced of himself were done, not by his own choice, but at the behest of art officials. His 1906 portrait, for instance, was requested by the Uffizi Gallery for its collection of artists’ self-portraits.\footnote{113} A commentary discussing this image noted, “‘What a modest little man!’ is the thought that may occur to you, looking at the likeness of the most prominent portrait painter of our age.”\footnote{114} This writer was struck by the relative lack of vanity exhibited in Sargent’s self-portrait in comparison with self-portraits by other artists such as Rembrandt. The opposite of Whistler, whose hermetic, ethereal pictures seemed to belie his flamboyant persona, Sargent’s apparently unassuming persona seemed to belie his flamboyant paintings.\footnote{115} While \textit{The Spectator} felt Beerbohm had captured “the authentic spirit” of
Sargent’s performative art, an alternative persona was conveyed in Sargent’s 1906 self-portrait. This self-portrait, while relatively modest, was also, however, a “performance” in which Sargent staked his claims about who he was as an artist.

Painted months before Beerbohm’s caricature, this self-portrait, the largest he ever did, shows him at his most formal. His dark suit and light cravat draw attention to his face. His infamous brushwork is displayed to greatest effect, not in the surface patterns of his attire, but in the facets of his face. Only the small red dot of his Legion of Honor ribbon in his left lapel momentarily distracts our attention.\(^\text{116}\) He has positioned himself in relation to a light source so that the far side of his face remains in shadow, save for an eye which appears circled in light. As such, it emerges from the shadows of his face with unusual penetration. Sargent’s reputation as someone who paints what he sees, who is a probing observer of people and life, is confirmed in this portrait by a visualization of penetrating sight. This portrait seems to suggest, however, that it is not just his celebrated brushwork and sharp eye that are responsible for his artistic achievement.

Individual strokes of paint, that index his hand at work, model his forehead and articulate a brow bathed in light and furrowed in seeming concentration. Hand and mind conflate with these strokes, as they simultaneously articulate his handiwork and the site of his mental processes.

Highlighting his mind, Sargent’s portrait can be understood as an artistic statement that engages the very issue Fry and MacColl debated with respect to Sargent’s greatness. Responding to critics who felt his art exemplified a skillful eye and hand without a creative mind, an imagination, that distinguished an artist from an illustrator, Sargent, with
his self-portrait, declares that his work is not just the result of the eye and hand, but also,
most notably, of the mind. MacColl could have argued that Sargent’s specific choice to
highlight the site of creativity testifies to an imagination at work.

This self-portrait also suggests that while the mind is important, what the eye
sees cannot be ignored. In the lower left corner of the painting, an odd, thinly painted
diagonal shape extends from his elbow. One might rationalize it as an armrest, except that
no comparable arm rest appears where we might imagine it in the right corner of the
composition. It might also represent a number of other things—a railing, wall molding, or
shadow perhaps, but no other visual evidence within the picture upholds any specific
possible interpretation. This shape does, however, assume the position his arm could
have taken as he painted this portrait. Still, Sargent declares that this is not his arm. His
arm, instead, falls closely at his side and even curves inward so that we can imagine his
hands are clasped in front of him. By painting his arms in this way, he creates the fiction
that he was not actually painting, and he thus shows himself capable of changing visual
information for the sake of the image. He does not, however, abandon what he has seen
while painting the portrait. He gives his painting arm presence in the form of a supposed
armrest—one that acts, visually, as a third arm, reaching out, we imagine, to paint this
portrait. With this small passage, we see Sargent equivocating, having it both ways: he’s
both accurate (in suggesting what he actually saw) and imaginative (in painting what he
did not see).

Significantly, this self-portrait brought about his resolution to quit painting
portraits of others. “I have long been sick and tired of portrait painting,” he recalled, “and
when I was painting my own ‘mug’ [the one discussed above], I firmly decided to refuse any more commissions for oil portraits and to devote myself to other branches of art.”

One can only speculate why painting his own self, in particular, prompted this resolve. Perhaps he was uncomfortable with the results of painting “what he saw” of his own physical appearances. Perhaps he found the resulting portrayal too penetrating or too inexact. Perhaps he recognized that painting how he looked limited how he represented himself. Perhaps he was confronted by the inability of any single ‘mug’ to represent the multivalencies and complexities of self.

* * *

Each new painting that Sargent publicly exhibited operated in dialogue with writers’ most recent discussions about his art. Sargent’s artistic choices can be understood as responses both to claims that his works presented essential “types” and to assertions that his works were realistic but unimaginative. As subsequent chapters will discuss, Sargent answered these claims with images that offered multivalent meanings and associations which served a number of different functions. On the one hand, they potentially appealed to a wide range of viewers by embodying different, even contradictory social or aesthetic values. On the other hand, they thwarted viewers’ evaluative processes and thus challenged the assumptions behind those very processes. Ultimately, the multivalencies in his art challenged notions of essential racial, social, and artistic identities.

Throughout this dissertation, I assume Sargent intended the meanings I attach to his works. It is, of course, difficult to argue this position when I suggest that many of his
messages were subconscious or subliminal. It is doubly difficult when Sargent, himself,
was silent about his works and their meanings. However, my assumption is based on two
premises. First, because of his strong technical training, impressive knowledge of past
art, and intense interest in the visual culture of his time, Sargent would have been aware of
the implications and effects of his aesthetic decisions. Each choice he made concerning
palette, style, subject, and design was an informed one; he intended every stroke.
Second, as we have evidence of the concerns and interests of those with whom Sargent
chose to spend his time, we can surmise that Sargent shared their particular interests to
the extent that the visual structures of his works support this supposition. In other
words, the evidence of the works themselves, in relation to evidence about Sargent’s
social milieu, can tell us much about his intentions, even if Sargent himself did not.

I also assume that my interpretations of Sargent’s works would at least have been
available to Sargent’s audience, for I rely on visual evidence garnered through specific
interpretative activities that turn-of-the-century viewers would also have practiced when
reading a work of art.118 The critical discourse on western art at this time suggests that
audiences not only would have read signs of appearance as indicators of identity, they
also would have engaged in the following three activities relevant to the way I read
Sargent’s portraits. First, they would have searched for narrative or meaning consistent
with accumulated visual clues such as settings, props, and costumes. Relatedly, they
would have read visual correspondences of color and form as symbolic correspondences
of meaning. Finally, they would have looked for a coherent environment (based on an
appearance of linear perspective), where figures would seem to actually occupy their

45

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space. Sargent’s artistic style provided a challenge to some of these activities. Many of his works, in resisting viewers’ conventional readings of images, prompted an intensification of critical discussion about how art should be interpreted and judged. The implications of Sargent’s choices, for viewers, extended beyond the parameters of a discourse about artistic techniques of color, form, and composition to engage issues of identity construction as well.\textsuperscript{119}

In the next chapter, I consider how this is the case with one of his most renowned performance pieces, \textit{Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth}. Drawing on information about the stage rendition and costume for Lady Macbeth and Sargent’s engagement with British aestheticism, this chapter argues that Sargent created his image of Ellen Terry to present his own statement about the nature of art and personal identity. Chapter Three analyses a few examples of Sargent’s portraits of Jews and aristocrats to consider how such images prompted typing while, at the same time, exposed the limits of this very activity. Chapter Four considers Sargent’s series of genre paintings of family and friends draped in Turkish costume and cashmere shawls. This chapter explores how role-play, art historical referencing, and sublimated sexual suggestions functioned to define Sargent’s position within the larger aesthetic debate about the role of realism and imagination in art. Presenting ambiguities, Sargent’s paintings often confounded the assumption that essential selves can be discerned through a study of outward appearances. In declaring the artifice of their making, Sargent’s pictures suggested that performance, itself, is a necessity of representation.
Notes to Chapter 1


7. Ibid.


13. Ibid.


16. Vernon Lee, letter to her mother, 16 July 1885, quoted in Simpson 121.

17. For the most recent discussion of Sargent’s portrait of Isabella Stewart Gardner, see Ormond and Kilmurray 209-11.
18. The commission for The Sitwell Family, 1900, is one such instance. See Sir Osbert Sitwell, Left Hand, Right Hand (Boston, 1944) 246-292.


25. Butler, Gender Trouble viii.

26. See also Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds. Performativity and Performance (New York and London, 1995) 1-18, specifically, for a discussion of meanings of performance in both the deconstructive and theatrical sense.


33. Articles such as “How Character Forms the Face,” *Review of Reviews* Jan.-June 1894: 396, and “The Physical Basis of Character,” *Spectator* 29 Oct. 1904: 629-30, strove to pinpoint links between interiority and exteriority that served as a basis for stereotyping and essentializing identities. A 1907 article in the *Spectator* entitled “The Changelessness of Character” declared that character was “the most permanent element in life,” a perhaps reassuring conclusion in the face of modern circumstances (*Spectator* 6 Apr. 1907: 526). Another article published in the magazine that same month, however, came to a different conclusion. In describing “A Vanishing Type,” the article suggested that national types—linked to notions of “character”—were changing and even disappearing (*Spectator* 20 April 1907: 611-12). Simpson 40-41, speaking specifically about the 1880s, has noted the tendency to classify art by nationality. See also Henri Frantz, “A French View of English Art of 1897,” *Magazine of Art* 1897: 169, and John Smith, “Some Plain Words on American Taste in Art,” *Magazine of Art* 1888: 114.


40. William Z. Ripley, The Races of Europe (1899) 111, quoted in Stepan, 94.


42. Stepan 94.


45. William Archer, Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting (London, 1888), argued that good acting was the result of an actor actually feeling the emotions of the character he or she was playing.


49. See n. 46 for publicity about costume events. Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 1905, Intro. Anita Brookner (New York, 1995) 196. Significantly, the cover of this edition shows a portrait by Sargent of Elizabeth Chanler, meant, in this context, to represent Wharton’s main character, Lily Bart.


51. Adam 31.

52. Nina Auerbach, *Private Theatricals: The Lives of Victorians* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1990) 4. Anti-theatricality is not a phenomenon specific to Victorian England. Comparable expressions against theatre can be found in writings from St. Augustine to Rousseau. I thank Elizabeth Hutchinson for this point. Sennett, 174-6, has also suggested that the nineteenth-century demand for greater “realism” in theatre is related to this phenomenon of anti-theatricality.


57. Meyer, 79, discusses Wilde’s introduction to Delsarte through Mackaye in the fall of 1882 and argues for “the influence of Delsarte in the formation of Wilde’s homoerotic strategies.” For Sargent’s admiration of Ruth St. Denis, see Dini 79.


60. Writers often went beyond noting his accurate likenesses to claim that being with Sargent’s portraits was like being with actual, live people. For example, one critic, recalling the 1899 Copley Hall exhibition of Sargent’s portraits, stated, “I remember with what human interest the hall seemed filled. It was as though one were witnessing some great levee or other ceremonial, crowded with beautiful and distinguished personalities and murmurous with living voices” (Royal Cortissoz, “John S. Sargent,” *Scribner’s Magazine* Nov. 1903: 529). Fairbrother notes that like going to a wax museum, the public looked at Sargent’s images to marvel at the effect of being among live people. (Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent and America* 109-110).


63. A. Meynell A3 and B1. Typical of many turn-of-the-century writers, Meynell uses the word “race” interchangeably with “nationality,” as the two terms were linked with notions of geographical origin. (See Stepan for a discussion of the discourse on race in Great Britain.) While beyond the scope of this chapter, the particular gendering of nations implicit in Meynell’s choice of portrait embodiments is worth further analysis.

64. For the performing of nations as curious spectacles, see literature on world’s fairs, most notably Greenhalgh and Rydell.

65. Part of her difficulty, of course, may have been due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of images in the book were of English sitters.


68. Lomax and Ormond, 73, claim Meynell was "the last great passion of [Patmore's] life."


70. Cortissoz, "John S. Sargent" 526, echoes Meynell's sentiment. Like many art critics, Cortissoz was prompted to write this article on the occasion of Meynell's publication. Cortissoz contrasts what he sees as the accurate rendering of character in *Madame X* with the incomplete rendering of character in *Coventry Patmore*. While beyond the scope of this chapter, gender plays a role in critics' understanding of the completeness and accuracy of Sargent's portrayals.


74. In this, I join recent scholars such as Sally M. Promey, "Sargent's Truncated Triumph: Art and Religion at the Boston Public Library, 1890-1925," *Art Bulletin* 79.2 (June 1997): 241-47, and *Painting Religion* 219-25, who discusses the contemporary vocabulary of typing that informed Sargent's choices and viewers' reactions to key figures in the Boston Public Library murals, and Kathleen Adler, 83-96, who examines Sargent's portraits of the Wertheimer family within discourses about Jewish "types."

75. See Stanley Olson, "On the Question of Sargent's Nationality," *John Singer Sargent*, exh. cat. (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1986) 23-24, for an overview of Sargent's claims to American citizenship. Sargent's links with the southern European countries of Italy and Spain were deemed less significant to his "racial" character.


77. Vernon Lee, letter to her family, 16 June 1881, quoted in Ormond, "John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee" 165.


85. Fry wrote art reviews for the *Athenaeum, Burlington Magazine, Nation*, and *New Statesman* and was curator at the Metropolitan Museum from 1906-1908.

86. Fry, “John S. Sargent” 110 and 66. My information about Fry is gleaned from Falkenheim.

87. Donald Laing identifies the unsigned art reviews in the *Athenaeum* from 1901-1906 as authored by Roger Fry. See Laing, Roger Fry, *An Annotated Bibliography of the Published Writings* (New York, 1979) xi-xiii, for justifications of attributions.


90. [Fry], “Royal Academy,” 11 May 1901: 601.

91. [Roger Fry], “Mr. Sargent at the Carfax Gallery,” *Athenaeum* 23 May 1903: 665. See also [Roger Fry], “The Royal Academy,” *Athenaeum* 7 May 1904: 597-8; 6 May 1905: 567; 5 May 1906: 553; and 4 May 1907: 547.

93. All quotes are from D.S.M[acColl], “Mr. W.B. Richmond on Portrait,” Spectator 25 Apr. 1891: 594. Borland, 70, outlines the Richmond and MacColl exchange.

94. All quotes are from D.S.M[acColl], “The New Gallery,” Spectator 16 May 1891: 693.


97. D.S. MacColl, letter to Roger Fry, quoted in Borland 120.


100. M[acColl], “Richmond on Portrait,” 595.


102. Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist 63; Promey, Painting Religion 30-36.

103. [Fry], Rev. of The Work of John S. Sargent, R.A. 724.

104. John Singer Sargent, letter to Edward Robinson, 8 January 1916, quoted in Simpson 121.

105. Boime 81-91.

106. [Fry], “The Royal Academy,” 10 May 1902: 600.

107. [Fry], “The Royal Academy,” 10 May 1902: 600.

108. Max Beerbohm, letter to his future wife, 29 March 1907, quoted in Rupert Hart-Davis, A Catalogue of the Caricatures of Max Beerbohm (London, 1972) 126. For a complete listing of Beerbohm’s cartoons of Sargent, see Hart-Davis 126-7.


115. For a discussion of Whistler’s public persona, see Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist 221-246. On Sargent’s reticence and love of privacy, see Evan Charteris, 1927, and Cecilia Beaux, 1930, quoted in Trevor Fairbrother, John Singer Sargent (New York, 1994) 142; Kilmurray and Ormond 16; and Promey, Painting Religion 194-96, 201, 252-71, 311.

116. The latest discussion of this portrait does not mention the red circle and claims that “he wears none of the honours his success had brought him” (Kilmurray and Ormond 167). The red circle, while less obvious, does seem comparable to the red Legion of Honor ribbon represented in the portrait Sargent painted of his teacher, Carolus-Duran of 1879. The French government had made Sargent a chevalier of the Legion of Honor in 1889 at the Paris Universelle Exposition (Carter Ratcliffe, John Singer Sargent (New York, 1982) 121).


118. By using the word “reading,” I do not mean to posit an exact analogy between the activities of processing visual images and written texts. Rather, I am suggesting a visual
activity that goes beyond passively viewing an image to engaging in interpretive processes, consciously or subconsciously.

119. My general conclusions about viewing activities have been gleaned from the discourse in annual art reviews in publications such as the Spectator, the Athenaeum, and the Saturday Review, geared towards an educated, upper and middle class readership. For a discussion of the circular way in which viewers “constitute” images, “while images ‘interpellate’ viewing subjects,” as well as a specific consideration of the viewing processes practiced in late nineteenth-century America, see Michael Leja, “Modernism’s Subjects in the United States,” Art Journal 55.2 (Summer 1996): 65-72.
Chapter 2
Performing Identity in Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth

Sargent’s painting Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth (Fig. 8) created a sensation when first exhibited in 1889 at the New Gallery in London. Ellen Terry, who had performed Lady Macbeth at London’s Lyceum Theatre that year, wrote in one diary entry, “Sargent’s picture is talked of everywhere and quarreled about as much as my way of playing the part.”1 The image portrays Terry crowning herself in a grand Napoleonic gesture in a costume designed by Alice Comyns Carr. In her moment of glory, Sargent’s painted character can be understood, in part, as an apt metaphor for the ambition and triumph of Sargent as he addressed his public audience.

Sargent’s public role as a portrait artist might be understood as comparable to Terry’s public role as an actress. Both Sargent and Terry strove to convincingly recreate, by artificial means, the character of specific individuals. Yet in doing so, they embedded their own personal concerns and interests into their ultimate interpretations of character. As both strove for public success, they were necessarily affected by their awareness of the desires of their particular audience. Ironically, their ultimate renditions of Lady Macbeth’s character were diametrically opposed. As Nina Auerbach has noted, Terry’s concentration on the interiority of Lady Macbeth resulted in a very different stage image from the one Sargent painted as he focused on the exteriority of her visual spectacle.2 Yet, as this chapter points out, both “performers,” through their rendering of Lady Macbeth, made comparable statements about the relationship between appearance and character and the nature of art-making itself.

Sargent sat with Carr and her husband in their theatre box on the opening night of Terry’s performance. Sargent’s hosts likely fueled his excitement over Terry’s visual impact. Carr, after all, had designed the costume responsible for Terry’s visual impact,
and her husband, Joseph, was co-director of the New Gallery where Sargent's portrait would ultimately have its debut. The three friends were part of a larger social circle of cosmopolitans in England who vacationed together and collaborated on various work projects. This extended circle of bohemian aesthetes, artists and literati included, among others, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, and Edward Burne-Jones, as well as Terry herself. Their friendships provided a mutual support system that enabled their various artistic, theatrical, and literary productions which, in turn, often served to promote publicly each other's works.

This chapter discusses how Sargent, in striving for a marketable picture, addressed two contemporary concerns. First, his image responded to fears and desires about changing gender roles and the relationship between femininity and power. Second, it addressed the desire for a recognizably and specifically “British” art. In addressing these two topics, Sargent presented his own statement about the nature of art and personal identity that 1) responded to the criticisms raised about his previous work and 2) destabilized categories of gender and artistic identity by revealing such categories as constructed performances. In order to understand Sargent's choices in creating Ellen Terry, I first situate Sargent within a social milieu engaged with issues of identity construction and British aestheticism. I then go on to discuss Terry's stage rendition and Carr's costume of Lady Macbeth. Albert Boime, focusing on issues of self-presentation and artifice, has already persuasively discussed Sargent's interest in aestheticism, his similarities to the aesthetes Wilde and Robert de Montesquiou, and the coincidence of his artistic subjects with themes from the novels of Wilde and James. This chapter extends Boime's discussion by specifically examining the way that Sargent addressed the relationship between appearance and character and between art and reality in Ellen Terry.
Performativity within Sargent’s social and cultural milieu

In contrast to the anti-theatrical climate outlined in Chapter One, those within Sargent’s circle of cosmopolitan bohemians appreciated theatricality and its challenge to the idea of an “essential” identity. Written texts by James, Wilde, and Terry, for instance, destabilized identity categories, revealing them as performatively constructed, in three interconnected ways. First, they revealed fissures in the assumed links between outer and inner, body and mind, appearance and character, and reality and art. Second, they insisted that artifice is a necessity of representation. Finally, they offered instances where “self” cannot be defined outside of performance.\(^5\)

In The Tragic Muse, for instance, published in serial form in the Atlantic Monthly the year Sargent painted Ellen Terry, James (friend of both Sargent and Terry) reveled in the notion that individuals are always playing roles in daily life that do not necessarily match a “true” interior self. One of the leitmotifs of James’ novel is that life is theatre and social interactions are acts variously successful at disguising genuine thoughts, feelings, and selves. One of James’ protagonists, Peter Sherrington, for instance, “cultivated the mask of an alien, an Italian or a Spaniard,” when, in fact, he was a British diplomat in Paris. Biddy Dormer, another character of the novel, is impressed that an acquaintance “seemed so to know his part and recognize his cues.” Other characters in the novel are admonished for so obviously acting: “Ah dear mother, don’t do the British matron.” And the two main female characters, Julia Darrow and Miriam Rooth, impress and mystify their beaus by “always acting.” The suggestion that individuals are role-playing in daily life implies a split between public appearance and interiority that threatens the basis upon which social ordering took place.\(^6\)

Oscar Wilde comparably unglued the link between appearance and character in his novel, The Portrait of Dorian Gray, written the same year that The Tragic Muse was...
published and Ellen Terry was exhibited. Rather than physical appearance mirroring interiority, Dorian Gray's appearance is like an ageless painting conveying immortal, innocent beauty that masks his actual corruption. Only the portrait he keeps hidden away provides an image of his real, evil character. By flipping traditional assumptions about art and reality (that art is ageless and perfect while actual bodies decay and reveal one's changing character), Wilde comparably played on the fears and desires of readers confronting changes in a social structure that relied on character reading.7

Several comments Terry herself made about her experiences in theatre suggest her analogous appreciation of a paradoxical relationship between art and reality. In “Stray Memories,” published in serial two years after her Lady Macbeth performance, she laughed at Charles Reade's concern that “everything should be real in the way of properties upon the stage.” “[Reade] had a short real wall built across the stage, but as there was no real sun there were no real shadows, and the absence of the painted shadows made the real wall appear like anything but a wall” (emphases in text).8 According to Terry, artifice was required, not only to create realistic scenes, but also to achieve realistic acting. When Terry visited a “madhouse” to study for the part of Ophelia, for instance, she found reality a lot less aesthetic than she desired: “There was no beauty, no nature, no pity in most of the lunatics. Strange as it may sound, they were too theatrical to teach me anything.”9

Terry's observations about the relationship between art and reality are mirrored in James' short story, “The Real Thing,” published just one year later. The story describes the efforts of an artist striving to create a convincing picture of nobility. Having failed in his attempts when using models who were actually of the upper class, James' artist comes to the realization that “[t]he defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation.”10 Like Terry, James' fictional artist recognized the paradox that artifice was necessary in creating believable representations.
James, in his characterization of the Jewish actress Miriam Rooth in The Tragic Muse, suggests not only that artifice is a requirement of representation, but also the possibility that one could exist only through performance. In the novel, Peter Sherringham gradually realizes that “so far from there being any question of her having the histrionic nature [Rooth] simply had it in such perfection that she was always acting;...her existence was a series of parts assumed for the moment, each changed for the next.” Having “no nature of [her] own,” she consisted of “a hundred characters.” He likens her to an “embroidery without a canvas.” Sherringham is horrified by his realization of Rooth: “such a woman was a kind of monster.” Even as he is appalled, however, he is attracted and falls in love. Unable to conceive of “such a woman” outside of the notion of mind/body dualism, Sherringham characterizes Rooth as an empty shell, all surface and no soul, frightening in implication.\textsuperscript{11}

Rooth—in her constitution as art—provides a female counterpart (albeit fictional) to the male aesthete, the most notable of whom was Wilde. Through aesthetic dress and affectations of manner and body language, Wilde constructed his public identity, displaying it as self-conscious performance. Rooth’s and Wilde’s performances of self were both admired and vilified as they (horrifyingly or liberatingly) belied the notion of a natural, authentic “real” self.\textsuperscript{12} Their artificial, performative, artistic selves became categorized as marginal—celebrity, outcast, artist, Jewish, homosexual—in the world of Victorian upper and middle class society.

I touch on these few examples of James, Wilde, and Terry from around the time of Sargent’s creation of Ellen Terry to illustrate the extent to which those within Sargent’s social milieu were confounding the presumed link between appearance and character and relatedly, appearance and reality. In so doing, they called into question the means by which social identity was determined, and by extension, challenged essentialist
notions of the social order. Sargent’s work, as I will argue later, participates in this challenge.

**Aestheticism at the Lyceum Theatre**

The notion of self as art, and by extension, life as art, was one of the tenets of British aestheticism. Loosely identified with the artistic, literary, and critical practices of the late nineteenth century by such diverse figures as Walter Pater, Algernon Swinburne, William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burne-Jones, James McNeill Whistler, Wilde, James, and Sargent, British aestheticism, according to Jonathan Freedman, promulgated a love of beauty and “art for art’s sake” even as it complicated those notions by its relation to the social world it claimed to refute.¹³

London’s Lyceum Theatre, where Terry performed with Henry Irving, was renowned for its aestheticism in stage scenery and costumes. As Michael Miesel has explained, the staging of many Lyceum productions strove to imitate not life, but specific works of art that their audiences would have recognized.¹⁴ Irving sometimes hired artists like Burne-Jones and Alma-Tadema to produce scenery and costume designs. Highly publicized by Irving, such collaborations between art and theatre at the Lyceum—just one of a number of examples at this time—were mutually beneficial to the reputations of both artists and actors.

According to Miesel, Irving had chosen Terry as his “leading lady” in 1878, not because of her acting, but because of her “pictorial appeal” and “aesthetic credentials.” As art model to first husband George Watts and mistress to the aesthete Edwin Godwin, “she had been at the center of artistic circles and current aesthetic ferment,” and she was able to help Irving on pictorial issues of costumes and lighting.¹⁵ James explained in 1879 that Terry “belongs properly to a period which takes a strong interest in aesthetic
furniture, archaeological attire, and blue china. Miss Ellen Terry is ‘aesthetic’; not only her garments but her features themselves bear the stamp of the new enthusiasm.” Like James’ fictional Rooth, Terry was deemed a “beautiful living picture,” a “Painter’s Actress.” In fact, James was among several writers who, on various occasions, declared Terry “picturesque” as they found her physical appearance comparable to subjects in the artworks of Burne-Jones and Rossetti. 17

Terry’s costumes no doubt contributed to people’s perception of Terry’s aestheticism. Terry had chosen Carr as her costume designer because of Carr’s aesthetic taste in dress. Describing herself as “more or less of a rebel when it came to clothes,” Carr enjoyed wearing simple, waistless, uncorseted dresses similar to the robes worn in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings exhibited in her husband’s gallery. According to her memoirs, George du Maurier, poking fun of aestheticism, used her as the basis for his cartoon character “Mrs. Cimabue Brown,” the side-kick to “Postlethwaite,” a caricature of Oscar Wilde. In designing costumes for theatre, Carr also favored simple, uncorseted Pre-Raphaelite dresses over the “elaborate and pretentious gowns,” “the exaggerated bustles” of Terry’s previous designer. In her work at the Lyceum, Carr focused on creating “artistic costume” in which form, color, and texture provided symbolic language that enriched stage characterization. While she took into account archaeological evidence when designing costumes, she readily gave up historical accuracy if it impeded her aesthetic idealism. 18

In deciding to paint Terry as Lady Macbeth, Sargent was thus choosing a subject who—by dint of physical features and costuming—was already associated with British aestheticism. Lyceum Theatre productions, embracing links between art and theatre, used the distinctly British aesthetic style of art to create a specifically national theatre. What better subject could there be, then, for Sargent to explore the performativity of artistic, gender and national identity?
Terry's performance of Lady Macbeth

The 1888 announcement that Terry was to play Lady Macbeth created a protest in the press. London theatre fans considered Terry's physique and personality ill-equipped for the part. "The stage Lady Macbeth has muscles of iron and nerves of steel," explained one gazette. "She is a woman to make men tremble, and to frighten the wits out of women and children." Commenting on Terry's slight build, the gazette concluded, "I'd back a thirteen-stone woman against a seven-stone sylph in the part." Classical renditions, such as those by Mrs. Pritchard in the mid-eighteenth century and Sarah Siddons in the early nineteenth century, had emphasized Lady Macbeth's diabolical character as an aggressive woman who, driven by personal ambition for the crown, persuaded Macbeth to murder Duncan, King of Scotland. One Terry fan summarized the issue by asking, "How could the graceful, gracious, tender-eyed, sweet-voiced gentle Ellen Terry grasp such a part as this?" Londoners who had seen the well-established actress portray gentle, laudably feminine heroines in such plays as Olivia and Romeo and Juliet, had come to identify her personal character with her virtuous, charming stage roles. Despite the fact that her private life was scandalous by Victorian standards (her brief first marriage ended in divorce, and her children were born out of wedlock), her fans believed her to be one with the unimpeachable characters she portrayed. James noted that her popularity stemmed from her femininity and her seeming naturalness on stage. He suggested, however, "Miss Terry has too much nature, and we should like a little more art." Lady Macbeth proved the most challenging role Terry had yet faced, for, in seeming so different in character to Terry's own, the role appeared to demand more art than nature. Irving had chosen the play to showcase his own talents, and as his "leading lady," Terry had to confront the challenge presented to her.
Rather than attempting, as James advised, to enact—by dint of art—a role at odds with her presumed nature, Terry determined to resolve the perceived dichotomy between her public persona and the character of Lady Macbeth by finding ways in which they were similar. “It is no use an actress wasting her nervous energy on a battle with her physical attributes,” Terry once explained. “She had much better find a way to emphasize them as allies.”

She decided to “adapt the part to my own personality with the knowledge that sometimes nature does freak and put an honest eye into a villain’s head.” In doing so, Terry scrutinized Shakespeare’s script in order to find empathetic insight into Lady Macbeth’s character. Terry attempted to draw parallels between Lady Macbeth’s situation and those of “good women” like her mother, friends, and other contemporaries in order to identify herself more closely with Lady Macbeth.

Terry concluded that Lady Macbeth was “a much be-blackened person.” “She was pretty bad, I think, but by no means abnormally bad,” wrote Terry in one letter. Terry ultimately chose to see Lady Macbeth not as the diabolical fiend who drove her husband to murder, but as a loyal, dedicated wife, motivated solely by love for her husband. In her later lectures on Shakespearean heroines, Terry categorized Lady Macbeth among the “Pathetic Women” rather than the “Triumphant Women.” She explained, “There is more of pity than of terror in her end. Lady Macbeth is no monster...she is a woman in everything...Her strength is all nervous force; her ambition is all for her husband. She has been the ‘dearest partner’ of all Macbeth’s thoughts and actions; she must needs be the partner of his crime.”

Lady Macbeth’s ultimate suicide was understood as brought on by her despair over her husband’s cold inattention. Her actions were thus portrayed as being within the Victorian standards of womanhood, whereby all-consuming devotion to one’s mate was considered an understandable and socially appropriate “modus operandi.”

67

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Written analyses of Shakespeare's play aided Terry's dramatic reinterpretation of Lady Macbeth. For instance, Terry read an 1847 essay by George Fletcher which argued that the "true" Lady Macbeth was "decidedly and even softly feminine in person." Irving, who was to play Macbeth, recommended Fletcher's essay to Terry as she prepared for her part. He, too, was invested in the notion of Lady Macbeth's femininity as a way to highlight Macbeth's, and by extension his own, masculinity. In choosing to adopt Fletcher's analysis of the play, Irving eschewed all previous theatrical interpretations where Macbeth is understood as an effeminate male swayed by the influence of his fiendishly ambitious wife. Instead, Irving decided that Macbeth was a brave soldier and moral coward who, through pure selfishness, brought about his own demise. Lady Macbeth's influence over her husband in this interpretation was thus downplayed and her role as virago diminished.

Terry also discovered that while Sarah Siddons had earlier enacted Lady Macbeth as a virago, Siddons' stage notes suggested that Siddons privately thought the "true" Lady Macbeth was more feminine. Surprised by the discrepancy between Siddons' private thoughts and stage performance, Terry likened Siddons' performance to a portrait—impressive but unrealistic. Terry declared that Lady Macbeth was "quite unlike her portrait by Mrs. Siddons! She is most feminine, and altogether, now that I have come to know the lady well, I think the portrait is much the grander of the two! But I mean to try at a true likeness, as it is more within my means" (emphases within text). Her ability to see a "true" Lady Macbeth that was more allied to her own feminine "type" must have allayed her concerns about playing a role that, on the face of it, had seemed so different from herself. In an ironic twist of logic, Terry came to see Siddons' stage enactment as a strategy for adapting the actual, more feminine Lady Macbeth to Siddon's own magisterial talents, towering physique, and booming voice.
Establishing Lady Macbeth's "true" motivations as ultimately feminine, Terry was then able to reconcile her small physique and standard charming stage persona to her role as Lady Macbeth. Terry's unique stage performance was littered with her physical clinging to, kissing, and flattering of Irving's Macbeth. The scripted lines that usually had characterized Lady Macbeth as diabolically masculine were enacted by Terry with a faltering voice or the shedding of a tear designed to counteract the import of the words themselves.

As Auerbach has analyzed, Terry suggested in her characterization of Lady Macbeth that "bad" women can have the appearance of charm, grace, and sweetness. Thus, ironically, in an effort to match the role of Lady Macbeth to her own talents and physique, Terry challenged existing "feminine" types (that charm and grace are equated with virtue, for instance). She thus allowed for the possibility of a fissure between appearance and character. In addition, Terry's performance suggested that "femininity"—signaled by charm, sweetness, reliance, devotion, and gracefulness—could be an act in itself. Terry saw her role as Lady Macbeth as a double act: Lady Macbeth had to act feminine and charming in order to persuade her husband to follow his ambitions, and Terry had to act the act. It was Lady Macbeth's act that was "the real thing," or, according to Auerbach, "the truth about being a woman."

The critics' response to her performance was mixed, but generally kind. Certainly, her interpretation generated much discussion. The Illustrated London News declared, "Mr. Henry Irving and Miss Ellen Terry are once more the talk of all London. It is impossible to enter a club, or sit down to a dinner table, or take a seat in a train, without facing the inevitable discussion as to the true Macbeth and the new Lady Macbeth." Some, like Clement Scott, were still not convinced that the "true" Lady Macbeth was as sweet as Terry played her, and they felt, comparably, that Terry herself was not "bad" enough to act a "bad woman." Terry responded privately to Scott, giving
him details of her personal life to prove that she was, indeed, “bad” enough for the part, despite having the facade, the appearance of a virtuous woman. In so doing, she insisted that in “reality,” appearance and character do not always match. This, ironically, served to bolster her claim that she could thus match herself to her role—the private Terry could seamlessly and convincingly become the public Lady Macbeth.

While Terry saw that she was creating a new multi-dimensional character type that could appear good, while being bad, her audience did not always understand her interpretation, and they often fell back on conventional “types” and descriptions of physical appearance in order to explain her performance. One writer, four years after the opening of Macbeth, recalled that Terry had made Lady Macbeth “an exquisite, fragile, feminine creature with golden hair...the critics declared she was simply a Guinevere or some other exquisite being out of Arthurian legend.” In describing Terry’s rendition, this writer fell back on a physical type from literature that assumed a match between blond hair and fragile femininity. Terry, however, had worn a wig of long red braids while playing Lady Macbeth. By mentioning “golden hair,” this writer was able to more clearly evoke the feminine type he was describing. The red wig proved incongruous to notions of Terry’s rendering of Lady Macbeth, so this one particular writer, at least, remembered Terry’s own hair rather than the stage wig when describing her performance. In other words, the writer attempted to realign appearance with character in his explication of Terry’s performance, when, in fact, Terry’s performance had suggested a fissure between appearance and character.

Her performance suggested this fissure in two ways. First, as we have already discussed, her behavior on stage gave her the semblance of being good while actually being bad. Second, as I will discuss in the next section, Terry’s visual appearance in the role—her wig and costume—provoked associations at odds with Terry’s own persona, and correspondingly, Terry’s enactment of Lady Macbeth on stage. Behavior and
appearance, Terry’s performance suggested, are not always reliable signs of a single, “true” identity. They can reveal, instead, the “truth” about identity—that it is constructed and multivalent.

Carr’s costume for Terry’s Lady Macbeth

As Auerbach has noted, Carr seems to have intended her costume to communicate all that Terry’s enactment refused to do, that Lady Macbeth was a dangerous woman—barbaric and alien to Victorian wifely devotion.42 Carr recalled later that “it had been with the Macbeth costumes that I achieved my first artistic success. It was the hardest as well as the most important work I had then undertaken...The dress which was most talked about was that which Nell wore as Lady Macbeth in the first scene...”43 Carr described the costume as follows:

Mrs. Nettleship bought the fine yarn for me in Bohemia—a twist of soft green silk and blue tinsel. I then cut out the patterns from the diagrams in the wonderful costume book of Viollet le Duc, and the yarn was crocheted to match them. When the straight thirteenth-century dress with sweeping sleeves was finished it hung beautifully, but we did not think that it was brilliant enough, so it was sewn all over with real green beetle-wings, and a narrow border in Celtic designs, worked out in rubies and diamonds, hemmed all the edges. To this was added a cloak of shot velvet in heather tones, upon which great griffins were embroidered in flame-coloured tinsel. The wimple, or veil, was held in place by a circlet of rubies, and two long plaits twisted with gold hung to her knees.44

The combination of French medieval design, Celtic imagery and unusual materials Carr described created a visual effect that evoked not an identifiable historic time and place, but rather a vague exotic past—barbaric, imperial, alluring, and dangerous. One critic suggested Terry looked like “the Queen of Sheba rather than the Queen of Scotland.”45 Oscar Wilde apparently quipped, “Lady Macbeth seems an economical housekeeper and evidently patronizes local industries for her husband’s clothes and the servants’ liveries,
but she takes care to do all her own shopping in Byzantium. The costume as a whole was successful as it allowed for a wide (but not exhaustive) range of related associations and symbolic meanings.

Carr, focusing on the symbolic language of color and texture, explained that she had wanted the costume to look "as much like soft chain armour as I could, and yet have something that would give the appearance of the scales of a serpent." Carr's allusion to chain mail armour suggests an association of Lady Macbeth with a military role appropriate to men or cross-dressing women such as Joan of Arc and Amazon warriors. Her invocation of serpents' scales offers an affiliation of Lady Macbeth with the dangers of Eve, Medusa, or mermaids, all mythological women who caused the downfall of men. Through costume, Carr thus intended to suggest the classical characterization of Lady Macbeth as "man or monster." Terry thought the costume "splendid"; but in her letters, she did not refer to the sinister associations that Carr had claimed to make through her choice of materials. Instead, Terry appreciated the robe based on her interest in and knowledge of an art style with which both she and Carr were intimately connected. Terry saw the costume's success solely in terms of art: "The whole thing is Rossetti--rich stained-glass effects," she explained.

Previous costumes for Lady Macbeth were nothing like Carr's creation. Paintings of Mrs. Pritchard as Lady Macbeth (Figs. 9 and 10) show her in a dress that is loosely historicized, while George Harlow's painting of Sarah Siddons in the role portrays her wearing a fashionable nineteenth-century dress and stole (Fig. 11). Later in the century, costume designers attempted to create attire for Lady Macbeth that appeared more exotic. An image of Mrs. David Bowers playing the role, for example, shows her in a
transhistorical robe and hood with ornamental trim presumably meant to be read as Celtic (Fig. 12). In addition, an 1882 photograph of Adelaide Ristori portrays her wearing a vaguely medieval wimple, large jewelry and embroidered dress (Fig. 13). Unlike Terry, all of these earlier actresses played a fierce, monstrous Lady Macbeth, yet none of their costumes suggested her monstrosity to the extent that Carr's costume did for Terry. The site of Lady Macbeth's barbarism in these earlier renditions was located in her behavior, but not in her adornment.52

Both Terry's dramatic interpretation and Carr's unique costume became the prototype for future productions. Mrs. Patrick Campbell, starring in the Lyceum production ten years later, for example, adopted Terry's interpretation of Lady Macbeth as a charming, loving wife. Her costume, however, was "magnificently barbaric, the bodice like a coat of mail, being covered with blue, green and gold sequins almost suggesting serpent's scales."53 Campbell's dress thus has been described in terms identical to Carr's explanation of Terry's costume. Starting with Carr's costume, the site of Lady Macbeth's barbarism had shifted from behavior to appearance.

For the most part, the publicity photographs and illustrations of Terry in this role portray more picturesque, less aggressive body language than do images of previous actresses in the role. For example, in a mid-nineteenth-century engraving of Charlotte Cushman in the role (Fig. 14) and a photograph of Terry (Fig. 15), both women hold daggers, one in each hand, to suggest Lady Macbeth's criminal culpability. Cushman, however, is portrayed with her brow furrowed, massive forearms exposed, and one large knee jutting out as if she is about to lunge violently forward. Terry, by contrast, is posed to emphasize a cameo profile. One hip sways seductively to one side as she leans slightly
away from the direction of her attention. Another comparison reinforces this point. An engraving of actress Isabella Glyn (Fig. 16), like another publicity photograph of Terry (Fig. 17), depicts her in Act I, scene III, reading a letter from Macbeth. Terry’s body language, however, is less foreboding and threatening than that of Glyn, shown scowling with her hand in a fist.

Compared to the publicity photographs of Terry just mentioned, Sargent’s image more strongly reinforces Carr’s allusions to Lady Macbeth’s femme fatale character rather than Terry’s performance of sweet femininity and wifely devotion. Sargent declared his debt to Carr at a banquet dinner where she and Sargent “sat side by side” beneath the portrait. Carr remembered Sargent stating, “You and I ought to have signed that together, Alice, for I could not have done it if you had not invented the dress.” Carr recalled, “This was the proudest moment of my professional life!”

Sargent’s painting

Soon after Sargent attended the performance with Carr on opening night, he wrote to Isabella Stewart Gardner, saying, “Miss Terry has just come out in Lady Macbeth and looks magnificent in it, but she has not yet made up her mind to let me paint her in one of the dresses until she is quite convinced that she is a success. From a pictorial point of view there can be no doubt about it--magenta hair!” His choice to portray Terry in this role was not driven by any concern to embody her success as an actress, for Terry’s performances of other roles, such as Olivia, were far more critically acclaimed. Terry herself acknowledged, “I should rather enact a role that savors of comedy, that ends happily, that sends the audience home with a smile rather than a tear...[Irving] is a natural
tragedian, I am a born comedienne.” While Terry hoped Sargent’s portrait would memorialize a successful dramatic performance, Sargent claimed to be interested simply in rendering her aesthetic effect.

Choosing to portray Terry crowning herself accentuated this visual impact as it allowed the splendor of the costume to be shown to optimal effect. Only by raising her arms could Sargent render the shape of her bodice as well as the flowing mass of drapery cloaking her figure. The bejeweled crown, at the center apex of the composition, appears a suitable signifier for the imperial splendor of her appearance. Sargent could have found inspiration for the pose from a black-and-white painting of her by J. Bernard Partridge made for the performance’s souvenir booklet (Fig. 18). In both versions, Terry wears the same costume, her head is tilted in a similar angle, and her arms are raised in a dramatic gesture that accentuates the flow of her cloak.

Yet Sargent’s image differs in significant ways from this small image and other paintings and photographs of Terry in this role. First and foremost, it differs in the rendering of her costume. For example, Sargent’s image is the only one that shows her with a crown. All the other images of Terry in the beetle-winged dress portray her with a light wimple covering her head (Figs. 15 and 17-18). In addition, as far as I know, Sargent’s image is the only one that does not show the white, long-sleeved undergarment she wore on stage. Instead, Sargent exposes the pale flesh of her forearms, which, against the dark blue and greens of the robe and background, emphasizes a death-like pallor that glows brighter than her crown. Finally, Sargent seems to have been the only painter who strove to portray the shimmer of her dress. Mr. Margetson, who exhibited his large painting of Terry as Lady Macbeth at the Grosvenor Gallery that same year, avoided the dress altogether and painted her in the starkly simple gray cloak she wore for her sleep-walking scene. Partridge did paint her in the beetle-wing dress, but gave little to no indication of its iridescent shimmer (Fig. 18). Photographs of Ellen Terry in the
dress show tiny, tight, all-over dots of highlight comparable to a pointillist painting by Seurat (Figs. 15 and 17). Sargent, by contrast, created a dress that shimmers with gold, ray-like strokes randomly scattered across the surface of her dress. These strokes concentrate attention on surface and detract from a sense of solid form. In summation, Sargent’s portrayal of costume, in contrast to other images of Terry in this role, highlights her imperialism and skin pallor, even as it focuses attention on surface as surface.

Sargent’s image also differs from other portrayals as it fails to identify scene or place. The other photographs and illustrations of Terry in this role, similar to previous theatre portraits of actresses playing Lady Macbeth, locate her within a specific scene in the play. Sargent, however, painted a solid background that situates her in no identifiable place. On the one hand, this enables viewers to focus on her iconic presence without any distracting elements. On the other hand, it locates her outside of any context, except, as I discuss later, of art. The motion of Lady Macbeth crowning herself did not occur in any scene in any version of Shakespeare’s play, and Terry did not perform this act on stage. Kimberly Rhodes has comparably noted that John Everett Millais also painted an episode outside of theatre in his 1852 portrayal of Ophelia, rendered as an analogously pale-faced, red-haired, mad woman (Fig. 19). In rendering a moment outside of stage performance, Sargent aligns himself with the visualizations of Shakespearian narratives by Millais and other Pre-Raphaelite artists rather than traditional theatre portraits of specific scenes.

Sargent’s initial idea for the painting did reference a specific scene from Terry’s stage performance (Fig. 20). Taken from Act I, scene 6, his first oil sketch emphasized the Lyceum atmosphere of exotic pageantry by rendering Lady Macbeth sweeping through a channel of bowing female attendants to greet Duncan, King of Scotland. By including part of the audience that bows before her, Sargent called attention to the impact of her presence. He ultimately rejected this initial idea, however, and instead, gave us a
closer view of Terry as Lady Macbeth—closer both physically and psychologically. The full-length figure, taking up the entire space of the canvas, is a monumental, crowning presence before which he must have hoped viewers would feel as reverential as the bowing servants appear in his first painting.61

Sargent created his vision of Terry as Lady Macbeth from a range of available options and visual prototypes. His choices reveal not just his own personal taste, but also what he understood to be the taste of his audience. The costumed body served, in one regard, as a site for Sargent’s display of his technical wares for potential customers. Sargent showed off his artistic virtuosity by giving full play to his technical range in recreating the complex textures of Terry’s dress. As one critic suggested, “The painter has deliberately chosen a costume which taxes his power to the uttermost or beyond it.”62 Sargent used thick, wet paint to define her bodice, a dry brush to sketch the dragons on her cloak, and thin translucent layers of blue and green to suggest the gauzy texture of the bottom of her gown. Pale orange-red highlights against the complementary color of blue-green create sparkle across the surface of her figure. In the iconic symmetry of her pose, Sargent managed to suggest the monumental solidity of her figure at the same time that he dissolved form into a surface pattern that dazzles the visual senses.

Not only in pure technique, but also in choice of subject and style, he marketed himself for a wide range of potential future buyers. The figure type and rich color would have been appreciated by Pre-Raphaelite followers. The sketchy, broken brushwork and suggestion of spontaneous movement (note the blur of her purse against her hip) would have pleased advocates of Impressionism, with which he was already allied in England. Those with tastes towards portraiture would have been able to recognize the skill with which he had faithfully rendered Terry’s hallmark eyes and jawline.

It was not purely in terms of technical, aesthetic, and stylistic issues, however, that Sargent determined to attract clients. As the next two sections will discuss, Sargent’s
painting addressed issues of gender and national identity that were of mounting concern to his audience. In so doing, he hoped to appeal not only to his viewers’ visual senses, but also to their ideological convictions.

Representing femininity and power

Auerbach has suggested that in choosing to render this private moment of crowning, Sargent allowed Lady Macbeth to exist beyond the confines of the structure of her creation, and perhaps, by extension, offered the possibility of the same for Ellen Terry. Yet at the same time, Sargent’s new image constructs her in a comparably confining way. Sargent chose to emphasize physiognomic traits that suggested that Lady Macbeth was both man and monster— not the sweet wife Terry assumed. No marital devotion is suggested by his work. Instead, he stressed the private ambition of Lady Macbeth for the Scottish crown. To begin with, in composition and pose, Sargent suggested a woman of great size and physical strength. We as viewers are positioned slightly below her, such that her build seems monumental, especially in light of the slight, “sylph-like” build many felt Terry had. The position of her arms accentuates the breadth of her torso, while her heavy artificial braids emphasize the Valkyriesque amplitude of her chest as they bend to the curves of her breasts. The crown she holds and the excess drapery that hangs from her arms appear weighty as Terry seems to arch her back and spread her arms for extra physical leverage as she raises the crown to her head.

Images of women with pale arms raised above their heads were ubiquitous in annual Royal Academy exhibitions. Raised arms invariably served to show off the (usually) nude torso. In some images, raised arms were linked to rhetorical signs of grieving, emphasizing womanly emotion, or pleading, emphasizing women’s dependence on men. It is in relation with these popular images, particularly the numerous variations
on Ingres’ *La Source*, and *Andromeda*, that Sargent’s image can be seen to contrast. While in such images, the single woman is standing in contrapposto so as to accentuate her feminine curves, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* stands with her weight evenly distributed. Even as her raised arms reveal her feminine form, they signify power and strength rather than helplessness.

The London magazine *Punch* parodied the implied physical strength in this portrait with an 1889 cartoon of the image captioned “Athletics. Strong Woman performing her *tour de force*” (Fig. 21). In this caricature, Terry is transformed into a weight-lifter—her sleeves are 100,000 pound weights, her braids are balls and chains around her neck, and her crown a “steele bar.” The shape of the sleeves also suggests large biceps popping up beneath the weights. The cartoon provides evidence that the implications of physical power in Sargent’s work were noticed by his audience. During this time, weight-lifting had become increasingly popular, particularly in England, but it was still almost exclusively a male activity. For the most part, “strong men” were viewed as fascinating oddities, and they most often performed in circus and side show acts. The rare “strong woman,” displaying both feminine curves and masculine strength, attracted large audiences with her alluring and threatening “androgynous persona.” To readers then, the cartoon would have implied that the physical power of Sargent’s *Ellen Terry* was masculine, and thus she was a freak of nature appropriate to side show venues. Physiognomic studies linked masculine physical characteristics in women with savagery or mental degeneracy, and images reinforced and likely shaped such links between appearance and character. In the two decades following the exhibition of Sargent’s painting, suffragettes would be portrayed in the press by anti-suffragists as comparably physically massive, strong women who, by extension, were deemed savage throwbacks or mental degenerates worthy of a freak show.
While in Sargent’s image, Terry’s body language suggested masculine physical power, her costume emphasized her as monster—a monster decidedly, horrifyingly, female. Sargent’s rendering of costume reinforced Carr’s intended evocation of a serpent, in particular. Blue-green dashes seem to cohere to Terry’s torso and waist so that they become one with it. No fold in the material above her hips exists to suggest that the dress is separate from her body, that the “serpent scales” are not of her body. Below her hip belt, the dress falls into long vertical folds that flow to her feet like a waterfall. Her arms emerge from great waves of green/blue material which fall in serpentine curves down her sides. Paintings of long-haired mermaids—half serpent, half woman—emerging from the ocean and turning men mad were ubiquitous at annual art exhibitions in London; so too were images of seductresses with snakes for hair or entwined with their bodies. In this visual environment, the references to serpentine evil in Sargent’s painting could not have been lost on his audience.

Terry’s facial expression as Lady Macbeth, however, prevents us from fully viewing her as a demonic, dangerous monster. She raises her eyebrows, which slant down from the center, and her mouth is posed slightly ajar in an expression that suggests her awareness of the horror and tragedy of her situation. One critic described it as “an expression of melancholy, very nearly of wildness, mingling with the look of satisfied and triumphant ambition.” In this, her expression is most similar to that of Frederick Sandys’ Medea of 1868, which portrays the future perpetrator of infanticide in the act of preparing poisoned garments to kill her rival for Jason’s affections (Fig. 22). Both Sandys and Sargent depict these murderesses with psychological interiority, with conflicted emotion that suggests a vulnerable humanity.

Sargent’s image of female ambition—linked with physical power, sexual danger, and psychological vulnerability—resonated with contemporary implications. At this time, discussions of women’s political, economic, physical, and intellectual ambitions were
fomenting in the press as women challenged the notion of “separate spheres” by gaining entrance into college institutions and male professions. Women had recently acquired more legal rights in marriage and were gaining political voice—even if only in local politics and as volunteers for political parties. The issue of women’s suffrage, in particular, was hotly debated in the press of this year. For example, “An Appeal against Female Suffrage,” written for the magazine Nineteenth Century while Ellen Terry was hanging on the walls of the New Gallery, was signed by several women within Sargent’s larger social circle of English artists and literati, including Mrs. Alma-Tadema and Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Others, petitioned by Frederick Leighton to sign, chose not to, including the wives of Burne-Jones and George Watts. Opinions about women’s rights varied within Sargent’s coterie, but opinions were strong. Sargent’s image of a dangerously ambitious, physically powerful, but alluring woman—both tragic and human—embodied both the desires and fears of an audience confronting major shifts in gender roles.

Representing national art through the feminine

The type of woman that Sargent’s figure most visually references is that of late Pre-Raphaelite pictures by Burne-Jones and Rossetti, painted between the late 1850s and early 1880s. Such images include Burne-Jones’ paintings, Laus Veneris, 1872-73, and The Legend of the Briar Rose: The Princess and her Maidens Asleep, 1871-90, and Rossetti’s paintings The Blue Bower, 1865, La Ghirlandata, 1873, Astarte Syriaca, 1877, and Mnemosyne, 1881, to name just a few (see, for example, Figs. 23-25). In general these women, like Sargent’s subject, are shown close to the picture plane and take up most of the composition. They are variously portrayed with features emphasized in Sargent’s painting: large limbs and torsos, well-defined jaws, thick necks, pale skin,
profuse red hair, brightly painted red lips and large, pale blue eyes. A significant percentage of them are dressed in blue or green robes. Rather than images of contemporary society, they represent mythological goddesses and literary lovers—some are evil seductresses, others are tragic victims of love. As Susan Casteras has explained, the physical features represented in such paintings countered traditional pictorial formulas for feminine beauty that were linked to virtuous character by popular treatises of craniology, phrenology and other quasi-sciences. Some viewers thus saw such androgynous images of physically overpowering, alluring women as startlingly ugly representations of pathology, sexual perversion, and moral degeneration threatening to the gender, social and moral order. Strong jaws were associated with female criminality, large physical frames with a lower social class, and “extinguished eyes,” as Bram Dijkstra categorized the large, vacant, pale eyes seen in many pictorial renditions of viragos, signified madness. White skin, in its association with illness and death, became linked with madness as physical and mental deterioration were conflated. Finally, according to Dijkstra, long hair in the late nineteenth-century was “virtually synonymous with mental debility” and in visual and literary imagery, long hair became a metaphor for women’s snakelike ensnarement of unwitting men. Burne-Jones and Rossetti’s women and Sargent’s Ellen Terry represented all that were deemed threatening to Victorian womanliness—physical strength, imperial status, mental illness, alluring sexuality, lack of refinement—in images that conflated many “others.”

The cognoscenti, however, admired Burne-Jones and Rossetti for their original language of beauty and symbolism, deemed spiritual and highly personal. As noted earlier, the look of their painted women became trendy among the social circles in which Carr, Terry, and Sargent moved, and Terry, herself, was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite type. Like Fanny Comforth and Jane Morris, models used by the Pre-Raphaelites, Terry in fact had some of the physical features emphasized by Sargent.
Terry’s eyes were actually a pale blue, and numerous photographs from varying angles and contexts show a well-defined jaw. Yet Sargent made her eyes appear even more pale by their relation to the dark mascara and bright, painted lips. Sargent could have chosen to de-emphasize her naturally strong jawline as other artists have sometimes done, but instead, he accentuated it by the tilt of her head and the thick undershadow. Thus, he chose to emphasize features identified with Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism. In addition, Sargent even made color changes to Ellen Terry that Burne-Jones specifically recommended.

Sargent’s art has frequently been discussed as antithetical to the aims of the Pre-Raphaelites. Certainly Sargent’s loose bravura brushwork could not be more different from the Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on minute, tightly delineated detail. Yet documents indicate that Sargent held a deep admiration for this school of painters. As early as 1881, Vernon Lee reported visiting Burne-Jones’ studio with Sargent and that she and Sargent had both greatly admired his work. In two letters that Sargent wrote to her three years later, he spoke of wanting to see Rossetti’s pictures in London. Ralph Curtis, writing to his parents in 1884 of Sargent’s desire to leave Paris for England said, “I fear là bas he will fall into Pre-R. influence wh. has got a strange hold of him...” When Sargent relocated from Paris to London in 1886, literary medievalizing subject matter painted by a second generation of Pre-Raphaelites led by Burne-Jones and Rossetti were still popular in London. The Grosvenor Gallery, co-managed until 1887 by Carr’s husband, Joseph, had been the primary exhibition venue for latter Pre-Raphaelites, and British aestheticism, generally. When Carr’s husband defected from the Grosvenor Gallery to found the New Gallery with Charles Hallé a year before Sargent painted Ellen Terry, Burne-Jones and his followers went with him. By the end of the 1880s, Pre-Raphaelitism had waned, but was championed as a distinctly English aesthetic.
With Ellen Terry, Sargent's choice to render a subject linked to Pre-Raphaelitism was deliberate. In referencing the one avant-garde school deemed distinctly English, Sargent likely intended to establish himself further with an English clientele. Before his move from Paris to London in 1886, Sargent had noted, "it might be a long struggle for my painting to be accepted [in England]. It is thought beastly French." In a milieu where art was judged by "national" characteristics and England was striving to define its art as distinct from and yet comparable to French art, Sargent doubtless saw the necessity of aligning his art with more fully "English" examples in order to create a larger market for his work in his new home. Marc Simpson has noted that Sargent's choices of English subjects and English exhibition venues upon his move to London reveal his commitment to establish himself in England. Simpson suggests that Carnation Lily, Lily, Rose, painted by Sargent in 1887 and selected as a Chantry Bequest purchase for the nation, can be understood, in its stylistic associations with Millais and Gainsborough, as an "homage to England." Ellen Terry can be understood as a comparable homage to England, yet this time Sargent chose a subject within the genre of portraiture that was his specialty and in which he hoped to make his future money. His image of a celebrated English actress, whose costume and physical features suggested a specifically English aesthetic and who was performing a play by the most famous English playwright, could not have better served this purpose.

His painting, however, depicts a Scottish queen, and he displayed the portrait in a frame decorated with a geometric, Celtic design appropriate to the character's "racial" origins. Such decorative ornamentation was in keeping with current interests in Arts and Crafts aesthetics as well as a turn-of-the-century Celtic revival. Sargent does not, however, make legible the explicitly "Celtic" designs Carr created on the border of Terry's sleeves, and no commentary about the painting noted its Celtic flavor. Nonetheless, the details of the frame, crown, and belt, in particular, were in keeping with
the specifically Scottish evocations the Lyceum production of Macbeth had intended and, more broadly, with a Pre-Raphaelite interest in Celtic themes. This painting might be understood, then, as not only an homage to England, but also one to Scotland, another region of the United Kingdom from which Sargent hoped to draw his future clients.91

Sargent did not simply create another Pre-Raphaelite painting just as that style was waning, however. Rather, in his painting’s similarities to and differences from that previous art, the painting draws attention to the construction of image, as it is a representation of or about representation. While Pre-Raphaelite paintings present a smoothly textured surface, often so meticulously detailed as to be a hyper-real window onto some other world, Sargent highlighted the means by which he created the image with his series of bravura brushstrokes. Burne-Jones and Rossetti’s involved labor at creating a seamless image is indicated by the countless minute brushstrokes that define individual strands of hair and veins of leaves. They achieved their glowing “stained-glass” effects by methodically building up multiple layers of transparent glazes. Sargent, no less labored at his work, toiled to suggest that he did not—that his images, in other words, were spontaneous impressions. His brushstrokes are signs of his artistic subjectivity, of his mediation with an art associated with the recent past. While Burne-Jones and Rossetti strove to transform their models into goddesses and queens—so that they seem to become what they represent, Sargent chose a subject that makes it clear that this is all an act.

Artifice as a response to critics

The exaggerated artifice of Terry’s appearance calls attention to Sargent’s image as an act. As we discussed earlier, Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth exists outside theatre as the scene is not a part of Shakespeare’s text or Ellen Terry’s performance. Yet Sargent
emphatically declares his image to be of theatre by drawing attention to the artificial nature of the red braids and skin pallor. To Sargent's audience, the hair was too long and too red, the eyes too "out of key, and out of focus" to be real.⁹² Of all the traits of artifice mentioned in commentary about Ellen Terry, her pale skin was most frequently cited as it signaled the use of stage lights or makeup powder.⁹³

Significantly, it is white skin that proves fake. As white skin is a sign of race linked with northern European cultures, pallor became associated with notions of beauty in Western culture because it suggested, in part, civilized refinement. The desire to make skin appear even whiter through the use of makeup reflects, in part, the desire to fashion oneself as refined. At the same time, the disdain for obvious use of makeup—considered a sign of vulgarity linked to mistresses and prostitutes—suggests the threat that makeup posed as it enabled people to alter the visual codes that identified social and racial status during a time when such status boundaries were collapsing. The pale skin of Ellen Terry signals the privileged white race even as it embodies the threat that race can be faked.

At the same time, as Susan Sidlauskas has already suggested in her discussion of Sargent's Madame X (Fig. 1), painted skin becomes a metaphor in Sargent's work for the painted canvas.⁹⁴ Sargent's paint strokes define skin that is itself painted. Sidlauskas suggests a skin that is thus doubly painted, or from another perspective, one can understand an indexical relationship between paint as makeup and paint as paint. Both transform a presumed "real" self into an artificial representation for public consumption. The analogy of makeup and paint, of skin and canvas, is all the more vivid in Ellen Terry. Here, Sargent abandons the seamless shifts in skin tone that create the careful modeling of the arms and neck of Madame X. Instead, in Ellen Terry, sharp edges between light and shadow on the skin flatten her form. The skin visually pops away from her body as it contrasts with the dark, brilliant colors of her hair, makeup, and background. With Ellen Terry, Sargent displays his hand in strokes and dabs of brilliant color across the surface
of her body, across the surface of the canvas, and in so doing, outdoes Madame X in its reveling in surface and paint as paint.

Indeed, Ellen Terry might be understood as Sargent’s response to the press criticism about the artifice of Madame X, shown at the Paris Salon five years earlier. Critics had felt that Sargent’s portrayal of her artificial appearance suggested an unflattering signification of her interiority. French critic Louis de Fourcaud, one of the few to give the work a favorable review, could proclaim the painting’s success only as he was able to declare outward appearance the sign of a legitimate public persona removed from her inner character. Fourcaud saw the blatant sexuality conveyed by her fallen shoulder strap, dramatic gestures, and pale skin as indicating the reality of her public persona as a “professional beauty” (emphasis mine). This line between the subject’s public persona and private character, however, was less distinguishable for most critics.

The scandal of Madame X continued to haunt Sargent in 1889, when he was painting Ellen Terry. That year, an article in the Art Amateur detailed the changes Sargent had made to Madame X. Noting that Sargent had settled in England to escape the Parisian scandal, the article described Sargent’s changes to the strap of Madame Gautreau’s gown, while declaring, “the paint and powder with which Mr. Sargent plastered the face of this Parisian belle -- and which gave more offense than the perilously décolleté costume -- are retained.” Sargent clearly was invested in his rendering of her skin tone, for he chose to leave it untouched, despite public outcry. While Madame X was in his studio, he created Ellen Terry. Using the context of theatre and further exaggerating artifice in Ellen Terry, however, Sargent made explicit the boundary between public role and personal identity.

The artifice of Ellen Terry was the focal point of newspaper critics’ assessment of the work when it first appeared at the New Gallery’s second annual exhibition in 1889.
The Saturday Review, for instance, praised Sargent’s creation, and after describing the evidence of her use of makeup, explained,

There is no attempt to idealize the subject, no thought of giving us Lady Macbeth herself: it is strictly and limitedly Miss Ellen Terry in that particular part, made as real underneath her stage artificiality as the painter knows how to make her. In fact, it is a tour de force of realism applied to the artificial, the actress caught and fixed, not as the individuality assumed, but as herself seen through and outside of the assumption.\(^9\)

While we can dispute the conclusion that this portrayal embodies Ellen Terry’s actual performance, this critic focused on an issue that was paramount in the assessment of Sargent’s work during these years: the relationship between artifice and reality. Here, the critic located the success in this portrait as it portrays the reality of artifice. Another critic, however, later complained, “[W]e once more enter a protest against Mr. Sargent’s unintelligent trick of representing actors and actresses in their ‘make up’—legitimate and absolutely necessary for the view before the footlights, but never intended to be seen off stage.”\(^9\) The discussions about Ellen Terry thus focused on those aspects of the painting that revealed the image as a construction.

The fissure between character and appearance signified by the obvious presence of makeup threatened the dearly held belief in a natural link between the two. Sargent’s image confounded critics used to judging portraits in terms of character and likeness. They debated whether visual clues were signs of Terry’s physical likeness, Terry’s character, or Lady Macbeth’s character: “As a likeness of Miss Terry, the picture is hardly worthy of consideration”; “The expression of the face [is] too disagreeable for a portrait, while scarcely repulsive enough for that of Lady Macbeth at such a moment”; “This is not a portrait of Ellen Terry, and neither is it Lady Macbeth.”\(^10\) Since the image was not an essential version of Terry or Lady Macbeth, critics floundered. In presenting a challenge to the means by which portrait work was judged, Sargent confounded the very act of identification, of labeling. Viewers reacted to this by giving the image close
scrutiny and in-depth analyses attempting to resolve the conundrum. It was “the best-
hated picture of the year,” “the most discussed picture of the year,” “opinion rage[d]
around it.”\textsuperscript{101} In thwarting standard conventions for judging portraits and in challenging
the link between character and appearance, it hung as a potential threat to the stability of
artistic standards, and even more incendiary, a threat to the stability of a social system
based on identification of social and class status, gender, race, and ethnicity through
visual codes of appearance.

This threat, however, was confined to the realm of representation, of art, for
Sargent’s image not only declared the boundaries between appearance and character, but
it also declared the boundaries between art and reality. Amidst the thin strokes and swirls
of gold that skirt on the surface of the dress, on the surface of the canvas—calling
attention to those surfaces as surface in their refusal to coalesce into identifiable shapes or
forms—a griffin emerges on the lower right of the composition. This griffin, outlined by
glittering paint, stretches, mouth roaring, against the edge of the picture plane. Doing his
mythological job, this griffin wards off any intrusion from beyond the picture frame, thus
simultaneously protecting her and confining her from the realms of the real, of the world,
of what is not art. The boundaries of the canvas itself almost perfectly and evenly
contain Terry’s form, with just a few inches of space at top and bottom and the corner of
her cloak just barely falling beyond the bounds of the painting’s space. Hair braids,
drawstring, belt braid, and dress sleeves, parading across the center of the picture,
reinforce, by rhyming, the long verticals of the picture’s edge. While her stance forms
an acute angle to the picture plane, with her head positioned slightly off-center, the
position of her elbows and crown tug her figure back towards perfect symmetry in a way
that draws attention to the dimensions of the picture. Thus, the visual structure of the
composition reinforces the griffin’s declaration of the image as art object removed from
the realm of the “real.”\textsuperscript{102}
Even as Sargent created a visual structure that declared the image’s status as art, he relied on signs that suggested the “real” in order to make his statement about the nature of art. One such sign was the crown, which I will turn to consider now as it provides a metaphor for Sargent’s ambition for the painting.

The “real” crown

Terry’s original crown for the play, special ordered from Paris by Carr, was never used in performance. Carr later recalled ordering the crown, based on designs by Viollet-le-Duc, only to discover when it arrived that it was far too heavy for Terry to use on stage. In her memoir, Carr reenacted a backstage scene, oddly associative with Sargent’s picture, in which Carr, herself, “crept up behind and placed [the crown] upon [Terry’s] brow as she sat before the mirror.” While the scene Sargent depicted never happened in the play itself, and could only have happened in a private “offstage” moment, Carr narrated a parallel “real” backstage scene in which she is a key player. In a memoir that details the success of her costume creations, Carr suggested that she provided the power, the transformation of Terry to Lady Macbeth, of Lady Macbeth to Queen of Scotland. Carr became her ambition, her creator. Carr’s scene in Terry’s dressing room resonates in viewing Sargent’s painting, and Carr’s agency in the creation of the image is more fully felt.

Carr’s anecdote creates an ironic scene that counters Sargent’s tragic vision of Terry with the crown while at the same time suggesting the problematic relationship between artifice and reality that Sargent’s picture addresses:

She took it off again, and weighed it in her hands.
“How much do you think this weighs? Ten pounds if an ounce!” she said. “And you’ve borne me to the ground already with those jewels on my cloak. How do you think I am going to act?”

Significantly, it was the weight of the crown, not the shape or form, that prompted Terry to label it a “saucepan.” While its weight may have been materially realistic for a gold crown, Terry needed to associate its weight with a kitchen implement in order to argue its inappropriateness. Saucepans are handled by kitchen staff, lower class women physically built to handle the weight of their work. Terry’s comments about the crown rely on gender and class associations with which Terry presented herself as too delicate and refined for such a prop. While the crown’s weight may have been realistic in terms of material property, it potentially prevented Terry from acting. Like the “real” wall and the “real” madwomen Terry dismissed as useless for theatre, this crown was also too “real” to allow for theatre.

Carr described how she resolved the problem of the weighty crown as follows:

...taking an odd piece of brown paper that was on the table, I cut the proper shape of the diadem. Then, with some odd pearls and jewels that were lying about and a bit of gold tinsel which had covered a champagne bottle, I made the correct, though rough, design, and added the two pendants of pearls which so became her, and made the final success of the thing.

When Nell came up again I put it upon her head, but not with much gaiety.

“Why, Alice, you’re the mother of invention,” said she. “I’ve always said so. I shall wear this very thing.”

Of course, she didn’t do exactly this, but out of buckram, Japanese tinsel stuffs, and jewels, Mrs. Nettleship and I concocted a crown which was as light as a feather and very becoming.

Carr’s meticulous description of used materials and invented forms aid in her memoir’s construction of herself as an artistic designer, professional and original. Carr’s narrative claims that the less realistic “buckram” crown, made from junk rather than weighty metal, allowed Terry to act Lady Macbeth. Like James’ artist in “The Real Thing,” Carr
— and by extension Terry—are successful as they rely on artifice to create a persuasive representation.

The crown Sargent painted, however, does not appear to be the featherweight fake Terry used on stage, but rather, the discarded, expensive crown from Paris, too heavy for practical use in theatre, but just right in conveying gleaming, weighty splendor. We might imagine that Sargent, who, as critics noted, made evident the "real" artifice of Terry's painted lips, pale face, and wig, might also have painted the buckram crown as buckram. The thickness of the rim and the gleam of light reflections on the smooth inner curve of the crown, however, does not suggest buckram or tinsel, but rather, the more "realistic" metal substance from which we assume the Parisian crown was made.

As Terry's backstage experience of the Parisian crown was based on its weight, we might imagine that comparably, Sargent's Ellen Terry, holding the crown above her own line of sight, can only experience the crown and all of its signification through its weight. As she experiences its weight—a weight that causes her back to arch and her arms to expand—its power is physically manifest. Giving reason for the pose, its weight transforms Terry as Lady Macbeth from the sweet feminine creature she was on stage to the ambitious, yet vulnerable, danger Sargent represents.

It also symbolically crowns the work of Terry, Carr, and Sargent—work characterized as artifice and declared as such by Sargent. Ironically, it is the realistically weighty, material crown that consummates the artifice of Terry's appearance, of Sargent's representation. In a painting of predominantly soft edges and sparkling surfaces that dissolve mass, the hard, thick, curving edge of the crown rim declares its comparatively substantial materiality, its objecthood in three-dimensional space—to an extent that no other part of the painting does. The crown's materiality transforms surrounding surfaces, causing the shadows of her palms to glow fiery orange. Resorting to the one detail of Terry's appearance that was never seen on stage, Sargent chooses the
more material, real prop to crown triumphant artifice itself. He does so to make his
message materially, symbolically weighty: that artifice is a real feature of successful
image-making; artifice enables representation. Ironically, it is the most “real,” weighty
object that declares the power and achievement of his artfulness.

Conclusion

With Ellen Terry, Sargent created an image that advertised his abilities while
appealing to his viewers’ varying ideological convictions concerning women’s role in
society. In addition, Sargent’s painting participated in the extended discourse of his
social milieu about the nature of identity and art. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested how
texts and performances by members of Sargent’s coterie challenged identity categories in
various ways: by revealing fissures between outer and inner, body and mind, appearance
and character, reality and art; and by declaring artifice as a necessity of representation.
Sargent’s Ellen Terry did likewise. In making performance the subject of his work, even
as it is a characteristic of his work, Sargent called into question the presumed natural link
between such dualisms as outer/inner, surface/depth, appearance/character, and reality/art
upon which criticisms of his work were based. He highlighted the artifice of theatre and
art to suggest that artifice, itself, is the “real thing.” He did both of these things with an
image representing British aestheticism that itself was inextricably bound up in notions of
essential femininity and English nationhood. In so doing, his work complicated notions
of gender and artistic identity by suggesting that such identities are performative
constructions.

Sargent did not, however, go quite so far as to suggest identity could be
constituted solely in performance. Sargent still allowed for the possibility that a “true”
Ellen Terry stood behind the artifice of costume, makeup, wig, and paint. At the very
least, the title itself suggests this: the “as” in Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth declares a rupture between subject and role.¹⁰⁷

Sargent’s subsequent paintings of theatrical performers, however, more fully offer the suggestion that identity could exist only through performance. In the few years immediately following the debut of Ellen Terry, Sargent received several commissions to paint famous performers. Significantly, the performers were all American male actors—Lawrence Barrett, Edwin Booth, and Joseph Jefferson. With one exception, Sargent painted them as “themselves” rather than playing a particular stage role.¹⁰⁸ When Sargent chose his own subjects, however, as with his series of Javanese dancers, 1889, and La Carmencita, 1890, they were female performers, heavily made-up and exotically costumed representations of non-Anglo-Saxon nations.¹⁰⁹ While represented with comparable artifices of makeup, costume, and dramatic poses, these performers were either anonymous or had stage personas inseparable from their offstage identity. La Carmencita, for instance, was “Carmencita” offstage as well as on.¹¹⁰ Her dancing was deemed exemplary of her Spanish race and character, just as the Javanese dancers, unknown by name, were viewed as performing their race, their identity.¹¹¹ Unlike the title Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, there are no “as”’s in the titles of La Carmencita and the paintings of Javanese dancers to declare the rupture between subject and role. Instead, they are playing themselves—or the selves the audience chose to understand. Yet, in contrast to the images of the male actors, their selves are most obviously constituted in and through performance. Given this, it is significant that they are female and not Anglo-Saxon. Perhaps, as with James’ Miriam Rooth, the concept that no self exists outside of performance proved so threatening to valued notions of authenticity that it could only be suggested within the context of representing marginal “others.”
Epilogue: Sargent's portrait of Carr

The year after Terry made her debut as a "Sargent" at the New Gallery, Carr made her "Sargent" debut there (Fig. 26). In the months following the exhibition of Ellen Terry, Sargent had produced numerous studies of friends and family which continued his experiments with the effects of varying lighting conditions on skin tone. Carr later recalled that Sargent had been "engrossed" with the "new idea" of painting her under lamplight; Carr's portrait at the New Gallery was one of those experiments. In contrast to Ellen Terry, which had commanded attention by its size and central placement in the gallery, Sargent's portrait of Carr was small, intimate, informal and "hung away in a corner." Yet Carr's portrait also stirred comment in the press as a result of her flesh tones.

Carr remembered that viewers were disconcerted by her appearance and found the portrait "gruesome." "The picture must have been painted after death," Carr recalled one viewer reasoning. Such a comment was likely prompted by the pale, mask-like skin color of her face and the resulting sharp shadow lines that carve cheekbones and eye sockets in a manner that suggests a skull. Her half-closed eyes appear dull and unfocused in a way that might also have suggested death to viewers. M.H. Spielmann, writing for the Magazine of Art, claimed surprise "that [Carr's portrait] should be exhibited at all." This painting, he felt, was not the kind of work the public was looking for:

Mr. Sargent is a man who works with astonishing ease and who is possessed of extraordinary dexterity; but that very dexterity has been his stumbling-block, and in this case the kind of facility he has shown is his fatal facility to fail. It would be idle to pretend that in this head of Mrs. Carr there is no talent; those whose eyes are so trained that they can restrain themselves in the presence of the subject and examine only the workmanship, will be constrained to own that this portrait is by no means the work of a "duffer." But how grotesque, how unpleasant, how comic! How libellous on the lady whose name is pinned to it! Were an unlucky editor to print of the charming original what Mr. Sargent has painted of her,
he would doubtless be brought without much ado into the presence of a
round dozen of his countrymen to answer for his temerity. It is true the
picture is hung away in a corner, but so curious a work is hardly likely to
escape for long the sleuth-hound instinct of a sensation-loving public.\textsuperscript{17}

Significantly, Spielmann's rhetoric about this portrait repeated the discourse around
\textbf{Madame X} when it was shown six years earlier at the Paris Salon. Just as Gautreau’s
reputation had suffered, so, Spielmann suggested, Carr’s reputation was damaged by
Sargent’s image of her. Spielmann implied that the portrait of Carr would create a
comparable sensation. In the commentary about both \textit{Mrs. J.W. Comyns Carr} and
\textbf{Madame X}, Sargent’s talent as an artistic technician was never questioned—he has
“dexterity,” “facility,” “talent,” “workmanship,” but the paintings failed, according to
critics, because of how he chose to render his subjects. His choices were deemed no
tribute to the women he painted. \textbf{Madame X} and \textit{Mrs. Carr} could not be more different in
presentation, yet the bizarre pallor of their flesh link these portraits and their critical
reception. Without the context of theatre that Ellen Terry provided to rationalize a
separation between appearance and character, Carr’s portrait, like \textbf{Madame X}, was
deemed libellous, as appearance was linked to character.

Despite the negative public reception, the image was later used as a frontispiece
for Carr’s memoirs. It was most likely chosen because it testifies to her friendship, her
intimate connection with the most famous artist of the day. Significantly, the caption to
this frontispiece does not just label sitter and artist, but includes the qualifying descriptor,
“From a painting by lamplight,” making it clear to readers that the rendering of skin is the
result of light, not the flaws of artist or sitter.

96
Carr's portrait, paradigmatic of numerous smaller portraits Sargent created in the next few years, expands his exploration in destabilizing the link between appearance and character, body and soul. The makeup of Madame X and Ellen Terry declared artifice that belied the assumed link, yet primarily actresses, prostitutes, and professional beauties wore makeup so obviously. Thus the implications of their artifice could be set aside as most viewers would not identify themselves with Madame X or Ellen Terry. With Carr's portrait, Sargent raised the issue within a context with which most viewers could identify. If lamplight—associated with the cozy, intimate privacy of everyday home life—can alter appearance to the extent that it suggests a grotesque visage of death, how is it possible to equate appearance with character, appearance with reality? While Sargent's images of these years seem to raise this question, at least some viewers were not ready to let go of the link outside the context of theatre.
Notes to Chapter 2


2. Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (New York and London, 1987) 261-264. Auerbach declares that Sargent painted Terry as she “rises into possession of her unsanctioned, forbidden, powerful self with a boldness she dreamed of but never realized” (263). While an exciting argument, I am uncomfortable with the notion that a man had the ability to see and present the true “self” Terry never could. I see Sargent’s image, by contrast, as a fictive construction as problematic as any of the other “selves” Terry’s men constructed and Terry obligingly performed or altered. My analysis most obviously differs from Auerbach’s in my understanding of Sargent’s image as it defines Sargent. I rely on Auerbach’s impressive biography, however, for my understanding of Terry.


5. Many of the texts that I discuss are ones that Boime has examined in relation to Sargent, namely Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and Henry James’ *The Tragic Muse* and “The Real Thing” (Boime, 77-81). In his discussions of these texts, Boime notes themes and subjects that correspond to the life and work of Sargent in order to argue for Sargent’s position within the aesthetic circles of Paris and England. My analysis of these texts in relation to Sargent’s work differs in detail and emphasis. I focus my observations on the way these texts explore notions of performance and identity.


15. All quotes from Miesel, "Irving and the Artists" 403.


17. Henry James, "Henry Irving as Louis XI; Olivia at the Court Theatre," 1878, "The London Theatres," 1879, and "The Acting in Mr. Irving's 'Faust,'" reprints in The Scenic Art 109, 122, 221. James compared Terry to "a preRaphaelitish drawing" in one essay and declared her to have "a face that Burne-Jones might have drawn" in another essay (The Scenic Art, 109 and 143). For similar comments about Terry's picturesque qualities, see quotes by George Bernard Shaw and W. Graham Robertson in Miesel 403. See also Olive Weston, "Ellen Terry, The Woman," Philadelphia Press 12 May 1889: 17, who compares Terry's appearance to "Burne-Jones' saints."

18. Adam 78, 84-5, and 78-79, respectively.


23. The story I relate about Terry’s characterization of Lady Macbeth is drawn from a plethora of secondary biographical and historical sources on Terry, including Auerbach, Ellen Terry: Roger Manvell, Ellen Terry (New York, 1968); Melville; Tom Prideaux, Love or Nothing: The Life and Times of Ellen Terry (New York, 1975); and Terry, The Story of My Life. A succinct chronology of the theatrical roles Terry played throughout her life can be found in “Ellen Terry,” Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-1930, 4th supplement (London, 1937) 827-830. For a discussion of the contemporary criticism of Terry’s role as Lady Macbeth, see Hughes 91-116. For a history of dramatic interpretations of Lady Macbeth, see Dennis Bartholomeusz, Macbeth and the Players (London, 1969).


25. Terry wrote this in the margins of an essay she read by Sarah Siddons on the character of Lady Macbeth, quoted in Charles Merrill Mount, John Singer Sargent, 3rd ed. (New York, 1969) 144.


27. Melville 131.


29. Melville 131.


31. Hughes 93.

32. For discussions of Irving’s interpretation, see Bartholomeusz 200, and Hughes 88-94.

33. According to Auerbach, while Siddons’ acting did not bring out the presumed femininity of Lady Macbeth, Siddons’ private notes perhaps “sanctioned Ellen Terry’s interpretation” (Auerbach, Ellen Terry 252).

34. Manvell 196.

35. Bartholomeusz 201.


42. Auerbach, *Ellen Terry* 264.

43. Adam 211.

44. Adam 211-212.


47. Adam 211.

48. She certainly was not aiming for historical accuracy, as medieval Scottish women would not have worn chain mail armor.

49. Terry chose to recount for the press an anecdote detailing her fear of snakes, a story meant to emphasize her endearingly typical femininity (Ellen Terry, “Stray Memories,” *New Review* May 1891: 446). How ironic then, that Carr turned her into a snake, particularly since Terry determined always to play herself.

50. Auerbach 253.


52. I thank Claudia Brush Kidwell for her information and thoughts about the costumes portrayed in these images.
53. Bartholomeusz 212.

54. Adam 300.


57. I thank Julie Simons for this insight.

58. For a description of this image, see “London Facts and Talk,” New York Times 12 May 1889: 1, and “The Grosvenor Gallery,” Saturday Review 18 May 1889: 604. The fact that Terry as Lady Macbeth was painted by at least two prominent artists attests to her pictorial impact in this role.


60. For the relationship between Pre-Raphaelite art and drama, see Miesel 351-372.

61. Terry kept the original sketch. In 1906, Sargent made a grisaille version of this sketch for her jubilee performance programme. She recalled that Sargent wrote to her: “You must think of me as one of the people bowing down to you in the picture” (Terry, The Story of My Life, 345). For further information about these sketches, see Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, John Singer Sargent: The Early Portraits, Complete Paintings, 1 (New Haven and London, 1998) 189-190.


63. Auerbach, Ellen Terry 261-3.

64. Examples of such popular images include Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s A Sculptor’s Model, 1877; Arthur Hill’s Andromeda, 1875; Walter Crane’s The Renaissance of Venus, 1877; Arthur Hacker’s Syrinx, 1892 and Daphne, 1895; Edward Poynter’s Diadumenè, 1885; William Blake Richmond’s Perseus and Andromeda, 1890s; and Frederick Sandys’ Danae in the Brazen Chamber, 1867, to name just a few. For discussions and reproductions of these images, see Joseph Kestner, Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting (Madison, WI, 1989).

65. One of the fathers of weight-lifting, Eugen Sandow, arrived in England to challenge an existing strong men act by “Samson” and “Cyclops” at Westminster in 1889, several months after Terry’s debut. The publicity surrounding the challenge attests to the
popularity of the sport. Sandow’s feats gained him celebrity status comparable to the top
theatre stars of the day. London held the first international weight-lifting competition in
1891, just two years later. Useful histories of weight-lifting include David Webster, The
Iron Game: An Illustrated History of Weight-Lifting (Irvine, 1976); Gottfried Schödl,
The Lost Past, trans. Aniko Németh-Móra (Hungary, 1992); Harvey Green, Fit for
America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society (Baltimore, 1986); and Cecile
Lindsay, “Bodybuilding: A Postmodern Freak Show,” Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of
356-367.

66. For a brief discussion of the career of strong woman Kate “Sandwina,” for instance,
see Lindsay 357-360.

67. A Max Beerbohm cartoon of Sargent, “The Strong Man of the Royal Academy,”
1912, recalls, in subject, the cartoon of Sargent’s Ellen Terry (Max Beerbohm,
Caricatures by Max from the Collection in the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford, 1958) fig.
14). A giant, corpulent Sargent, with thick neck and bulging eyes, stands on a fair-booth
platform called “Royal Academy” wearing frilly shorts and a singlet with his initials on
it. While the cartoon of Ellen Terry as a strong woman portrays her as a scrawny woman
remarkably lifting heavy weights, Sargent’s “strength” is conveyed through his physical
size alone. The odd, ruffled shorts and possibly hosed legs doubtless refer to the
comparable breeches worn by earlier nobility, whose portraits Sargent often invoked in
his own portrait work. Humorously referring to Sargent’s own nobility, the frilled pants
offer an incongruous sign of high class in the context of a public fair booth where only
the lower classes would perform. These pants also add an odd, “effeminate” element to
an otherwise extremely masculine persona. Like the androgynous persona conveyed in
the cartoon of Ellen Terry, the androgyny suggested by the incongruous juxtaposition of
male strength and anachronistically ruffled shorts in this cartoon implies that Sargent,
too, is a freak of nature. In the corner of the cartoon, a woman and young boy peer up at
Sargent with startled amazement at the awesome curiosity he embodies.

68. See Dijkstra 212-5, and Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness,

69. See Lisa Tickner, The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign
1907-1914 (Chicago and London, 1988), and Patricia Marks, Bicycles, Bangs, and

70. See Dijkstra, 265-69 and 305-314, for discussions of mermaid images and fin-de-
siècle associations of women with serpents.

72. Kestner provides a brief overview of the debates about women’s rights in England in the context of image-making in nineteenth-century England (35-38). For fuller discussions on women’s suffrage, see Tickner.

73. Kestner 147-8.


76. Dijkstra 175-82.

77. Dijkstra 42-47, and Showalter.

78. Dijkstra 229-230. Rossetti’s various versions of Lady Lilith, combing long, wavy, golden red tresses, visualized such literary imagery—specifically the verses from Goethe’s Faust about Lilith: “Beware of her hair, for she excels/ All women in the magic of her locks/ And when she twines them round a young man’s neck/ She will not ever set him free again” (Alicia Craig Faxon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (New York, 1989) 203).

79. Images of Ellen Terry in which her jawline is deemphasized include Julia Margaret Cameron’s photograph, The South West Wind from Life, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Pamela Colman Smith’s drawing of Ellen Terry as Ellaline in The Amber Heart, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. (Reproductions in Auerbach, Ellen Terry 98.)

80. Terry’s diary noted, “Burne-Jones yesterday suggested two or more alternatives about the colour which Sargent immediately adopted, but Burne-Jones raves about the picture” (Terry, The Story of My Life 305-6).


82. See The Honorable Evan Charteris, John Sargent (London and New York, 1927) 88, for a brief discussion of Sargent’s admiration for the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. Sargent at one point apparently owned an engraving by Rossetti, identified by Charteris as The Meeting of King Arthur and Guinevere, “which hung on the landing of his studio.” Charteris claimed, however, that Sargent’s art held “no outward sign of kinship with the Pre-Raphaelites.”

84. John Singer Sargent, letters to Vernon Lee, 1884, Miller Library, Colby College. I thank Sally Promey for bringing these letters to my attention.

85. Ralph Curtis, letter to his parents, 1884, quoted in Evan Charteris 62.

86. Rossetti, however, was reluctant to exhibit in any public art institution, and refused to exhibit at the Grosvenor primarily because of its inclusion of Academicians (Susan P. Casteras, “Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle at the Palace of the Aesthetes,” Casteras and Denney 75-77).

87. I thank Elizabeth Hutchinson for this insight.

88. John Singer Sargent, letter to Edwin Russell, 10 Sept. 1885, Tate Gallery Archives, quoted in Marc Simpson, Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent, exh. cat. (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1997) 129.

89. Simpson, Uncanny Spectacle 129.

90. I thank Elizabeth Broun for calling my attention to the Celtic flavor of this image. Most literature on the Celtic revival focuses on Celtic Ireland and the nineteenth-century archeological excavations that took place there. See, for example, T.J. Edelstein, ed., Imagining an Irish Past: The Celtic Revival, 1840-1940 (Chicago, 1992).

91. Future Scottish clients included Lady Agnew of Lochnaw and Mrs. Huth Jackson.


95. See Chapter One 3-5.


100. Montezuma, “My Note Book” 46; Art Clippings from the Pen of Walter Cranston Larned and Other Critics at the Fair, ed. J.S. Merrill (Chicago, 1893) 5; and the Philadelphia Evening Telegram, quoted in Art Amateur Feb. 1894: 84, respectively. I thank George Gurney and Brandon Fortune for sharing reviews of this painting published in American newspapers at the time of its exhibition in Chicago (1893) and Philadelphia (1894) (Exhibition files for Revisiting the White City: American Art at the 1893 World’s Fair, National Museum of American Art and National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.).

101. “The New Gallery,” Saturday Review 25 May 1889: 639; “The New Gallery,” London Times 3 May 1889: 9. Terry herself loved Sargent’s portrait of her, even though it did not highlight her interpretation of Lady Macbeth. She described the painting as “magnificent” and “splendid.” Yet during the time it was first exhibited, she never made reference to Sargent’s interpretation of her performance in the part. Only in commentary written nineteen years later did she come to the conclusion that “Sargent suggested by this picture all that I should have liked to be able to convey in my acting as Lady Macbeth” (Terry, The Story of My Life 332). We might assess this statement as indicative of Terry’s autobiographical enterprise. With the mediation of time, Terry was able to create a seamless narrative that reconciled contradictions. Terry was ultimately concerned that her portrait be a success, and as it proved to be, she was perhaps able, or even eager, in her own mind, to accommodate its discrepancies with her actual performance. For an alternative reading of this quote by Terry, see Auerbach, Ellen Terry 263.

102. When first exhibited at the New Gallery, the painting was protected by “a shield of plate glass,” which further distanced viewers from the realm of the representation and declared the boundary between art and life. This was not standard practice at art exhibitions, and its presence was noted in at least two reviews. The critic for the London Times felt sure everyone would agree that the glass should be removed to allow for better viewing (“The New Gallery,” London Times 3 May 1889: 9). See also Montezuma, “My Note Book,” Art Amateur Aug. 1889: 46.
103. Adam 212.

104. Adam 212.

105. Adam 212-213.

106. They did note that the crown jewels appeared “fictitious.” See “The New Gallery,” Saturday Review 25 May 1889: 639, and “American Painting: IV: Whistler, Dannat, Sargent,” Art Amateur Nov. 1893: 134. Nothing was said, however, about the gold material itself. Certainly both the buckram crown and the heavy Parisian crown would have had fictitious jewels—as both were made for the stage.


108. Sargent did two paintings of Joseph Jefferson, one of him in the role of Dr. Pangloss. The paintings were not commissioned by the actors themselves. For further information about these paintings, see Trevor Fairbrother, John Singer Sargent and America (New York, 1986) 155-159, 166.


110. For a contemporaneous biography of Carmencita, written in conjunction with a fictional romance loosely based on her life, see James Ramirez, Carmencita: The Pearl of Seville (New York, 1890).

111. For a discussion of these images as exemplary of race, see “Mr. Sargent’s Portrait of La Carmencita.” Harper’s Weekly 14 June 1890: 467-8, and Alice Meynell, Intro., The Work of John S. Sargent, R.A. (New York, 1903) A3, respectively.

112. These include Alma Strettel, c. 1889, Private Collection; Violet Sargent, 1889, Private Collection; Autumn on the River, 1889, Private Collection; Flora Priestley or Lamplight Study, c. 1889, Private Collection; and Flora Priestley, c. 1889, Tate Gallery, London.

113. Adam 301.


115. Adam 301-2.
116. Spielmann 306.

117. Spielmann 306. Certainly after reading such a review, which damns the painting without offering specific visual information as to why it is “grotesque” and “comic,” readers would likely have made a special effort to join the sleuthing public in looking for her portrait at the New Gallery, and they would have been predisposed to discover something grotesque without knowing, in advance, what that “grotesque” would look like.
Chapter 3
Typing and Ambiguity in Sargent’s Portraits of Jews and Aristocrats

“The aristocracy of finance” and “the aristocracy of blood,” as Christian Brinton respectively called wealthy Jews and British peers, provided Sargent with his most ambitious portrait commissions after his reputation was secure in the early 1890s. Both groups clearly felt they had much to gain from large-scale images of themselves by the most famous portraitist of their generation. In general, the wealthy Jews who commissioned Sargent were invested in presenting themselves as established aristocrats with good taste and culture. The British lords, by contrast, were invested in defending their positions as the standard-bearers of taste and in declaring the stability of their class position.

Continuing to equate appearance with character, viewers of these paintings at the annual Royal Academy and New Gallery exhibitions enjoyed labeling these sitters by “racial” types. Sargent’s images enabled such typing, but they also, at times, exposed the limits of this very activity. This chapter looks at three ambitious portraits where this is the case: Mrs. Carl Meyer and her Children, 1896, Charles Stewart, Sixth Marquess of Londonderry..., 1904, and A Vele Gonfie, 1905. Mrs. Carl Meyer and her children were deemed exemplary of the “Jewish type,” while Londonderry was deemed characteristically “English.” A Vele Gonfie, which I examine as an epilogue to this chapter, portrays a Jewish sitter but was not identified as such in the press. In fact, critics said very little about this portrait at the time of its initial exhibition. Their silence, as we shall see, is particularly revealing in the context of critics’ ordering impulse.

In considering the function of these three images for the sitters and their viewers, I draw on evidence from the sitters’ biographies, the discourse on Anglo-Jews and British aristocrats during this time, the art critics’ commentaries, and the aesthetics of the images.
themselves. At times, I examine the portraits for evidence of features that could have been interpreted as signs of "race." I do so not to reify such essentialized readings, but rather to suggest the way Sargent's pictures would have both prompted and problematized such an activity within a turn-of-the-century cultural context.

**Viewing “Mrs. Meyer and her Two Children”**

_Mrs. Carl Meyer and her Two Children_ (Fig. 27) was the feature painting at the 1897 Royal Academy exhibition, the 1899 Boston Sargent exhibition and the 1900 American art exhibition at the Paris Exposition. Hung in a central location at all three venues, _Mrs. Meyer_ was praised more than any other work in these shows. A reviewer at the 1897 exhibition announced that it was “the dominating picture of the whole Academy...the one undoubted masterpiece of the exhibition...one of the wonders of the time.” Two years later, reviewers at the 1899 show declared it “one of the most remarkable pictures Mr. Sargent has ever painted,” “unquestionably destined to be the most talked of during the exhibition.” Acclaim for the painting continued in reviews of the Paris Exposition, where one viewer exclaimed, “it might have a room to itself and nobody would have a right to complain, its merit is so superlative...There is nothing in the whole exhibition, French or foreign, that surpasses...”

The painting depicts Mrs. Carl Meyer (née Adèle Levis), the wife of a Jewish banker, and their two children, Frank and Elsie. Mrs. Meyer, her form taking up most of the lower half of the picture space, sits off-center on a Louis XV sofa while her children peer out from behind the sofa back. Sargent has relegated these children to the left background corner of the composition, as if they are merely attributes of her motherhood rather than individuals of comparable significance. Only Mrs. Meyer's arm, stretching diagonally across the center of the composition, connects with her children. Rather than
foregrounding a maternal intimacy with her children, as he does with portraits such as Mrs. Edward L. Davis and her Son Livingston Davis and Mrs. William Marshall Cazalet and Children, Sargent's painting foregrounds the family's wealth. This wealth is signaled by the richness and amplitude of dress fabrics, the pearl necklace that cascades to Mrs. Meyer's feet, the boiserie, and the gilded sofa, covered with a decorative tapestry. In addition, the painting highlights the Meyers' possession of culture: literature is signified by the book, while music and art are represented by the chair decoration.

The main possession the painting proclaims, however, is that of a "Sargent"—one of the decade's most telling signs of wealth and good taste. By 1896, Sargent's style was well known, and his reputation was firmly established as the premier society portraitist of the era. Patrons willing to pay the large sums Sargent charged were looking not only for a positive rendering of themselves and their social position, but also for a painting that would be identifiable "Sargent." One critic noted that Mrs. Meyer "exemplified his accustomed methods" and represented all that was a "Sargent" at its best. Specifically, the painting made direct and oblique references to the two female society portraits that had "finally established Sargent's English career" several years earlier: Lady Agnew of Lochnaw (Fig. 28) and Mrs. Hammersley (Fig. 29).

When these two female portraits were first exhibited in 1893, critics were enthralled, and they devoted an unusual amount of text to explicating the different charms of Lady Agnew, shown at the Royal Academy, and Mrs. Hammersley, shown at the New Gallery. Lady Agnew was praised for its depiction of refined beauty and dignified grace, whereas Mrs. Hammersley was celebrated for its depiction of sparkling vivacity. Mrs. Meyer can be viewed as a combination, even a one-upsmanship, of these two successful female images.

Mrs. Meyer recalls Lady Agnew in dress and pose. Both sitters wear dresses with comparable gauzy necklines and transparent sleeves, accented by ribbons at the...
elbow that match the sash around their waists. In addition, like Lady Agnew in her chair, Mrs. Meyer sits asymmetrically at the right corner of a sofa, and her skirt flows towards the opposite side of the couch. Furthermore, the figures’ forms relate to the furniture in comparable ways. White plays off white in Lady Agnew, as pink plays off pink in Mrs. Meyer. The decorative edging at the top of both chairs visually directs the viewer’s attention to the sitters’ faces, particularly their eyes, which meet the viewer with a seductive upward glance. In addition, their forms unite with their furniture: Lady Agnew’s left arm sensuously entwines with the organic undulations of the chair’s arm; Mrs. Meyer’s arm, holding an open fan, stands in for the arm rest, whose form we barely discern as a gold accent beneath sleeve and fan. The union of figure and furniture is pushed even further in Mrs. Meyer, however, as her hemline mimics the scroll-like design of her footstool, and, at the right corner of the picture, the V-shape fold of skirt completes the zigzag edge begun by the gilded edge of the footstool. Rather than intertwining with the furniture, her form seems actually to merge with it to create a single visual entity. With Mrs. Meyer, Sargent relied on and even built upon pictorial strategies that proved successful with Lady Agnew.

In other ways, however, Mrs. Meyer recalls Mrs. Hammersley in dress and pose. Both women display comparable décolletage and two dainty feet, the presence of which in Mrs. Hammersley was much noted in the press. The angles of their faces to the picture plane are identical, and both women appear animated: each leans forward, one arm stretches out to rest against the sofa back, and fingers spread in self-consciously elegant display.

In referencing both Lady Agnew and Mrs. Hammersley, Sargent suggests that Mrs. Meyer embodies the best of both characters—she is both refined and spirited, gracious and animated. But above all she is wealthy. The accessories in Mrs. Meyer far
outnumber those in the two earlier paintings; and the painting’s size is much larger, attesting to its greater monetary cost.

The Meyers’ wealth was new, and a few critics noted that Sargent’s painting served as the family’s public entry into society. At the time the portrait was made, Mr. Meyer, a naturalized British citizen born in Germany, was a senior executive for the house of Rothschilds. Moving to London as the Rothschilds’ employee in 1872, Meyer most notably represented them in their South African mining companies, in particular De Beers Consolidated, as well as the Burma Ruby Mines. In addition, he had made considerable money outside the firm with another Jewish financier, Ernest Cassel, in a foreign loan business the two had established. Sargent’s portrait can be understood as presenting the Meyer family as wealthy elite on par with well-established Anglo-Jewish aristocratic families such as the Rothschilds and Sassoons.

Months after the Meyer portrait debuted at the Royal Academy, Mr. Meyer was released from his job with the Rothschilds. Sir Edward Hamilton, who was staying with Lord Nathan Rothschild at the time, wrote in his diary of the “considerable excitement in Rothschild circles: latterly, having feathered his nest well, [Meyer] wanted to be less tied; and fully expecting that he could dictate his own terms, he threatened to resign unless his position was improved. Much to his surprise, he was taken at his word; it being thought by the [Rothschild] brothers that he was getting a little ‘too big for his boots.’” Sargent’s grand-scale portrait of the Meyer family, having drawn considerable public attention with its blatant display of wealth, could have served as further evidence for such a perception.

Because of his connections and influence garnered from his job with the Rothschilds, Mr. Meyer had no trouble continuing his financial successes as a mining magnate after he left their establishment. Thirteen years after Sargent’s picture was first exhibited and shortly after Meyer donated a large sum of money for the creation of
the Shakespeare National Memorial Theatre, King George V conferred the baronetcy on Mr. Meyer. The family’s ability to buy national culture, not just for themselves, but for the nation, enabled them, gradually, to change their social identities. No longer merely “the aristocracy of finance,” they and their descendents would be “the aristocracy of blood.” Still, they would be a step below the nobility Lord Rothschild had achieved; and today’s histories of prominent Jews in England at the turn of the century almost never mention Meyer’s name—if they do, it is only in passing.

The success of Mrs. Meyer, however, has been considerable and long lasting. Most recently, it graced, full-bleed, the cover of the retrospective exhibition of Sargent’s art at the Whitney Museum of Art in 1986. It was undoubtedly chosen as much for being recognizably “Sargent” as for being able to captivate a potential buyer of the catalogue.

Jewish identity in “Mrs. Meyer”

From the time Mrs. Meyer was first exhibited in the late 1890s, the figures were praised for being “wonderfully full of life,” “living and breathing,” and “giv[ing] the idea of life in an amazing degree.” The impression that the figures were alive enabled critics to declare the portrait’s success in capturing the “truth” about the Meyers—although this “truth” was variously articulated. Some critics, like Henry James, overtly declared the sitters as “markedly Jewish in type.” Other comments were blatantly anti-Semitic: The Spectator, for example, claimed that “even Mr. Sargent’s skill has not succeeded in making attractive these over-civilized European Orientals.” Still other commentators only covertly alluded to ethnicity: the London Times, for instance, in commenting on Mrs. Meyer’s “ropes of pearls” stated that “Lothair’s creator” (the famous Jewish ex-prime minister and novelist, Benjamin Disraeli) would have “rejoiced in the picture”—an
implication that Jews particularly appreciated fine jewelry. Yet other critics never explicitly mentioned the sitters’ ethnicity and simply praised Sargent’s skill in color and execution.

This range of comments is indicative of the diverse attitudes towards wealthy Jews in England at the turn of the century. I first briefly outline these attitudes before returning to a consideration of Jewish stereotypes in circulation at the time and the extent to which these stereotypes would have been identified in Sargent’s representation of the Meyers.

Kathleen Adler has usefully summarized the social and political situation for Jews in turn-of-the-century England based on a variety of historical accounts. As she points out, an increase in anti-Semitism at this time resulted from the effects of Jewish immigration and the coinciding increasing visibility of Jewish economic and social power within English society. Jews were considered foreigners, and as such, their patriotism to England was questioned. A few people, for instance, blamed wealthy Jews for the Boer War and complained that Jews with businesses in South Africa were conspiring to seek personal advantage from the war at the expense of the British nation. Others worried about the predominance of Jews within Edward VII’s social circle and suggested that Jews were allowed undue influence in the running of a nation not originally their own. People expressed fear that Jews were taking over England both from below, as newly arrived immigrants, and from above, as wealthy businessmen. As Adler has noted, the period from 1870 to 1914 has been described as “the golden age of the Jewish people in Britain.” Jews had unprecedented access to great wealth, land ownership, and high government office, and through all of these things, social respectability. As of 1885, with the conference of peerage on Nathan Rothschild, Jews could become aristocrats not just through marriage, but through their own merits. Some scholars have pointed out that anti-Semitism was much less overt in England than in most other European countries, and thus
England was the destination for many Jewish immigrants. Many British citizens prided themselves on their history of liberalism and tolerance and were concerned to avoid any appearance of anti-Semitism. Organizations promoting anti-immigration policies but wary about the consequences of appearing to be anti-Semitic, carefully worded their recommendations for an “aliens act” by avoiding an overt equation of Jews with aliens, although in effect, the two words became synonymous. At one extreme, then, being a “wealthy Jew” could imply that one was a self-serving foreigner contributing to the demise of the English nation. On the flip side, however, it could also be a matter of pride and accomplishment as well as a testament to the liberalism of England.19

In this environment of varying anti-Semitism, tolerance, and acceptance, Jews were invariably considered “other,” marked as different from citizens of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic origins. As a result of Jews’ increasing acculturation into English society, various ethnographic tracts and articles reassured those concerned that Jews could always be distinguished from Gentiles. Jews were presumed to have distinct linguistic accents and physiognomies—most notably dark features, large, aquiline noses, thick lips, conjoined eyebrows, short stature, and flat feet—that functioned as markers of their racial character, temperament, and tastes. Novels, articles, and cartoons at the time created multiple and at times contradictory typologies of the Jew: they were deemed “oriental,” materialistic, excessive, shrewd, intelligent, sensual, and dangerous.20

In Mrs. Meyer, the faces of mother and son are offered at identical viewing angles, while the daughter’s face is offered at an angle that mirrors, in reverse, the other two. As such, these three faces function like the popular physiognomic charts at the time that presented numerous faces of a single type at comparable and alternative angles to show the variations and repetitions of features categorized under the same type.21 On the one hand, viewers could have checked off a mental list of features linked to the Jewish type, particularly in the children: dark hair and eyes, olive skin, full lips, long noses, and, with
Mrs. Meyer, short stature. On the other hand, viewers could also have felt stymied by other features: Mrs. Meyer’s blue-gray eyes, for instance, or fair skin, noses that don’t appear aquiline, thin upper lips, non-conjoined eyebrows, and arched feet. Because these latter features did not conform to conventional assumptions about the physiognomy of Jews, viewers attempting to read the sitters as stereotypically Jewish would have been confounded by the ambiguities presented.

I turn now to take a closer look at Henry James’ commentary about the painting, for he wrote the most extended discussion of the painting’s portrayal of Jewishness, and his text reveals the alternating modes of typing and ambivalence at play. This description came at the end of a review of the Guildhall and Royal Academy of 1897, published in Harper’s Weekly:

The subject of Mr. Sargent’s principal picture wears a pale pink satin dress with wonderful gauzy accessories and, sitting on a Pompadour sofa, presents to incredulous view a pair of imperceptible feet. Her dark hair, powdered or, in spite of youth, faintly grey, is raised high over her forehead and dressed with a pale pink top-knot and small black plume, and, though her type is markedly Jewish, the tinting, ever so delicate, of the space between her upper lip and her nose is not an effect of the shadow of the latter feature. She has round her neck a string of pearls, ineffably painted, that hangs down to her shoes; and one of her hands, raised to rest as she turns, against the old faded, figured tapestry of her seat, holds the hand of one of her two children, boy and girl, who, with their dark heads together, show, over the back of the sofa, shy olive faces, Jewish to a quaint orientalism, faces quite to peep out of the lattice or the curtains of closed seraglio or palanquin. Of these elements Mr. Sargent has made a picture of a knock-down insolence of talent and truth of characterization, a wonderful rendering of life, of manners, of aspects, of types, of textures, of everything. It is the old story; he expresses himself as no one else scarce begins to do in the language of the art he practices. The complete acquisition of this language seems to so few, as it happens, a needful precaution! Beside him, at any rate, his competitors appear to stammer; and his accent is not to be caught, his process, thank heaven, not to be analysed.
James’ description of the mother’s dress, accessories, and furniture evokes associations with French eighteenth-century images of Madame Pompadour by François Boucher, for example, yet his description of the children conjures quite different associations of a generalized Eastern other. Based solely on references to the children’s skin tone and shyness, James launches into an astonishing range of associations—from Muslim palatial harems to Hindi conveyors—none of which bear any direct link to a specifically Jewish culture, despite his identification of them as Jewish. The notion that one can pinpoint essential “Jewish types” collapses in the face of such a range of disparate observations and associations about a single family.

Despite James’ insistence that they appear Jewish, his description of Mrs. Meyer’s features, in particular, reveals his recognition of the ambiguity of physical signs of appearance. He is unsure, for example, whether her gray hair is due to premature aging or to powder; he allows both possibilities—of nature and of artifice—to co-exist. Furthermore, in making the point that she is “markedly Jewish” even though facial shadow is not caused by a large nose, he undoes the stereotype linking “nostrality” and Jewishness. Yet James’ need to point out this shadow seems significant, and once attention has been directed to the shadow, it is difficult not to contemplate its signification. On the one hand, the gray brushstroke above Mrs. Meyer’s upper lip could be interpreted simply as a shadow line created by light on the angles of her face. Yet no other Sargent portrait that I have seen shows such a dark, delineated stroke above a woman’s mouth. Even in Mrs. Hammersley, whose facial angle to the picture plane most closely parallels that of Mrs. Meyer, the shadow above the lip is quite faint. On Mrs. Meyer, Sargent’s distinctive stroke, particularly as it closely matches her hair in color and tone, could have prompted some viewers to interpret it as evidence of facial hair that would have further marked her otherness. Specific physical features—gray hair on a
young woman and matching dark tones beneath her nose—in their ambiguous signification, suggest the inadequacy of typing based on physical appearance.

Finally, in the last few sentences of his review of Mrs. Meyer, James characterizes Sargent himself by using a metaphor linked to the process of typing by race or nation. Art is likened to a foreign language that only Sargent, among fellow artists, has mastered completely. Even Sargent's accent (it is assumed he has one) cannot be detected; thus, metaphorically, who he is and where he comes from cannot be analysed based on his language. He seems native. While James celebrates Sargent's skillful delineation of the Meyer's accent, their otherness, he claims that Sargent does so in a language so perfected that his own accent, by contrast, cannot be delineated. In other words, according to James' metaphor, Sargent enables the typing of his sitters, while denying the typing of himself. The dynamic between Sargent and the Meyers that James offers matches general implications of the time that typing is best accomplished from a position of relative nativeness and belonging. In the final analysis, however, James' activity of delineating the portrait's truths becomes so involved and detailed that it results in multiple, contradictory observations and ambiguous evidence. Ordering leads to ambiguity which leads to further ordering. Ultimately, unlike other reviewers who merely typed Sargent's sitters without giving evidence, James provides us some access to his thinking process, which in itself, perhaps, is a "truth" comparable to Sargent's painting, for, despite James' claim, Sargent's process, as we shall see later, can also be at least partially accessed.

The interpretive activity we witness in James' review of Sargent's art is the same one that James delineates in his own novels. Works such as The Portrait of a Lady (1881) and The Tragic Muse (1889), for example, portray cosmopolitan societies obsessed with identifying an individual's social standing, class, race, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity through an examination of his or her costume, physical features,
James' activity of analysing his characters' identities through a minute description of such traits reveals his own participation in this obsession. While some of his protagonists enact stereotypes of their nationality or "race," for example, others serve to confuse the process of categorization. Much is made, for instance, of the fact that Madame Merle, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, appears French, sounds French, but is "actually" American, and Miriam Rooth, in *The Tragic Muse*, is pronounced a combination of English nobility and German Jew. James seems to delight in providing examples of characters who defy facile labels. In so doing, he offers extended descriptions of people's attempts to resolve for themselves the ambiguities embodied in these characters. In his review of *Mrs. Meyer*, it is James himself who is attempting to resolve the ambiguities, and it is Sargent who conveys them in his visual representation.

**Reading "Mrs. Meyer"**

In conjuring up images of "the lattice or the curtains of closed seraglio and palaquin" in his description of the Meyer children, James alludes to an important aspect of the picture which he does not fully explore. He emphasizes, through metaphor, the impression that the sitters are hidden behind physical barriers through which we (middle class viewers, tourists, voyeurs) peer to catch glimpses of lives that are "other." Their world is one about which we are curious but from which we are barred. Our lack of full access provokes our frustration, our fascination, our desire to view, to know. These sitters can, however, comparably look back at us—with perhaps equal curiosity. The physical barriers were created not by us, but by those "others" who peer behind the barriers. We can only see the part of the picture they want us to see. Much remains hidden from us. James may have suggested that the "Jewish type" is easily discernible in
Sargent’s work, but his allusions suggest at least a subconscious recognition of the limits to which one can fully know those whom one considers “other.”

Close examination of the painting verifies James’ suggestion of our limited view of the Meyers. Even as chosen aspects of the Meyers’ bodies and belongings are offered to us for viewing, even as our visual consumption of the image is encouraged, it is also, simultaneously, denied. In fact, it could be argued that the painting itself is about reading, about looking, and the frustration of those activities.

In this light, the open book positioned on the couch next to Mrs. Meyer serves as a metaphor for the entire painting. Splayed on end, this odd prop prompts us to rationalize a reason for its presence, and in so doing, to conjure a plausible narrative for the scene. The book’s precarious position suggests that something has happened just moments before and will happen just moments after what we are viewing. We might imagine, for instance, that Mrs. Meyer was suddenly interrupted by her children, and upon seeing them, she dropped her book and reached out her arm to them. Or perhaps she was interrupted by a visitor and dropped her book for the more decorous fan. Still, it would be difficult to rationalize why she would be reading in such an elaborate costume. Perhaps she had been reading to pass the time while the painter concentrated his attentions on the folds of her dress, and the children, curious about the process, came shyly in to see what was happening. Or perhaps she was patiently reading (maybe to her children) while waiting to go to a ball or opera. No single, seamless narrative, however, fully accounts for the presence and position of the book in relation to the rest of the environment of fancy costume and furniture. I list a number of potential narratives to illustrate how this image both prompts and denies such interpretive strategies. The splayed book is integral to this function.

As the book’s pages are turned towards us, we might imagine that its presence is for our benefit, that we are the ones solicited to read it, and by extension, the image itself.
In its fanned position, it offers multiple pages for our delectation. In so doing, however, the book denies our complete view of any one page, much less a reading of the whole text (we do not even have access to the title).

Analogously, this is what Sargent offers to us with his portrait. While some visual information is forthrightly displayed, other information is presented so as to be partially concealed, illegible, or presented in a way that leaves meaning, perspective, or identity unresolved. Mrs. Meyer’s skirts, fanning out like the pages of the book, present the texture and abundance of rich material and open like theatre curtains to display two dainty feet, yet they conceal much of the furniture and floor and thus a clear reading of the spatial environment she inhabits. Her fan, echoing the forms of the book and skirt, also functions to conceal and reveal information. Viewers of Sargent’s painting would have been accustomed to fans as frameworks for art, fine objects rewarding scrutiny. Yet whether those bright pink squiggles at the top of the fan stand in for an image or merely represent the material of the fan, we can never know. The color changes from pink in the center to a paler tone, to green at the edges and thus could suggest an image as much as it could suggest shifts of light across a pleated surface. Significantly, like the splayed book offering pages that cannot be fully viewed, Sargent both suggests and denies viewing by his rendering of the fan. Additional fanned shapes within Sargent’s image function in comparable ways. The end of Mrs. Meyer’s sleeve, presented in the center of the composition conventionally reserved for the significant focal point of the painting, is fanned in a way that displays lacy fabric while concealing the main figure of the scene on the decorative sofa. Two small feet presented beneath the sleeve, however, let viewers know of the figure’s presence. The semi-transparent material of Mrs. Meyer’s sleeves, the slats of the fan, and the lacy décolletage of her neckline, all serve to reveal and conceal parts of her body. In addition, the sofa back, its gilded edge rhyming the sweeping curves of skirt, fan, sleeve, and neckline, displays a decorative scene of performers while
providing a physical barricade behind which the Meyer children present themselves. Thus, the visual props on which Sargent focuses our attention have dual, opposing functions of simultaneously revealing and concealing information that could provide clues to pictorial narrative or meaning. We are made aware through scrutinizing these visual details that only the Meyers themselves have full access to viewing and knowing the environment they inhabit.\textsuperscript{25}

In addition to the bewildering details of props and facial features discussed thus far, the compositional structure as a whole lacked resolution for viewers used to spatial conventions of linear perspective. While the painting was generally praised, critics were uncomfortable with the tilting perspective of the composition and found it the one fault of the painting.\textsuperscript{26} The \textit{Magazine of Art}, for example, noted:

\begin{quote}
The one defect lies in the fact that, instead of placing his seated figure upon the throne, the artist himself takes the higher position and paints down upon the sitter. The result is that the perspective, though true enough, appears to be distorted, and the furthermost floor-line mounts above the head of the principal figure. To the spectator this arrangement is objectionable, irritating—the only objection, as has been said, in a really great work...\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

This critic is at pains to point out that the perspective is “true enough,” but the problem is that it appears as if it were not true. It disrupts an illusion of stable order. \textit{Punch} made this tilting perspective the focus of a cartoon (Fig. 30). In this parody of \textit{Mrs. Meyer}, the fan and book are falling down and the children are holding onto their mother’s arm to prevent her from slipping off the page. The caption reads: “The Perils of Steep Perspective! ‘Hold up, mother; it’s only like the switchback!’” The notion that the props and figures might slip out of the framework of the painting itself, down an imaginary mountain side, out of our view, suggests that they have not been securely captured, caught, fixed in a safe and proper space. Such an implication was perhaps “objectionable” and “irritating” because it was discomforting, particularly in the context
of a culture obsessed with relegating others into their "proper" place within the social order.

In most pictorial constructions, viewers are displaced artists looking at the subject as if from the perspective of the artist who created the image. This, however, does not exactly happen in Mrs. Meyer. As the critic for the Magazine of Art noted, it appears as if Sargent was standing above his sitters while painting them. Viewers of the resulting life-size image, however, were always, technically, looking up at the family. One illustration of crowds before Mrs. Meyer at the 1899 exhibition shows viewers' heads at the level of her feet or knees. Both looking up and looking down on a subject can distort perspectives in comparable ways, flattening out the image along sloping verticals. The spatial ambiguity of where we are and where we are supposed to be in relation to the sitters additionally works to defy the illusion of a stable space most viewers were used to seeing.

The ambiguity of Mrs. Meyer's body in relation to the sofa on which she sits also adds to the instability of the composition. In the position in which Sargent has depicted her, she cannot actually be sitting on the chair as it is represented. We can rationalize the position of her upper legs and waist in relation to the couch only if we imagine her half rising from the couch. Yet the position of her feet, resting on the stool, defies this possibility. Her illogical spatial position allows us to conceive that her form was initially created as a visual entity separate from the realm she now inhabits. The chair appears added to fill in the two-dimensional space around her. The junctures that would allow us to understand the chair as inhabiting a rational, three-dimensional space are hidden behind the head, arm, and skirts of Mrs. Meyer. With these spatial disjunctions, Sargent provides us the means of comprehending the construction of the painting as a pastiche of elements overlapping on the canvas. The aura of seamless illusion, the sense of the image as a transparent window onto reality, is thus destabilized, and we are made aware of the
construction of the painting as artifice. As such, we are also perhaps confronted with the possibility that the subjects of the painting, and all that they are assumed to "truthfully" and "markedly" represent, are analogously artificial constructions.

Like the spatial ambiguities between figure and chair, visual correspondences between figure and chair function to highlight the artifice of the representation. The chair's three decorative figures—female singer, male flutist, and dancer of unknown gender whose legs are just visible under Mrs. Meyer's sleeve—are arranged in a manner that echoes the familial relations between Mrs. Meyer and her children. The triads of both are arranged in a two to one relationship. Sargent provides us with the visual means for connecting the two musicians with the children, dressed in comparable blue and pink and positioned just above the musicians, who in turn are positioned just above the open book. This vertical line-up on the pictorial surface, from open book, to sketchy decorative figures, to the Meyer children, offers the possibility of a progressive extension of association, as if the chair's figures are emerging, vaguely sketched, from the pages of the open book, into the more life-like correspondences of the Meyer children. Sargent likewise offers us the means to connect the dancing feet with Mrs. Meyer, for her costume converges with that of the dancing figure, and the dancing figure's distance from the musicians matches Mrs. Meyer's spatial distance from her children. In addition, the feet of the dancer and Mrs. Meyer are comparably highlighted as they appear beneath waves of gauzy fabric. The musicians are fully displayed, however, while the corresponding Meyer children are half hidden. The dancing figure, on the other hand, is hidden behind the theatre curtain sleeve, while Mrs. Meyer is enthroned center stage. While the pictorial correspondences between the Meyer family and the figures on the chair decoration prompt the activity of deciphering visual correspondences as symbolic correspondences, these correspondences slip and flip-flop, never stabilizing one to one. As soon as we settle on one set of correspondences, we see the problems inherent in so
easy a match and thus find other correspondences. For example, visual connections comparably exist between the mother and the female singer next to the flutist. Both display great billows of pink cloth. The open book next to Mrs. Meyer correlates pictorially with the pink songbook the singer holds. The musician pair comparably relate to Mrs. Meyer and her son, for the musicians are positioned just above their joined fingers. Pictorial correspondences between the Meyers and the chair figures thus provide yet another example of how the image prompts and denies full reading. Nonetheless, these correspondences certainly offer the suggestion that the Meyers are comparable performers, Sargent’s art a comparable theatre. The implication of artifice is sustained.

The dual acts of enabling and frustrating viewing are an inherent part of performance. Sargent’s paintings of dancers, especially El Jaleo and Javanese Dancer, both rendered in action, rely on the art of revealing and concealing through fans and costume to provide visual pleasure and win an audience’s attention. Like El Jaleo and Javanese Dancer (paintings interpreted by Sargent’s audience as embodiments of other races), Mrs. Meyer was also considered a portrayal of an “other” race. In this light, the two dancing feet emerging beneath the curtain of Mrs. Meyer’s sleeve embody more symbolic weight than it might seem at first blush. The diminutive feet appear linked to Mrs. Meyer’s relatively giant arm via her sleeve (as if both were of the same body, dressed in a lacy garment), suggesting a fantastical hybrid creature occupying the center of the composition. As a potential freak curiosity that lurks, cloaked but suggested, it perhaps offers an embodiment of the viewer’s projection of the spectacle of the “other.” Ultimately, the portrait of the Meyers presents a visual dance of ambiguous signs and carefully orchestrated passages of display and concealment. More than El Jaleo and Javanese Dancer, Mrs. Meyer calls attention to the activity of viewing, itself, as constructed and controlled and thus inadequate for supporting conclusions about essential “racial” identities.
One viewer of this painting was represented in a *Boston Herald* illustration of the 1899 Sargent exhibition (Fig. 31). This viewer sits holding an exhibition catalogue in one hand and looks directly at us through a pair of lorgnettes held by the other hand. We are positioned where Mrs. Meyer would have been (Mrs. Meyer hung directly opposite Mrs. Edward L. Davis and her Son Livingston Davis, shown in the background of the illustration just behind the scrutinizing viewer). The activities of viewing and reading are linked in this image, as the exhibition catalogue, opened neatly on her lap, would have given her the names of the people represented in the portraits she was viewing. The painting and catalogue together would have defined who the sitters were for this viewer. The joke the illustrator makes by focusing on this scrutinizing woman, however, is that observers are also subjects for observation. She looks at a painting, we look at her looking, but she is also looking back at us.

Mrs. Meyer too, Sargent’s image suggests, has the power to look back at the spectacle of our viewing. A pair of lorgnettes, nearly camouflaged as a fold in her dress, but there for the careful viewer to discover, offers an instrument for viewing, for reading. Compared with those of the woman viewer depicted in the *Boston Globe* illustration, Mrs. Meyer’s lorgnettes, as well as her book, appear abandoned. Nevertheless, their presence calls attention to Mrs. Meyer’s ability to look back at our view of the view she has presented to us. Because of their wealth, the Meyer family could command a viewing and control what was viewed--but not the interpretations drawn from that viewing. While displaying accoutrements of wealth, the image demands us to look, read, and interpret, but makes it clear that we can only see and read part of the picture. Some aspects of the picture are partly hidden or illegible, other aspects are ambiguous and enigmatic, and thus we are made aware that the conclusions we reach about this family and who they are can only be incomplete.
Following the portrait's critical acclaim, a number of Jewish patrons commissioned Sargent to paint their portraits in the next decade. These portraits include some of his most renowned works, such as the eleven large portraits of Wertheimer family members dating from 1898-1908, *Mrs. Leopold Hirsch* of 1902, *Lady Wemher* of 1903, and *Lady Sassoon* of 1907, to name just a few. Certainly the patronage of these sitters had much to do with their personal friendships with Sargent, their connections with his other patrons, and the general increase in his popularity among the wealthy, Jews and non-Jews alike. According to Wilfred Blunt, Sargent stated that he preferred painting Jews "as they have more life and movement than our English women." Sargent clearly participated in the stereotyping discourse of his time, yet as Sally Promey has determined from her study of his correspondence, Sargent did not participate in denigrating Jews as some of his friends and acquaintances did, and in fact, Jews were among his close and life-long friends. Despite the fact that Sargent’s resulting images of Jewish patrons vary markedly in “life and movement,” as well as in costume, setting, and body language, critics over this next decade linked these images together in paragraphs that proclaimed Sargent’s particular skill at characterizing Jewish types. In the zeal to categorize, contradictory evidence and ambiguity were glossed over or ignored altogether.

*The Londonderry portrait -- presenting British aristocracy*

As each year’s production in the 1890’s served to assure the longevity of Sargent’s reputation, critics started to suggest that Sargent should be given a royal commission to paint the king and queen. Two years later, after Queen Victoria’s death, according to James Lomax and Richard Ormond, Sargent “declined the commission for the official coronation picture [of Edward VII], giving as his reasons the fact that his ‘entire
Responsibility on nature both for likeness and for qualities of painting’ made him ‘particularly unfit for this high task.’

Roger Fry, art critic for the *Athenaeum* at the time, apparently agreed with Sargent’s assessment—both with his unique reliance on ‘nature’ and with the notion that the demands of grand official portraits of state conflicted with that reliance. In a 1905 review of Sargent’s work, Fry explained the differences between the requirements for portraits of aristocrats in their private capacity and the requirements for portraits of aristocrats “posing as part of the scheme of the British Constitution.” Fry claimed about the latter:

> Whatever is merely natural and habitual in pose or gesture will be below the claims of the occasion; composition, chiaroscuro, and colour can no longer be merely harmonious, much less merely explanatory; they must help the illusion of grandeur and support the ritual. For such a work does, in fact, come within the category of historical art—it is no longer mere likeness or genre.

Fry felt that Sargent’s style was inappropriate for this kind of “historical art.” Ironically, while Sargent’s presumed realism—his ability to replicate “nature”—was the hallmark of his popularity, it was deemed a detriment for the type of portraits that he was increasingly called upon to execute—grand style official portraits of the British aristocracy.

The aristocracy’s increasing investment in images of themselves coincided with a decrease in their status and power at the turn of the century. While the wealth of Jewish financiers and “captains of industry” dramatically grew during this time, much of the wealth of the British nobility remained tied up in land holdings. As David Cannadine has detailed, many of the British lords, whose Anglo-Saxon ancestors had controlled the majority of the nation’s wealth for generations, now found themselves strapped for money and financially struggling to maintain ancestral estates and lavish lifestyles. As a
result, they formed uneasy alliances with the nouveau riche and engaged in business deals previously deemed beneath their status. This new distribution of wealth and blurring of class distinctions called into question essentialized notions of what it meant to be an aristocrat. One article went so far as to suggest that the British aristocrat was a “human fossil,” an embodiment of an earlier, bygone era that should no longer be relevant in modern industrial society. Portraits of British aristocrats were supposed to counteract such notions and declare the stability and continuity of their class position.  

While Sargent had declined the commission to paint the king, he did paint other presentation portraits of royalty and aristocrats. One of his most ambitious portraits to come under Fry’s definition of “historic art” is the 1904 painting, Charles Stewart Sixth Marquess of Londonderry, Carrying the Great Sword of State at the Coronation of King Edward VII, August, 1902, and Mr. W. C. Beaumont, His Page on That Occasion (henceforth referred to as Londonderry) (Fig. 32). Described by the Art Journal in 1904 as “a very large performance,” this full-length painting shows Londonderry standing in Westminster Abbey in his official coronation costume and holding before him, two-fisted, the sword of state, its point towering several inches above his head. Beaumont, dressed in the official attire of coronation pages, stands behind Londonderry and carries his coronet and train.

This painting participates in the onslaught of “historic” portrait production in England prompted by the occasion of King Edward VII’s coronation in 1902. British peers wanted images that recalled the pageantry of that singular event and commemorated their involvement in it. In a review of the 1904 Royal Academy, two years after the coronation, the art critic for the Spectator declared, “Members of the House of Lords in Coronation robes have a tendency to appear in most of the rooms.” The Pall Mall Gazette illustrated four of these images as part of their special edition of Royal Academy exhibition pictures: The Earl of Mount-Edgcumbe by Stanhope Forbes, The Earl of
Cadogan by Solomon Solomon, The Earl of Shrewsbury by Hubert von Herkomer, and The Marquis of Linlithgow by Robert Brough (Fig. 33). Like Sargent’s Londonderry, these portraits show peers in the official coronation dress: coronets, black buckle shoes, white breeches and hose, high collared gold brocade waistcoats, and crimson and ermine full-length robes with white lining. Sargent’s image, however, differs from these other portraits in significant ways, and critics were displeased with his resulting image. Negotiating the requirements of historic portraiture with an adherence to “nature,” Sargent created a grand scale portrait that paradoxically declares the health and continuance of British monarchical power, even as it simultaneously suggests the fragility and temporality of that power. To understand how it does this, I first discuss the implications of the coronation itself and Londonderry’s singular role in that event.

The coronation

The coronation pageant was a carefully orchestrated series of day-long rituals and parades designed to advertise imperial unity and strength, presumably supported by a stable and longstanding social order in which male Anglo-Saxons predominated. The foreign press, however, did not always buy into the coronation’s message, and detractors focused on the monarchical rites as artificial, theatrical, in a realm removed from the realities of contemporary life. W.T. Stead, writing for Cosmopolitan, for instance, claimed that the coronation “is no longer a real thing, as it was in the olden times.” “It is a more or less theatrical spectacle... The whole ceremony of the coronation is based upon the assumption that the man to be crowned is the man who is going to govern the realm. The progress of democracy has demolished this foundation, and the ceremony therefore is essentially unreal.” According to Stead, Edward VII, in his overly fastidious attention to dress etiquette and ceremony rather than state affairs, ideally fulfilled the role of a modern
king because the position, in effect, was most like that of a “stage-manager.” Stead noted that by contrast, real affairs of political importance, such as the Colonial Conference held around the time of the coronation, took place privately by modest men in sober attire with little public pageantry.

Another article in *Cosmopolitan* by T.C. Crawford outlined numerous jokes made about the dress requirements for processing peers. “Through the newspapers the public has been informed that the coronets are, by order, to be made of strictly imitation materials and that no solid gold or real jewels are to be employed in their make-up: upon this account their appearance in the shop-windows provokes smiles,” explains Crawford. The author goes on to mention circulating quips about impoverished peers making payment installments in order to afford their coronation costume. “A very good coronet can be had for about fifteen dollars,” Crawford informs his readers. Such commentary served to debunk the mythifying aura of grandeur assumed by the aristocracy by suggesting that their exotic, otherworldly appearance was in the end, fake, and could be bought commercially by anyone of modest income.

While the foreign press were more likely to focus on the anachronistic rituals as ridiculous and meaningless in a twentieth-century society, the British press tended to focus on the traditions as evidence of their nation’s longstanding history. Numerous books and periodicals describing the event echoed the sentiments expressed in the *London Times*:

Dull, indeed, must be that Englishman who could witness the Coronation of his Sovereign in Westminster Abbey without some stirrings of the pride of race... Every circumstance and association of that great solemnity speaks to him of the long ages of which he is the heir, and bears witness to that splendid continuity of national life which stretches back unbroken for a thousand years... Old as the Abbey itself, perhaps even older, are the rites with which the crowning of an English King is accomplished. They belong to the oldest coronation service in living use in Christendom. With its quaint feudal survivals and impressive symbolism, the service is an
epitome of the foundations on which the English Monarchy, and with it the English polity, has been reared. This paradigmatic commentary suggested that the coronation prompted "English" pride, a "pride of race" based on longevity. Yet just exactly what it meant to be "English" had become increasingly unclear. The term was used interchangeably with "British" to refer to peoples of England, Great Britain, the United Kingdom, and the British empire. To define an "Englishness" by geography became problematic in the face of colonializing activities, yet to define it by heredity was equally problematic given the increasing numbers of English residents who were not of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic origin. In the face of this, special efforts were made at the turn of the century to define, preserve, and celebrate "Englishness." Such efforts included the institutionalization of "English" as an educational field of study comparable with the study of Greek classics, the increased building of commemorative monuments, the foundation of the National Trust for the historic preservation of buildings, the establishment of the Tate Gallery and National Portrait Gallery for the preservation of "English" art, the introduction of the "Dictionary of National Biography," and the foundation of Ancestors, a magazine which focused on "descent, heraldry, and the preservation of family papers and relics." In addition, periodicals at this time focused on defining English character, sometimes through biographical sketches of historic and monarchical figures interpreted as embodiments of "Englishness." The coronation pageantry participated in this celebration of the "English" and called attention to their longevity.

Significantly, however, to symbolize longevity, the ceremony relied on "quaint feudal survivals." Articles about the coronation noted that the rituals involved seemed "picturesque," "curious," "quaint," "odd," and "exotic." Such word choices had particular resonance in the context of social Darwinism at this time. The oft-used word "survival," in particular, suggested something of a lower order of civilization that, in
anthropological parlance, would have provided evidence of evolutionary links between various forms of civilization. Writers resorted to a vocabulary that insinuated that the rituals of hereditary monarchy were primitive, their symbolism suggestive of a less advanced social order than that offered by the modern world.48

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, in *The Invention of Tradition*, explore the importance of tradition during times of rapid social transformations as a way to suggest stability and continuity.49 According to David Cannadine, the coronation of Edward VII was one such moment, in which, during a time of waning monarchical power, pageantry and ritual were unprecedented in grandeur and scope. Cannadine claims that between 1877 and 1914, “there was a fundamental change in the public image of the British monarchy, as its ritual, hitherto inept, private and of limited appeal, became splendid, public and popular” and “old ceremonials were staged with an expertise and appeal which had been lacking before.” Cannadine argues that in “an age of change, crisis and dislocation, the ‘preservation of anachronism,’ the deliberate, ceremonial presentation of an impotent but venerated monarch as a unifying symbol of permanence and national community became both possible and necessary.” The proliferation of commemorative memorabilia, laudable biographies about royalty, and British books and periodicals celebrating the event attest to its importance in the public mind. King Edward VII, rather than a political power who would provoke partisan opinion, became “dear old dad,” a patriarchal figurehead unifying the national “family.” The fact that the coronation ceremony had been postponed because of his near-fatal appendicitis suggested to the public the symbolic fragility but ultimate triumph of nation and empire.50
Londonderry’s role

Londonderry’s role in the coronation ceremonies served as a symbolic declaration of the Union’s stability. His aristocratic family was “part Irish, part English, originally Scottish.” Londonderry thus embodied the national mix that made up the United Kingdom. Londonderry had been Viceroy to Ireland from 1886 to 1889—the first Irishman to hold this position. In this role, he had been responsible for ensuring the peaceful continuance of British sovereignty during a time of particularly high tensions concerning England’s union with Ireland. A staunch Conservative and ardent life-long opponent of Ireland’s bid for Home Rule, Londonderry, with Arthur Balfour as his Chief Secretary, had been able to maintain control against Home Rulers’ threats of warfare. Later on, Londonderry had played a particularly significant part in allying Conservative and Liberal Unionists in order to defeat a second Home Rule Bill in 1895. At the time of King Edward’s coronation, Londonderry held the position of Lord-Lieutenant of the County of the City of Belfast, Ireland, as well as Postmaster-General and First President of the Board of Education. He was most linked in the nation’s eye, however, with the Unionist Cause. His most illustrious ancestor was the first Lord Castlereagh, Robert Stewart, who had been the person responsible for bringing Ireland into union with England. The choice of Londonderry for the role of carrying the symbol of imperial military power during this time likely served to symbolize the strength of the Union in light of threats against it from Ireland.

Londonderry’s part in the ceremony was an especially complex series of ritualistic actions involving the delivery of the sword to the Lord Great Chamberlain and the acquirement of the King’s Sword in return. At one point in the ceremony, Londonderry formally bid to receive back the sword of state. This latter ritual, particularly noted by the London Times as a “survival from a long-departed day,” was described as follows:
[Londonderry] “offereth the price of it”—a hundred shillings is the traditional sum—and, having thus redeemed it, he receives it again at the hands of the Dean of Westminster, and, drawing it out of its scabbard, carries it naked before his Majesty for the rest of the solemnity. It is a bag of actual shillings, newly coined, with which the Marquis redeems the Sword; and, as he draws the weapon from its scabbard, he salutes with it the altar.33

Significantly, Londonderry’s role was singled out in the press as notably linked to traditions of previous eras that, while seemingly anachronistic, served to connect the king’s coronation with past coronations, thus emphasizing the continuity of monarchical power. John Bodley, in his 1903 book on the coronation ceremonies, claimed that the king himself would have performed part of Londonderry’s ritual of saluting the altar with the sword of state, but the king’s weak physical condition prevented him from doing so.54 The substitution of Londonderry, in a ritualized action symbolizing the strength and union of church and state, would have reinforced for viewers an awareness of the actual fragility of the king.

In several ways, Londonderry thus served as a synecdoche for the coronation event as a whole. In his ceremonial role, he symbolized the strength and stability of the Union and the continuity of the monarchical structure. Even as he did so, however, his performance also suggested that such strength, stability, and continuance were both outdated and fragile.

The commission and site

The commission to have Sargent paint Londonderry in coronation robes was part of a larger effort within the family at this time to celebrate their role in British history. The Londonderrys were particularly proud of their lineage, for they could trace their
ancestry to the first Lord Castlereagh, and the most treasured possessions in their house were those relating to historic events connected to Lord Castlereagh. According to Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, former Duchess of Marlborough, both Lord and Lady Londonderry were "ardent" champions of the prerogatives of birth and position. Balsan felt that Lady Londonderry, in particular, "should have been born in the eighteenth century...impressed by her splendid lineage, she made great play of those rights which the governing classes still possessed, and sought to impress others with the importance of her position." Balsan recalled one instance where Lady Londonderry, with great dramatic flair, enacted a family ritual for serving the queen that was deemed laughably curious and anachronistic by her peers, but was meant to visually reinforce the longstanding relation her family had with the monarchy. An "intelligent and ambitious" woman, Lady Londonderry involved herself in Unionist causes, and Londonderry House, where she and her husband entertained, became "the rallying point of all Conservatism," according to Balsan. The Londonderrys' political convictions stemmed from a desire to uphold the deeds of this historic family ancestor. The year Sargent painted and exhibited Londonderry, Lady Londonderry published a book which celebrated the accomplishments and vindicated the actions of Lord Castlereagh, and in so doing, declared the importance of the Londonderry family while promoting Unionist politics on "historical" grounds.

Sargent's painting of Londonderry ultimately hung opposite Thomas Lawrence's painting of Lord Castlereagh (Fig. 34), shown "in his Garter robes worn at the Coronation of George IV in 1821." Displayed at either end of a long narrow ballroom in Londonderry House, these two figures were thus linked through costume and position within the visual program of the room. Sargent's painting, in fact, appeared as if to head the procession of grand scale paintings that lined both sides of the room (Fig. 35). These full-length paintings included other ancestors in Garter robes as well as heads of state, including three Russian czars and King George IV. Paintings of female family members
were displayed in other rooms but not in the main ballroom. Instead, small white sculptures of allegorical women—including a “Dancing Girl” and “Venus,” both by Canova—were interspersed in niches between the colorful portraits of “real,” historic men. While the portraits celebrated the continuity of patriarchal power and prestige in this family and declared their participation in world and national history, the female allegorical figures served as testimony to the family’s cultured artistic taste while providing titillation to viewers under the guise of art. Ultimately, family and politics combined in this grand ballroom, for the room functioned not only to champion the illustrious lineage, history, and taste of the Londonderrys through its art, but it also served as the site where the Unionist cause was championed through lavish political receptions held in that room. The pageantry, created by both the procession of pictorial representations and the formally attired aristocrats who convened there, might be understood to parallel, on a smaller scale, the pageantry of the coronation itself.59

Sargent’s painting of Londonderry

Sargent’s painting emphasizes aristocratic continuity through family heredity—important to the Londonderrys as well as to the British monarchy—by the inclusion of Londonderry’s page, W.C. Beaumont. Of the coronation portraits I have seen, both those exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1904 and those exhibited at Londonderry House where Sargent’s painting ultimately hung, Sargent’s image is the only one that portrays an accompanying page. Beaumont was Londonderry’s nephew, for his sons would have been too old for the role. The pages who participated at the King’s coronation were all young boys descended from the titled aristocracy and many were destined to rule in the House of Lords. The British nation relied on extended family as the bulwark of its constitution; property, titles, and corresponding power were passed along blood lines in
an exacting system of inheritance privileging first-born sons. Recent reports that suggested a deterioration in the physical health of young English men as well as decreasing birth rates, particularly among the upper classes, had prompted concern about the longevity of the English race. The presence of a multitude of pages at the coronation seemed to belie this concern. One magazine at the time, featuring a photograph of a long line of coronation pages all descended from the Dowager-Duchess of Abercorn, stated, "One may declare that government by 'the great houses' is nearing its end; but when one sees this roll of nobles, descendants from one lady, all bound together by ties of blood, and occupying by hereditary right some of the foremost places in the country, it is clear that the influences of wealth and position are still to be reckoned with." At the ceremony itself, coronation pages, holding the trains and crowns of processing royalty, made visible the promising future and vitality of the British ruling class, while their eighteenth-century jackets and breeches suggested a continuity with the past.

**Costume**

The costume worn by Londonderry was also traditional. Forthrightly displayed in Sargent’s painting, it communicates status and power. Londonderry’s left leg is held forward so that viewers can have a good look at the garter, conferred on him by Queen Victoria for his service in Ireland. In addition, Sargent positioned Londonderry at such an angle that the sword, held directly in front of him, does not visually interfere with our reading of the various orders that decorate his elaborate jacket and celebrate his accomplishments for the empire. The robe itself is worn so that we can view both the outer and inner fabric, and it is drawn back in a way that emphasizes the display of his body. Together with the sword of state, Londonderry’s robes create a central pyramid in the pictorial composition that proclaims the stability of power represented.
The very multitude of symbols, however, offers a challenge to the implication of a stable imperial union. Part of the intended activity for viewers of this work, no doubt, was to read and recognize the numerous signs of authority and merit presented in the portrait. The emblems on the sword, painted in strokes and dabs of paint difficult for the average viewer to decipher, are, in fact, legible to those knowledgeable about the sword’s symbolism. The icons represent the nations under the king’s dominion: the rose for England, the harp for Ireland, the thistle for Scotland, and the fleur-de-lis for France. Long after Great Britain had given up claims to France, the fleur-de-lis remained on the sword of state, and it is this anachronistic symbol that Sargent makes most legible towards the top of the sword’s point. As such, it perhaps serves as a sign of the contingencies and instability inherent in building an empire of diverse peoples and geographies.63

Sargent also prominently displayed the money bag decorated with the royal coat-of-arms and dangling from Londonderry’s sleeve. Occupying a position close to the center of the composition, the money bag visually rhymes with the shape, color, and size of the crown the page holds. This visual link between money bag and crown might have suggested to viewers an ideological link between economic and aristocratic power. More concretely, it referenced the feudalistic ritual Londonderry performed as a symbol of the continuity of monarchical power. At the same time, however, in its quaint origins, the money bag perhaps also suggested that the whole system of hereditary aristocracy—embodied by its visual twin, the crown—was a comparable quaint feudalism.

Body Language

Several critics reviewing the painting in 1904 complained that Londonderry looked “ill at ease”—his clothes looked uncomfortable and his sword appeared particularly
cumbersome. By contrast, they felt the page, standing at relative ease, was the best part of the work. Londonderry’s facial expression might have contributed to the perception of his discomfort. His brow is furrowed and the dark line of his eyelid socket creates a downward slant often associated with worry. His forehead, in particular, is rendered with numerous small modulations meant to convey a sense of life, but also suggesting an interiority not in keeping with the exterior pomp of his dress.

In addition, Sargent seems to have sacrificed artful body language in order to insure that all the symbols of Londonderry’s costume and sword were shown to optimal effect without interfering with each other. In positioning the gartered leg forward and the sword to one side so as to make the waistcoat more fully visible, Sargent renders Londonderry’s body in a pose that would not have met contemporary criteria for “harmonic poise of bearing.” As discussed in Chapter One, numerous tracts on comportment, posture, and body expression during this time were utilized by the upper and middle classes not only as part of health and beauty regimens, but also in preparation for public recitations, tableaux vivants, and other theatricals. The widespread use of such literature engendered a self-conscious awareness of body language, and Sargent’s public would have been able to analyse the poses assumed by his sitters according to varied criteria for beauty and harmony. In general, the criteria called for the even disposition of head, limbs, and torso, in gentle counterbalance to each other. This does not happen in Sargent’s Londonderry. The visual weight of his body is tipped to the right of the composition and thus appears to rely for support on a seemingly unsteady gartered leg. Viewers familiar with the literature on comportment would have found Londonderry’s body particularly unartful—it was neither balanced nor harmonic.

Londonderry’s wavering leg, in fact, belies the stability of the whole pictorial structure. The picture’s pyramidal composition appears to balance precariously on this leg, to teeter on the toe. Unlike the other strong verticals of the composition (of sword
and church pillars), this foreground leg undulates from thigh to toe. The diagonal folds of cloth across the thigh break down its verticality, its potential ability to hold firm and balance the tremendous weight of authority conveyed by robes, orders, and sword. In contrast with the page’s corresponding front leg, which appears in a stable, relaxed position, toe turned out at rest, Londonderry’s leg appears to be tremulously stepping forward. We sense that in the next moment, as Londonderry shifts onto this wavering leg, his weight (and all it conveys of church and state authority) might be too much: the leg might crumple.

Londonderry’s stance, in suggesting forward movement, differs from the other coronation portraits in both Londonderry House and the 1904 Royal Academy exhibition (see again Figs. 35-36). The figures in these other paintings also put weight on their back leg and bend their front leg in traditional contrapposto position, yet there is no question that their front legs are at rest. The figures are not going anywhere; in the next moment, they will continue to stand exactly as they are. They are clearly posing for their portraits; props surround them, and columns and curtains set them off in a fictive environment arranged specifically for portrait making. As such, their authority appears timeless, transhistorical. Not so in Sargent’s portrait of Londonderry. Instead, Sargent’s image allows us to imagine a narrative moment in which a seated viewer, watching Londonderry process down the aisle, catches his eye as he passes.

In addition to Londonderry’s pose, the dappled light—in contrast to the studio lighting used in other coronation portraits—also suggests a transitory moment. We can imagine that the spots of sunlight, coming from an upper window and breaking down an otherwise stony solidity, will change with the passing hours or the shift of a cloud. Such signs of potential change and movement can be seen in many other Sargent portraits. In fact, one critic, reviewing the 1904 exhibition, discusses these signs as hallmarks of Sargent’s art: “Some time ago [Sargent’s] admirers, needing the creed which he smilingly

142
declined to state, formulated it themselves into the phrase arrested action; which certainly helps enjoyment of portraits whose subjects generally look as if they had just looked round to you, and were going to say something. In this particular image, perhaps because such signs of the momentary also seem to suggest the potentially transitory nature of the religious and national authority represented, critics were uncomfortable with the work.

Relationship between figure and setting

The visual links between Londonderry’s figure and the abbey environment in which he stands offer multiple allusions. Vertical rhythms link figure and background. The pillars behind Londonderry are echoed by the forms of the sword, the stained glass window in the background, as well as the legs of the lord and his page. In addition, the stained glass window that specifically defines the space as church, visually rhymes with the triangular form of Londonderry. The small rosette echoes Londonderry’s head; the curves of the thin, arched windows repeat his sloping shoulders. With these pictorial correspondences, Sargent links the symbols of church and state. On the one hand, these visual analogues allude to the strength and stability of their unity and reinforce their mutual authority. Yet the fragile fretwork of the stained glass window, the wavering thin lines of paint that faintly suggest brightly illuminated saints unreadable in the glaze of light, perhaps offer the suggestion of the comparable fragility of Londonderry and all that he represents. The architecture of the abbey seems to emerge from a murky background darkness, penetrated only here and there in fragmentary passages revealed by varying degrees of natural light. Against this dim, ephemeral atmosphere, Londonderry sparkles all the more solidly. This contrast between figure and ground (a contrast that coexists
with the correspondences) implies a distance between the two—as if Londonderry is an apparition, not fully of the environment in which he resides.

One critic expressed displeasure that “a figure from a pageant is isolated and removed from all the surroundings which give excuse for his unusual dress and pose.”

While the portrait allows us to imagine a narrative moment in time, Sargent chose not to portray Londonderry as if processing in the actual Westminster ceremony. In the real ceremony, Londonderry was flanked by two peers, and other lords processed immediately before and behind him. Sargent made no suggestion of these other figures or of the crowds that filled the abbey during the ceremony. In addition, no artificial lights illuminate the space as they did at the coronation. Instead, the abbey in Sargent’s work serves as a theatrical and symbolic setting for presenting the star performer, shining jewel-like, in a center spotlight. This performer evokes the aura and actions of that coronation day.

Stead, in writing about the coronation for Cosmopolitan, suggested an analogue between the coronation ceremony and the windows of Westminster abbey that resonates with Sargent’s portrait. Stead likened the transitory illumination of the two to the role of history:

The glories of the stained glass are often unnoticed owing to the lack of light. But at certain hours, when the rays of the setting sun flood the long aisles with radiance, the once darkened window glows resplendent with the pictures of heroes and of saints. What the slanting rays of the setting sun do for the windows, such a ceremony as a coronation does for the famous episodes of English history. It recalls us to the past...

In Sargent’s portrait, Londonderry assumes the form of a stained glass window, richly radiant, illuminated momentarily by the sun, evoking a national past. Yet it is the artistic vocabulary of the modern present—impressionistically sketchy passages and arrested action—that enables this visualization of momentary evocation.
Ultimately, we are made conscious of the portrait’s fiction because of the tension between the dramatic theatricality of the setting, costume, and pyramidal composition and the wavering discomfort and fragility of Londonderry’s body language. Thus, as with Ellen Terry, Sargent suggests a fissure between Londonderry and the role assumed for his portrait. Significantly, in this instance, critics rationalized the fissure as a sign of Londonderry’s race, his nationality.

Critical reception

For the most part, reviewers of the 1904 Royal Academy exhibition did not consider this portrait particularly successful or noteworthy. Unlike Ellen Terry and Mrs. Meyer, it was not considered Sargent’s “picture of the year,” even though its subject matter and size suggest a comparably ambitious work (certainly it was his most ambitious portrait of 1904). If mentioned in reviews at all, however, the picture was generally discussed towards the end of a paragraph that highlighted his other portraits. No long descriptions or explanations of the work exist.

In the critical comments that do occur, Londonderry is deemed a typical “Englishman.” The critic for the Spectator concluded about Londonderry, “Englishmen do not dress up well. They are too self-conscious and afraid of their finery to be able to carry it off with the air of use which alone prevents the men being lost in their clothes.” The Illustrated London News, focusing on the painting one week later, repeated the Spectator’s comments, “The simple fact is that few Englishmen can dress up: they cannot carry fine clothes decoratively.” The notion of a particularly English aversion to “dressing up” had been mentioned in other articles at this time as well. Five months earlier, the Spectator had published an article on “The Place of Pageantry in National Thought” that argued that “to all appearances, we [England] are a nation caring very little
for show, and certainly making no attempt either by the decoration of our cities, or by the manner in which we dress ourselves, to make pomp or colour part of our daily lives. The scheme of the life of London, is, as Whistler might have put it, an arrangement in black and gray.”72 Two years earlier and a month before the coronation of Edward VII, an article in the Delineator had comparably declared that Londoners as a people do not know “how to decorate”—“We have neither the artistic background requisite nor the popular instinct.”73 Instead, the article argues that in Asia and the Far East, the cities and people are dressed more exotically and decoratively. Such stereotypes had been current for a number of years. In 1861, for example, the Saturday Review had claimed that “the people of a southern climate and of non-Teutonic parentage” were better at pageants and ceremonials than the English.74

On the surface, these comments might appear self-deprecating. Such remarks about the nature of the English, however, were part of a larger social discourse that equated modest attire with sincerity, integrity, morality, masculinity, and a higher degree of civilization, while decorative exoticism was linked to artifice, primitive sensuality, and femininity. The presumed inability of the English to dress up well could thus be interpreted as a sign of their innate superiority.75

More significant for my purposes, however, is that critics employed significant convolutions in declaring Londonderry a type. Rather than interpreting dress as one sign of national type, those critics who chose to talk about the painting at all rationalized the otherwise disconcerting fissure between costume and figure by declaring that, in not suiting the subject, the costume revealed national type.
Conclusion to “Londonderry”

As a commissioned work, this portrait was no doubt intended to celebrate Londonderry as representative of the strength, unity, and continuity of the monarchal nation and empire. Certainly aspects of the painting—the pyramidal composition, the presentation of various imperial symbols and orders, the references to longstanding rituals, the inclusion of a member of the next generation of aristocrats, and the abbey setting—support such a message. At the same time, however, other aspects of the painting—the most legible fleur-de-lis, Londonderry’s facial expression and pose, and the effect of natural light on the environment—undo these assertions. These latter aspects can be connected with Sargent’s attachment to “nature.” Sargent’s use of natural light creates arbitrary legibility, disintegrates solid mass, and suggests the temporality of the moment. His naturalistic activation of Londonderry’s body suggests psychological interiority and awkward transition. In the final analysis, Sargent and Fry’s fears are confirmed in this painting—Sargent’s reliance on “nature” interfered with an otherwise straightforward proclamation of grandeur and national pride required of “historical art.”

The contradictory messages within the work challenge the reading process. Critics desirous of typing were reduced to convoluting the process, so that Londonderry was ultimately labeled by how he did not fit with what he attempted to present.

Ultimately, the painting’s ambiguity—its signal to both the strength and fragility of nation—resonated with the particular circumstances of British rule during the time of Edward VII’s coronation. Londonderry was an Englishman, an Irishman, and an aristocrat (among other things), but as those identities were undergoing transformation during this time, it was ultimately unclear just what those identities meant. Sargent’s portrait allows ambiguity full play, yet as a result, critics were unsure of the portrait’s ultimate success.
Final conclusion

In analysing Mrs. Meyer and Londonderry, I have engaged in interpretative activities that would have been utilized or at least available to Sargent’s viewers on some conscious or sub-conscious level. I did so in the hopes of better understanding the relationship between the turn-of-the-century critical discourse about Sargent’s work and the actual paintings themselves. In reading Mrs. Meyer and Londonderry, I have considered how physical signs of appearance offer multiple or contradictory suggestions about racial identity and how visual correspondences of color and form present varied and conflicting possibilities for symbolic correspondences of meaning. I have also studied how narrative is both prompted and denied through accumulated visual clues and how the figures’ relation to their environment ultimately reveals the fictions of their making. As a result, I have suggested how these portraits can prompt reading while offering ambiguities that simultaneously complicate the reading process.

While we can never know for sure, the ambiguities present in both Mrs. Meyer and Londonderry could stem from the contingencies involved in decisions of stylistic content rather than necessarily from any preconceived, self-conscious intention on the part of Sargent or his sitters. In Mrs. Meyer, stylistic features linked with Impressionism—sketchy passages, loose brushwork, and unusual spatial perspective—signalled an immediate reality that Impressionism claimed to strive for, even as these features created puzzling ambiguities that hindered the process of reading for racial type. In Londonderry, implied movement and the emphasis of natural light across surfaces were comparable features of Impressionism that worked in the same way. Ironically, while critics claimed that Sargent’s presumed realism enabled easy typing, it is in fact such signs of “reality” (as defined within the discourse of Impressionism) that also problematized the reading process. Because of critics’ assumptions about the types that
these sitters were presumed to represent, the pictorial ambiguities worked for the benefit of Mrs. Meyer and to the detriment of Londonderry. In Mrs. Meyer, produced during a time of increasing anti-Semitism, ambiguity posited a potential escape from identity structures that, within British society, discriminated against Jews. For Londonderry, produced when aristocratic and monarchical authority was being undercut by a variety of modern circumstances, ambiguity posited a threat to the presumption of an essentialized supremacy of a pure Anglo-Saxon aristocratic race.

**Epilogue: Performing “A Vele Gonfie”**

Unlike in Mrs. Meyer and Londonderry, Sargent self-consciously declares ambiguity in his portrait A Vele Gonfie (Fig. 36). This image of Ena Wertheimer, the daughter of a Jewish art dealer, was exhibited at the 1905 Royal Academy, where critics responded to it with relative silence. Ena is portrayed with one hand on her hip, smiling, cloaked in a black robe and white plumed black hat, her body facing the left of the composition. Assuming a theatrical pose, she turns her head to look over her shoulder as she raises a gloved hand to hold the top of her robe. A thin, brown rod protrudes horizontally from her cloak and is cropped by the picture’s right border. A dark, indefinite background merges with the darkness of her robe, thus making the lighter rod, as well as her face, white plumes, white lacy cuff, blousy jabot, and gold-trimmed collar, all the more visually prominent. Kathleen Adler has rightly claimed that this picture "suggests an enjoyment on the part of the artist and his sitter in exploding the conventional expectations of society portraiture." Yet she sees this explosion as resulting from a portrayal of transvestitism which “subverts the functions of categorization in its defiance of firm boundaries.” I argue, however, that rather than an obvious image of cross-dressing, this portrait adamantly maintains ambiguity in regard to
dress. As such, the function of categorization is not so much subverted by a flipping of gender signs as it is stymied by unresolvable ambiguity.

Adler states that Ena is wearing “a male military uniform and a cavalier’s hat.”80 Certainly the 1905 Punch cartoon of A Vele Gonfie compares her costume to that of a soldier. Her cartooned image is juxtaposed with a man in military uniform and captioned, “Call yourself a soldier! Look at me!” (Fig. 37). The cartoon makes a play on Ena’s costume as it is loosely associative with the plumes, high collar, and sword of soldiers’ uniforms, but it certainly does not prove that the costume would have been read literally as military garb. No published review of the painting described her costume as military. In the orientation of her hat and the open neck of her gold collar, in particular, her costume differs from generic “cavalier” outfits and standard British military garb.

Robert Ross, in a 1911 article on the Wertheimer portraits, indicated that Ena might be wearing some of Londonderry’s belongings.81 Sargent had painted Londonderry the year before he painted Ena. While it seems unlikely that the lord’s belongings would still be in Sargent’s studio (unless Sargent was making changes to the image after its exhibition), visual evidence does suggest that, indeed, she could be wearing Londonderry’s gold jacket. Both A Vele Gonfie and Londonderry show a comparable high collared top in a gold design. In fact, the few strokes that define pattern on Ena’s gold collar match the pattern on Londonderry’s collar. In addition, Sargent has painted a hint of gold on Ena’s sleeve just above her white cuffs that appears similar to the gold trim of the lord’s jacket. While Londonderry wears his gold collar fastened at the throat, however, Ena wears it open to allow room for her white jabot.

Her outfit can also be considered in relation to that worn by the Duke of Marlborough for his portrait by Sargent in 1905. Ena’s jabot and hand-on-hip gesture, suggested beneath a voluminous black robe, can be understood as a play on the Duke’s
comparable dress and body language in the Marlborough Family, which Sargent was working on at the same time he was painting A Vele Gondola.

Significantly, however, while Ena’s costume might reference those worn by Londonderry and Marlborough in their Sargent portraits, her outfit does not diverge from fashionable women’s wear for that time. Large hats with profuse feathers, high necked, patterned collars, lacy jabots, blousy white sleeves, and dark gloves and cloaks, all comparable to what Ena wears, can be seen in numerous illustrations for women’s fashionable day dress during 1905 (see Figs. 38-39). In addition, fashion illustrations show women holding parasols at angles comparable to the position of the mysterious brown rod that protrudes from her cloak (see Fig. 39). Thus, there is nothing in the particulars of dress that would have told viewers at the time that she is dressed in male garb rather than women’s clothes. Even if Ena was, indeed, posing in Londonderry’s jacket, it is rendered in such a manner that its identity would not necessarily have been recognized by general viewers, potentially Londonderry among them.

Ena’s black robe prevents viewers from ultimately knowing what clothing she “actually” wears underneath. If the robe were to be swept off, would we find her in a man’s jacket and breeches or a woman’s street suit? Both are possible. The details of dress that we are permitted to see at the edges of the cloak are androgynous enough to provoke the question. Even the brown rod might be read as any number of props: umbrella point, walking stick, cane, or sword. The potentially identifying details of this rod are hidden in the robe. This cloak thus functions like the traditional unisex domino costume of masquerades, which, as Terry Castle has described, had a “somewhat sinister power of effacement.” In this example, the cloak reveals enough details to prompt questions, but conceals enough to prevent answers to those questions.

One of the only critics to comment on the work suggests that Ena is wearing a “fancy costume,” words which carry the insinuation that she is dressing as someone other
than who she is. Her theatrical body language—the dramatic turn of her head, the hand on her hip, the other elbow raised high as she clutches her cloak—certainly support the notion that she is role playing. But her act is enigmatic, and self-consciously so. Is she parodying the class pretensions of the aristocracy? Is she ridiculing them as laughably theatrical? Or is she suggesting that she, a Jewish upper-middle-class woman, could become one of them? Or then again, is her image meant as non-threatening fun as she is so laughingly not one of them? On the other hand, perhaps she is commenting on contemporary women’s fashions which were looking more like men’s dress during this time. In this case, is she celebrating and flaunting the fashion or laughing at it? Her costume could be that of an aristocratic man or a fashionable woman, and while she might “really” be the latter, she seems to be playing at both.

Ultimately, the ambiguity of her dress declares the arbitrary and relative nature of the visual language of costume and thus challenges the activity of reading dress as a sign of essential race, class, or gender identity. Significantly, both wealthy Jews and English aristocrats were stereotyped as excessive and theatrical in their self-conscious public presentations—of which grand-scale portrait-making was part and parcel. These stereotypes potentially conflate with A Vele Gonfie, as Ena may be dramatically enacting the presumed theatricality of the aristocracy, or equally, the presumed theatricality of Jews. Such a potential double act also functions as a challenge to the typing activity. As with Ellen Terry, a presumed link between appearance and identity is undone—in this case, as a result of ambiguous dress and exaggerated, theatrical body language.

Critics in 1905 seemed mystified by A Vele Gonfie. In the face of such overt ambiguity, most Royal Academy reviews were silent about the painting and failed to mention it at all; those who did found the work enigmatic and indecipherable. Fry gave the painting the fullest consideration:
"A Vele Gonfie" is one of those odd pictures with which Mr. Sargent occasionally puzzles the public. Every now and again he strikes one as having concealed about him a turn of very dry and bitter irony, but his expression of it is so subdued, he so baffles one by the blandness of his commonplaces and the apparent sincerity of his love of the banal, that one does not know how far the irony is conscious. But it is in such pictures as this that Mr. Sargent is most intriguing to the critic, and one would suppose most trying to his sitters.87

As discussed in Chapter One, Fry consistently faulted Sargent for putting appearance before imagination or message. With A Vele Gonfie, Fry is unsure whether the image is simply the result of Sargent’s typical focus on mere appearance (bland and banal commonplaces) or whether Sargent is consciously making a statement (a dry, bitter, ironic one). Significantly, Fry uses a vocabulary to describe Sargent that could be used to describe the representation of Ena herself. Fry claims that Sargent appears as if he has "concealed about him a turn of very dry and bitter irony"; this sounds comparable to Ena’s use of a cloak to conceal about her the facts of what she wears and thus clues about who she is and what exactly she is doing. Sargent’s message, his artistic intentions, and by extension his definition of himself as an artist, are ambiguous (just as Ena’s message is ambiguous) because of "concealment." Fry suggests that we could ask as many unanswerable questions about Sargent’s meaning as we have about Ena’s meaning. Is Sargent making a statement, and if so what? Fry suggests a "dry and bitter irony." If so, what is the focus of his irony? The pretensions of Ena, or the pretensions of those people that Ena appears to enact, or both? With Fry’s commentary, Ena and Sargent conflate, so that Ena can be understood as an index of Sargent’s artistic identity—in her call for reading and her ultimate ambiguity.

A Punch cartoon, published soon after the opening of the 1905 Royal Academy exhibition, visualizes a conflation of Ena and Sargent. The full-page cartoon, entitled “Opening Revels at the Royal Academy,” shows four monumental statues of artists in a
park where a variety of social types (caricatures of specific individuals connected with the Academy) stand, sit, or dance amidst the statues. On the far left is a statue of Sargent, assuming the pose of A_Vele_Gonfie (Fig. 40). The position of his hands, head, body, cloak, and rod, protruding from the cloak, exactly mimic that of Ena in Sargent’s portrait. The plumed hat has been abandoned, and booted feet added, making it clear that he is in male costume. The epitaph beneath his name on the pedestal reads, “Why Drag in Velázquez?”—Whistler’s famous quote disavowing artistic influence. Here, the inscription comments on Sargent’s presumed emulation of Velázquez through painterly brushwork and critics’ constant evocations of Velázquez when referring to Sargent. The epitaph could have had additional associations, for “drag” has multiple meanings, and could insinuate the act of cross-dressing, of being “in drag.” While Sargent is not shown in drag here, his transformation into this pose and these clothes comes via his portrait of a woman—who herself might or might not be in drag. The masquerades are numerous: Sargent as Velázquez, Sargent as Ena, Ena as soldier, as aristocrat, as Jew, as Sargent, and all as artifice. The indication of such multiple masquerades, such artifice of pose and dress, resists the notion that identity—be it gender, class, race, or artistic identity—is fixed and stable.
Notes to Chapter 3


5. “The Royal Academy. 1897,” Art Journal 1897: 180; Lomax and Ormond 56. One Boston newspaper, quoted in Fairbrother, Sargent and America 195, suggested that the family had paid $10,000 for the portrait.

6. Other scholars have also noted that Mrs. Meyer’s pose “derives from Mrs. Hammersley” (Lomax and Ormond 59; see also Kilmurray and Ormond 35 and 148). For reviews of Lady Agnew and Mrs. Hammersley, see “The New Gallery,” Spectator 6 May 1893: 606; “The New Gallery,” Athenæum 6 May 1893: 578; “The Royal Academy,” Athenæum 3 June 1893: 704; “The Royal Academy,” Saturday Review 6 May 1893: 487; 27 May 1893: 568; and “The New Gallery,” Saturday Review 10 June 1893: 627. The year Mrs. Meyer was painted, Lady Agnew was included in the English publication The Book of Beauties, whose images were reproduced in periodicals such as the Cosmopolitan. See “English Beauties of the Victorian Era,” Cosmopolitan Dec. 1896: 201-208. For more information about Lady Agnew, see Julia Rayer Rolfe with David Cannadine, Kenneth McConkey and Wilfrid Mellers, The Portrait of a Lady: Sargent and Lady Agnew, exh. cat. (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1997). Mrs. Hammersley, by contrast, has not received such focused scholarly attention.
Discussions of this later work include Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York, 1994) 80-83, and Kilmurray and Ormond 34-35.


10. Cassis 197.


18. See, for example, “The Royal Academy,” Black and White 579; “The Royal Academy, 1897,” Art Journal 180; “The Royal Academy,” Athenaeum 26 June 1897: 846; D.S. M[acColl], “Painting at the Academy,” Saturday Review 22 May 1897: 572; and A.M., “The Royal Academy,” Academy 8 May 1897: 502. Adler has briefly described aspects of the critical reception about Mrs. Meyer that focused on the family’s Jewishness. Most notably, she argues that commentary by Henry James and the critic of the Spectator presented “a view of the assimilated English Jews firstly as bearing the marks of civilization to excess—unlike their ‘English’ counterparts who were, of course, regarded as civilized to the appropriate degree—and secondly as other to the point of being objects of fascination and fantasy from the world of the harem” (Adler 86-87). Her insightful discussion of this aspect of the painting’s reception, however, does not take into account much of the celebratory discourse about this portrait.


22. One critic pointed out that Sargent did not attempt to deny the fact of Mrs. Meyer's "small stature," but instead, cleverly arranged the dress so as to counteract the visual effects of her size ("The Royal Academy. 1897," Art Journal 1897: 180).

23. James, "The Guildhall and Royal Academy 1897" 256-257.


27. "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy" 58.


29. Sargent's spatial ambiguity stems from his experiments with Impressionist and Realist modes of depiction. Futurist and Cubist experiments with spatial perspective began a few years later.

30. Starting from the left side of the picture, our eyes can follow the chair seat and project how that seat would extend beneath Mrs. Meyer's body. Yet in doing so, we realize that the back edge of the chair seat would intersect with the position of Mrs. Meyer's mid-thigh—leaving her no space to be actually sitting. Comparably, her knees, suggested beneath the voluminous skirt, would sit well short of the front edge of the seat in a way that would suggest she is too short for the chair. Yet we know this is not the case, because the width of the seat, shown on the left of the composition, is no larger than the length of her thigh, as suggested beneath her dress.

31. For information on El Jaleo, see Mary Crawford Volk, with contributions by Warren Adelson and Elizabeth Oustinoff, John Singer Sargent's 'El Jaleo'. exh. cat. (National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992).


34. Sally Promey, Painting Religion 207-09. Promey finds the “equivocality in Sargent’s attitudes and behaviors toward Jews” as indicative of the way “[h]uman selves, like human cultures, sustain constellations of complicated, multiple, and sometimes conflicting commitments and inclinations” (Promey, “Sargent’s Truncated Triumph,” 241).

35. Mrs. Wertheimer, 1904, Tate Gallery, London, for example, was described as “an admirably sober and discreet arrangement” ([Roger Fry], “The Royal Academy,” Athenaeum 7 May 1904: 598). For an example of a critic who grouped Sargent’s Jewish portraits together as a type, see Brinton 164-165.

36. In 1899, for example, one critic stated that since Sargent’s portraits were both “true interpretations of character” and “great works of art,” it was a pity “that no portrait of the Queen ha[d] come from [Sargent’s] brush” (H.S., “The Academy,” Spectator 6 May 1899: 641).

37. Lomax and Ormond 82-3.

38. [Roger Fry], “The Royal Academy,” Athenaeum 6 May 1905: 567.

39. Lomax and Ormond note, “Until 1900 most of Sargent’s sitters had been drawn from the Edwardian plutocracy. For the few remaining years of his professional career it was the aristocracy who were his main patrons...” (Lomax and Ormond 54).


48. I thank Elizabeth Hutchinson for this insight. For an overview of the idea of “survivals” in anthropological study, see George W. Stocking, Jr., Victorian Anthropology (New York, 1987).


50. Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual” 101-164. (Quotes, in order, are from 120, 108, 122, and 121.)


52. For biographical information on Londonderry, see Hyde 63-113, and “Death of Lord Londonderry,” London Times 9 Feb. 1915: 9. For Londonderry’s politics during this year, see “Lord Londonderry’s Speech and the Position of the Government,” Spectator 9 Apr. 1904: 558-9. At Queen Victoria’s coronation, the honor of carrying the sword of state had gone to the Prime Minister, and at Queen Elizabeth’s coronation, it had gone to the Defense Minister. (I thank Marie-Louise Brodnax for this information.) For relations between Ireland and the Union during the year of the coronation, see “The Discontents of Irish Unionists,” Spectator 8 Oct. 1904: 508-9; and “Home-Rule and the Duty of Unionists,” Spectator 5 Mar. 1904: 361.


55. Hyde 100.

57. See “Death of Londonderry” 9.

58. One book review noted that Lady Londonderry “alludes so frequently to current events that it would be possible to construct a substantial political creed out of her historical researches” (Rev. of Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereaeh, by Lady Londonderry. *Athenaeum* 17 Dec. 1904: 840).


63. I thank Marie-Louise Brodnax for sharing her knowledge of the sword’s symbolism and legibility in Sargent’s work.


68. For diagrams of the procession and descriptions of the abbey decorations, see “The Coronation” 6-7.
69. Stead 661-2.


75. For the virtues of sobriety in dress linked to civility, in both Europe and America, see John F. Kasson, “Venturing Forth: Bodily Management in Public,” Rudeness and Civility 118-123.


77. “A Vele Gonfie” is an Italian phrase, not French, as Adler has suggested (Adler 91). The phrase, according to one dictionary, means “successfully, with flying colors” (Cassell’s Italian Dictionary 1964 ed., 229). The phrase has also been translated as “In Full Sail” (Adler 91, and David McKibben, Sargent’s Boston, with an Essay and a Bibliographical Summary and a Complete Check List of Sargent’s Portraits, exh. cat. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1956) 130) and “With Swelling Sails” (“The Royal Academy,” London Times 29 Apr. 1905: 14.)

78. Adler 93.

79. Adler 92.

80. Adler 92.


82. I thank Claudia Brush Kidwell for information about the costume Ena wears and for helping me to locate relevant fashion illustrations. While it was more common for Sargent to paint his female sitters in formal evening dress for full-length portraits, Sargent did paint women in day dress. Examples include Mr. and Mrs. J.N. Phelps


85. For excessiveness as a stereotype of Jews, see Adler 89-94; for English aristocrats as excessive and theatrical, see Allen 657-662.

86. The Saturday Review, Spectator, Illustrated London News, and Black and White, for example, all fail to mention *A Vele Gonfie* in their reviews of Sargent’s paintings at the Royal Academy.

87. [Roger Fry], “The Royal Academy, Athenaeum 6 May 1905: 567.

88. I thank Lee Glazer for this information.

89. While the boots, cloak, and large cuffs worn by Sargent in the Punch cartoon would have conjured vague associations with the seventeenth-century dress worn by Velázquez’s sitters, the pose and the way the cloak is worn do not recall any particular Velázquez painting. See August L. Mayer, *Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures and Drawings* (London, 1936).

Chapter 4

The Real and the Imaginary in “the semblance of a picture”:
Sargent’s Zuleika and Cashmere series

In 1907, the year Sargent vowed to quit portraiture, he started a series of figure paintings of masquerade. Created during his holiday trips in Italy and Switzerland between 1907 and 1911, they portray family members and friends dressed in Turkish costumes and cashmere shawls enacting harems and less specific, mysterious female societies. Richard Ormond has noted that with these works, “Sargent does not pretend to be painting the real thing but draws us into a fantasy where the signs of subterfuge are plain to see.” The specific visual effects that led critics to recognize with varying degrees of comfort the performativity of the portraits already discussed are also at work in these smaller costume pictures. Significantly, however, they operate outside the realm of portraiture. Possibly for this reason, critics were less bothered by their evident artifice.

Sargent’s decision to quit portraiture at the height of his reputation was met with dismay and disbelief by would-be patrons, but at least one prominent critic supported his desire. A year earlier, the critic for the Spectator, praising Sargent’s less formal portraits and landscapes, had stated, “May we not hope that Mr. Sargent will devote more of his time to work of the kind he shows in the present Exhibition, and not bind his great powers too closely to commissioned portraits? The position of the artist is assured, and his fame acknowledged everywhere. To paint the great and the rich under the conditions of portraiture is to submit to limitations.” This critic argued, “Ornate ladies, Dukes and
Duchesses, or members of the haute finance may bring out the painter’s wonderful command over his material, but they do not always give him an opportunity for showing his finest and most artistic qualities.” Sargent may have agreed; at least it is clear that the artist had come to feel shackled by the limitations of portrait work, for in one letter declaring his intention to quit this line of work, he stated, “it is to me positive bliss to think that I shall soon be a free man.” Patron demands, however, prevented him from completely quitting portraiture, but he tried to satisfy most requests with charcoal drawings, and he painted fewer than thirty portraits after this time. Reviews of annual exhibitions noted that some of these later portraits showed “a certain sense of weariness in the painter.” In 1908, the critic for the Spectator regretted Sargent’s continuing work in portraiture and advised, “An artist can never stand still. While he is perfecting a manner he may be inspired; when he has reached his goal he must abandon it for new things…” A year later, when Sargent exhibited Cashmere (Fig. 41), perhaps the most renowned of the small costume pieces I will be discussing, this same commentator praised the work: “Mr. Sargent is always delightful when he lays aside the brush of the virtuoso, and paints to please himself and not to astonish the world.” The reviewer thus encouraged Sargent’s shift away from portraiture and argued that to reach his potential as an artist, he needed to paint what personally interested him. Costume pieces like Cashmere appeared to be one such interest.

Abandoning portraiture, Sargent no longer needed to consider sitters’ likenesses, reputations or opinions, and these relatively small genre paintings provided him with one opportunity to change his artistic reputation as a society portraitist who was optically

165
accurate but superficial. As noted in Chapter One, his mural projects functioned comparably. The costume pictures discussed here were obviously much less ambitious than his mural projects, but as a group, they proffered another, more modest, response to critics who accused him of having no imagination, of being a mere reporter of life. One could argue that his choice of imagery in these paintings simply reflected his longstanding interest in exoticism and Eastern “others” and naturally arose from the contingencies of his other work (he had recently returned from travels in the Middle East doing research for his mural project). Nonetheless, in producing these small costume pieces, he was selecting to paint images outside his commissioned mural works that also declared his capacity to be imaginative, poetic, inventive. Moreover, these images pleased critics who had always admired his technical skill in creating life-like appearances. Thus, rather than abandon what he did well in order to prove his ability to be imaginative, Sargent painted these small pictures as explorations in the intersections between significations of life and the imagination. The results are compelling pieces that suggest the fabricated nature of both.

With these paintings, Sargent joined other artists working at this time who were negotiating the conflict between the “real” and the “ideal.” As Bailey Van Hook has explained, many American artists of the Gilded Age, like Sargent, had been taught in French ateliers to work directly from live models yet imbue their figural representations with something extra that would distinguish their art from mere slavish imitation. Van Hook has discussed the variety of ways in which artists “compromised between idealism and realism” at the turn of the century. Some artists like Augustus Saint-Gaudens, for
instance, created works that combined allegorical figures with historical figures; others, like Kenyon Cox and Childe Hassam depicted “symbolic or mythological form[s] in a realistic setting”; still others, like Thomas Dewing and Edmund Tarbell, depicted realistic figures veiled in an atmospheric, spiritual aura.10

Sargent’s strategies came closest, perhaps, to those of Abbott Thayer, who painted “flesh-and-blood models in an iconic, archetypal realm.”11 Like Sargent’s costumed figures, Thayer’s models are young family members and friends dressed in imaginary robes.12 Angel (Fig. 42) of 1889, for example, shows Thayer’s young daughter Mary with wings and a white sleeveless garment enacting an angel. Paradoxically, her face is so portraitlike in its specificity and realism, and it contrasts so markedly from her vague surroundings that we are unconvinced by the angelic illusion. Instead, we perceive her as a real model posing as an angel. As this chapter will discuss, Sargent’s models operate in comparable ways, yet Sargent differed from Thayer in the roles he gave his young female relatives. Thayer transformed his family members into angels, virgins, and saints, thus suggesting their purity and piety.13 Sargent, however, painted his young robed models in roles meant to be seductively alluring and at times even erotic.

Ormond has noted that the eroticism in some of these paintings is “as explicit as anything [Sargent] has ever done.”14 This chapter discusses the function of this eroticism in the context of the paintings’ interstitial position between the “real” and the “ideal.” Trevor Fairbrother has already noted the sensual allure of many of Sargent’s subjects, including paintings of reclining friends taking a siesta, drawings of male nudes, mural decorations, society portraits, and Venetian street scenes.15 In so doing, Fairbrother has
privileged examples of male subjects that he persuasively argues are “a response to masculine physicality that is homoerotic.” No written documentary evidence available to scholars, however, supports any conclusion about Sargent’s sexual identity. Certainly, the erotically posed women that populate the images I will discuss complicate the visual evidence and make conclusions about Sargent’s sexual identity based on his art problematic at best. Ultimately, I am not convinced that Sargent’s art can offer a key to unlocking his closet. Instead, as recent scholars have pointed out, his art often proclaims privacy as a value Sargent held dear. My chapter participates in these ongoing discussions about Sargent’s visualizations of sexuality and privacy.

Until recently, these costume pieces garnered little art historical attention. They were generally discussed, along with his other genre paintings, as documents of holiday leisure. In 1998, the publication of *Sargent Abroad*, in conjunction with an exhibition at Adelson Galleries, served to renew interest in and awareness of these enigmatic works while providing valuable information about the places, dates, identities, and circumstances depicted. Describing these paintings as images of role-play, sexuality, exoticism, and ultimate ambiguity, Ormond has briefly and insightfully overviewed key issues raised by these pictures. He has also noted the ways in which they relate to Sargent’s other images while alluding to nineteenth-century “orientalist” paintings and “neoclassical” works by Ingres. This chapter relies on the information he provides about the production of these paintings and expands on his comments to explore more specifically how role-play, art-historical references, and sublimated sexual suggestions functioned to define Sargent’s
position within the larger aesthetic debate about the "ideal" versus "real" aims of art. I begin with a consideration of Sargent's choice and use of costumes and models.

Costumes and models

When Sargent went in 1907 with family and friends to Purtud, a remote Alpine hamlet near the border of Italy and Switzerland, he brought with him "trunkloads of oriental costumes and cashmere shawls." Ormond suggests that many of these costumes were purchased on Sargent's trip to the Middle East two years earlier and that Sargent's careful transportation of them from his London studio attests to his conscientious pre-planning of the resulting series of paintings. The costumes included a cream caftan with green spots, a bright green caftan, orange trousers, a tan and green "Turkish cap," red slippers, and a number of cashmere shawls. Over the next five years, these costumes made various appearances in the figure paintings he produced on holiday trips in different parts of Italy. He used cashmere shawls, for example, as blankets for figures costumed and labeled "Turkish," as robes encasing figures of unidentifiable origin, or as wraps combined with western dress. He used the spotted caftan to help construct pictures of Turkish harems, but he also used it in combination with cashmere shawls to create decorative dress non-specific to country or region. The Turkish cap appears on both men and women, sometimes in combination with pantaloons and Turkish caftans, sometimes in combination with cashmere robes and western dress. Rather than attending to accuracy in costuming, Sargent enjoyed creating his own fashions with numerous decorative combinations that evoked mystery, exoticism, and sensuality. The repetitious appearance of these costume props, obsessively rearranged and recombined on reclining
and standing figures over a five year period, help to call attention to the process of Sargent’s creative vision and the fiction of the resulting works.

The models for these paintings have been identified as Sargent’s two adolescent nieces, Rose-Marie and Reine Ormond, his sister Violet Ormond, friends Polly and Dorothy Barnard (who had posed for *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* as children), fellow artist Jane de Glehn, and his Italian manservant and frequent studio model, the dark complexioned Nicola d‘Inverno. Notably, Sargent’s other male travelling companions do not figure in these costume pieces. When Sargent did paint his other male colleagues, he most often represented them as gentlemen artists at work like himself. Furthermore, while Sargent used two of his nieces as models for these costumed fantasies, he did not use any of his three adolescent nephews—two of whom were older than their youngest modeling sister. A photograph taken at Purtud in 1907 shows these nephews in swimming trunks romping by a brook (Fig. 43). Jane de Glehn, in a letter to her family, noted that the boys went bathing in the “icy brook” every morning. “The children look so jolly rushing around the sunny meadow, naked and rolling in the cristal water,” she wrote. This description immediately followed anecdotes about her modeling sessions and the outfits she wore for Sargent and her husband, Wilfrid. Her narrative juxtaposition brings into sharp relief the gender divisions in the roles and activities of this holiday party. While the boys romped “naked,” Jane and other women posed in various resting positions in voluminous material. Sargent did paint at least one image of a male bather in a stream from this time period. The women in his pictures, by contrast, are shown alongside the brook rather than in it, and they partake in more passive activities. In her
letter, Jane insisted that she would be joining her male companions in the “icy brook” once she recovered from a cold, but only the manservant, Nicola, joined the posing women.

The titles of the resulting works, for the most part, did not include the names of the figures. With some difficulty and confusion, scholars have attempted to sort out the identifications of particular models. Just who was who was not of relevance to Sargent in exhibiting the works. Sargent’s choice of models for these costume pieces may simply have been determined by how persuasively they could look the part. This determination would have been based on pictorial conventions and stereotypes about the appearance of Eastern “others.” On the other hand, Sargent’s casting of characters may have been determined, in part, by the contingencies of real-life gender and class roles at that time.

Ormond has roughly divided these fanciful genre pictures into two series, based on evidence of style, date and costume. The “Zuleika pictures,” painted in 1907, depict figures in notably Turkish dress. In the “Cashmere series,” dating from 1908-1911, cashmere shawls provide the primary decorative emphasis. I turn now to consider each of these series in relation to the visual culture of Sargent’s time, and I locate the multivalent associations that can be drawn from these paintings. In so doing, I suggest the images’ positions at the interstices of various polarities of meaning. From there, I will examine how the eroticism of these pictures functioned within this context.
Zuleika pictures

The Zuleika pictures, so named for one of the images in the series, include the oil paintings *The Brook* (Fig. 44), *The Chess Game* (Fig. 45), and *Dolce Far Niente* (Fig. 46), and the watercolors *Zuleika* (Fig. 47) and *Turkish Woman by a Stream* (Fig. 48). Jane de Glehn, in a letter to her mother describing how she dressed in Turkish costume to model for Sargent, stated that the artist was “doing a harem disporting itself on the banks of the stream.” The resulting pictures most notably reference popular nineteenth-century European paintings of harems and odalisques.

European travel to the Near and Middle East had increased in the nineteenth century, and with it, dissemination of first-hand information about the sights, dress, and customs of these regions. Salon painters such as Eugene Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gerome met with critical success for their paintings of “orientalist” subjects, which contributed to the growing interest in and travel to the Near and Middle East and inspired additional artistic works about the “Orient.” Harems were by far the most popular “orientalist” subject of art. Because entering these female spaces was strictly against the Islamic social and moral code, painters relied on popular fantasies of harems, inspired by the poetic, violent, and sexual tales from *The Arabian Nights*, the immensely popular collection of stories by Schéhérazade.

By the time Sargent was working on the Zuleika pictures in 1907, however, the quantity of paintings of Near and Middle Eastern subjects exhibited at annual exhibitions had waned. In England, written reviews and pictorial overviews of the annual Royal...
Academy and New Gallery exhibitions during these years rarely focused on works with "orientalist" themes. Articles specifically about harems, published in popular newspapers and periodicals such as the Illustrated London News and the Strand Magazine, focused less on their presumed sensual lifestyle than on their increasing education and westernization and on their relative oppression in comparison to the social freedoms experienced by European women. Nevertheless, J.C. Mardrus' new French translation of Arabian Nights of 1900-1904, published in sixteen volumes, and the 1906 publication of Pierre Loti's Les Désenchantées, a fictionalized account of contemporary harems, testify to a continuing interest in the romantic fantasies of "orientalist" literature. Sargent apparently "devoured" Mardrus' volumes, which may have helped spark his interest in creating this series.

Sargent's large collection of books attests to his taste for "orientalist" literature. In addition to the complete 1904 edition of Mardrus' Arabian Nights, a catalogue of the contents of his library includes three editions of William Beckford's Vathek, several biographies of travels along the Nile river, A.E.P. Weigall's Life and Times of Akhnaton of 1910, C.J. Lyall's Translations from Ancient Arabian Poetry of 1885, two early nineteenth-century editions of James Morier's The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan, Edward Fitzgerald's English translation of Omar Khayyám and the Sálám and Ábsál of Jámí of 1879, several "orientalist" novels by F.W. Bain, including A Digit of the Moon, 1899, and a 1910 book on Oriental carpets. His library also included ten large-sized Persian miniatures.
In addition to reading “orientalist” literature, Sargent had been interested in painting Middle and Near Eastern subjects long before he created his Zuleika pictures. In 1880, for example, he was in Morocco and wrote from there, “Of course the poetic strain that writers launch forth in when they touch upon a certain degree of latitude and longitude—is to a great extent conventional; but certainly the aspect of the place is striking, the costume grand and the Arabs often magnificent.”32 He made several paintings based on his North African travels, the most renowned of which is Fumée d’ambre gris.33 In 1890-91, Sargent traveled with his family through Egypt, Greece, and Turkey, and during that time, painted Study from Life (also known as Egyptian Girl), a female nude rare in Sargent’s work. While this trip had initially been “simply to see and not to work,” he ended up spending much of his time in Egypt doing research for his Boston Public Library murals on the history of religion.34 The researches for these murals continued fourteen years later on a visit to Syria, Palestine and various countries of the Near East in 1905-6. On this later five-month trip, he painted “more than a dozen oil paintings and over forty watercolors,” many of which depicted draped, hooded, and veiled Bedouins.35 The various figures he painted during these travels to Northern Africa and the Near East emphasized physical concealment or allure that would characterize his later costume pictures.

In contrast to these earlier paintings and studies of the Near and Middle East, the Zuleika pictures are more obviously invented.36 These later works also differ markedly from the prototypical nineteenth-century paintings of harems they seem to reference. Images such as J. Frederick Lewis’s An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo (Fig. 49), of
1869, portrayed harems in dimly lit interiors decorated with lavish architectural
ornament, mosaics, tilework, and carpets. In such prototypical pictures, idle women lie
supine against plump, tasseled cushions, with black eunuchs or slaves in attendance.
Sensual pleasures are emphasized with the inclusion of exotic fruits and wine, braziers
smoking with perfumes, narghiles for inhaling opium, and attendant musicians playing
stringed instruments. In the rare instances when harems are shown out-of-doors, they
are either veiled or portrayed on their rooftops overlooking stucco buildings and generally
arid or tropical environments.

In the Zuleika pictures, by contrast, many of the harem figures are unveiled while
lounging out-of-doors. In traditional western paintings, nude Ariadnes, Greek goddesses,
water nymphs, peasants, and prostitutes sprawl seductively in nature, but I have rarely
seen harems imaged in this way. Furthermore, the lush green environment of Sargent’s
paintings bears little resemblance to the generally arid lands depicted in most “orientalist”
landscapes. Besides their costumes, only the figures’ recumbent, sensual poses serve to
identify them as harem; no other props or accessories support this identification.

Ultimately, as Ormond has noted, we are aware in the Zuleika pictures, to a
degree not felt with the earlier prototypes, that the figures are not “actually” harem, but
rather, are models posing for the artist. The pictures slip between being read as an
“imaginative” representation of another world and as an “actual” representation of the
construction of that other world. The costumes and recumbent poses persuade us that
these are harems; the setting, on the other hand, proclaims the fiction of the
representation.

175
In 1910, just three years after he produced the Zuleika pictures, the immensely popular and influential Russian ballet Schéhérazade, directed by Serge Diaghilev in Paris, with sensational, exotic costuming by Leon Bakst, brought about a dramatic resurgence of interest in “orientalist” fantasies. Paul Poiret commodified an “oriental” look in the following years with fashion designs, interior decorating accessories, and a perfume line; and he helped promote a returning craze for “oriental” masquerade parties with a renowned “oriental” fete of his own. By this time, however, Sargent had apparently turned away from painting figures in Turkish garb and had turned increasingly and obsessively towards painting women in cashmere shawls.

Cashmere series

While in the Zuleika pictures, the imaginary realm is clearly that of harems, in the Cashmere pictures, the imaginary realms are more mysterious and offer multivalent contextual possibilities. Paintings from this series include the watercolors Woman Reclining (Fig. 50), Reclining Figure (Fig. 51), Woman Reading in a Cashmere Shawl (Fig. 52), and Violet Sleeping (Fig. 53), all dated c. 1908, in addition to the oil paintings Cashmere (Fig. 41), 1908, Princess Nouranihar (Fig. 54), 1910, Two Girls in White Dresses (Fig. 55), c. 1909-11, Villa Torre Galli: The Loggia (Fig. 56), 1910, and Repose (Nonchaloin) (Fig. 57), 1911. The women in this series are wrapped in a variety of cashmere shawls rather than Turkish trousers and vests. The pale spotted caftan, red slippers, and Turkish cap, however, all make appearances. In many images, comparable
to the Zuleika pictures, the women recline, sleeping or reading. In other images, including the most ambitious of this series, Cashmere (Fig. 41), the women stand in different attitudes.

By including the word “Cashmere” in so many of the titles, Sargent referred to the place of original shawl production, Kashmir, an English protectorate.\textsuperscript{41} Certainly the title “Paisley,” for instance, could also have been used, for the word, which refers to the Scottish town renowned for its production of shawls with Kashmir-inspired designs, would have been immediately recognized by Sargent’s contemporaries in association with such shawls and their distinctive pattern of pine motifs.\textsuperscript{42} The shawls from Kashmir, however, were hand-woven, while the imitation European shawls (such as those made in Paisley) were all machine made.\textsuperscript{43} By choosing the word “Cashmere,” Sargent thus alluded specifically to a particular geographic region associated with Eastern exoticism as well as the “authentic,” hand-made production of valued shawls.

Carol Troyen has pointed out that cashmere shawls “had been immensely popular in the mid-nineteenth century” but were “no longer fashionable in the Edwardian era, except among those who favored antique clothing and other modes of aesthetic dress.”\textsuperscript{44} One 1909 society gossip column, in the English magazine \textit{Black and White}, pointed out that English women would never have worn cashmere shawls in the manner in which Sargent painted them in Cashmere. The columnist relayed a conversation she overheard during a visit to the Royal Academy exhibition where Cashmere was displayed:

\textit{Now, when could one put on things like those?” scornfully remarked a sturdy-looking flapper to a companion like herself, as they stood before Mr. Sargent’s picture of fair and charming English girls in Eastern shawls, as it appears at this moment at Burlington House. Indeed, in spite of the fascination of the painted maidens swathed in soft, greyish, creamish}
wraps, one cannot imagine such a garb being worn here. To begin with, one would have to acquire a shuffling, Oriental walk in order to move in it. The English woman is incapable of tolerating any dress which hampers her freedom of movement. In Europe, the only modern woman able to wear a shawl gracefully is the Spanish woman, and she is certainly the laziest of the lot. There, in many of the old houses, costly fabrics from Cashmere and Persia are kept in cedar wood boxes, to be brought out on state occasions, and draped on the figures of matron and maid with an inimitable skill that northerners can only envy. How much ought to be sacrificed to appearance is no problem to a French woman, or a Spanish woman, or an Eastern woman; without a scruple they will cheerfully sacrifice all. But the Englishwoman has different ideas on the subject, and at the shrine of her beauty declines to offer up her outdoor games, her sport, and even her conscience.\textsuperscript{45}

As with the portraits we have discussed in Chapter Three, \textit{Cashmere} becomes the focal point in this article for discussions of national types. Other countries and regions are described disparagingly as "shuffling" and "lazy," yet these others are still envied for a taste for decoration that the English presumably lack.\textsuperscript{46} Contrary to this columnist’s opinion, however, cashmere shawls and their trademark pine frond patterns were popular in England among a few aristocratic and theatrical circles, which included some of Sargent’s friends and sitters who favored aesthetic modes of dress. Indeed, the Duchess of Marlborough, whom Sargent had painted four years earlier, had herself photographed the same year he exhibited \textit{Cashmere} in a delicate beaded dress decorated with the large pine pattern trademark of cashmere shawls (Fig. 58). Cecil Beaton later described the duchess as "outside fashion" and compared her to "an idol or Cretan goddess."\textsuperscript{47} Two years earlier, a photograph of Ellen Terry draped in white with a cashmere shawl folded next to her was published in \textit{Cosmopolitan} (Fig. 59). The photograph was intentionally constructed using the conventions of aesthetic pictorial arrangements rather than those of
formal studio portraits. Terry's costume, along with the mirror, classical frieze fragment, and cashmere shawl, were arranged in a simple, asymmetrical composition that emphasized formal qualities and identified Terry with aestheticism. In the few commissioned portraits Sargent painted during this time, his sitters were happy to pose with cashmere shawls. In 1907 alone, Sargent painted at least six portraits of women displaying the characteristically white wraps with pine borders. These shawls drape shoulders, hips, elbows, and forearms. They wrap middle-age women as well as younger ones. They drape dresses with long sleeves and high necklines as well as dresses with off-the-shoulder sleeves and low sweeping necklines. In every instance, the serpentine lines of the shawls, wrapping sinuously around the female figures, add a sensual quality to the portraits (see, for example, Fig. 60). In this way, they mimic portraits by Ingres dated a century earlier in which comparable shawls, seductively winding and coiling around attenuated arms and bodies, sensuously wrap and reveal female forms (see, for example, Fig. 61). Ormond has identified Sargent's use of cashmere shawls during this time with his admiration for Ingres and his interest in neoclassicism. Such an interest can be understood as part of the period's nostalgia for and celebration of the eighteenth century. Margaret Maynard has suggested that this new valuation of the past and an interest in revival dress, in particular, functioned as a reaction to modern life, and namely, to the recent changes in gender roles brought about by the women's movement. In an era of dress reform, when many women did not want their dress impeding their active lifestyle and participation in sports, cashmere shawls evoked earlier times or even an
aesthetic timelessness seemingly removed from the cares of contemporary life. As such, these shawls did have a place in the fashion choices of the day among certain circles.

While in Sargent's portraits, the shawls are treated as fashion accessories, in his genre works, they most often function as robes cloaking his figures, and in the case of Cashmere, hooding them as well. Comparably “invented” robed and hooded women were ubiquitous in theatre productions, magazine photographs, illustrations, and beauty advertisements during this time. Stage productions of plays, ballets, and operas set in the Near East or ancient Rome or Greece enabled exotic and aesthetic stage sets and costume designs featuring robed women. The play “The Courtesan of Corinth” starring Sarah Bernhardt and the ballet “Sardanapalus” are just two examples of such productions documented in photographic essays in the Illustrated London News the year Sargent painted the Cashmere series. Cloaked and hooded women, presented as embodiments of beauty, were often featured in advertisements and photographic essays as well. The Strand Magazine during this time, for example, published advertisements for a full-body beauty regimen with the bold title “Are You Beautiful?” The standard of beauty this advertisement presented was an image of a young woman with drapery framing her face in a way comparable to some of Sargent's cashmere figures. This same magazine, in 1908, ran a beauty contest in which artists were asked to pick the woman they found most beautiful from a series of photographs. One of the chosen beauties was a young woman cloaked in a manner similar to the women in Cashmere—only her face and hair were revealed (Fig. 62). One artist explained the selection, “This lady has the most beautiful face, and that is enough for me...I am free to imagine that what is hidden is quite
as beautiful as what is revealed." Such, we might conjecture, could have been the effect on viewers of Sargent's cloaked women as well.

Other draped, hooded, and prone figures in Sargent’s own work relate visually to those from the Cashmere series yet are more clearly narrative or documentary in intent. In costume or figural arrangement, Sargent’s cashmere women might remind us of his biblical illustrations for the story of King David (see Fig. 63, for example), the figures of the Virgin Mary and the robed Jehovah in Israel and the Law from his Boston Public Library murals (Figs. 64 and 65), the sleeping women, entwined in one another, in Atlas and the Hesperides (Fig. 66) and the robed woman revealed in Truth Unveiled (Fig. 67), both lunettes from his Museum of Fine Arts murals, as well as the foreshortened, blindfolded bodies sprawled on the ground in his large painting Gassed (Fig. 68). In all of these examples, however, no one-to-one correspondence exists to suggest that Sargent used the figures from his Cashmere series as studies for other works. Notably, while the other works by Sargent that I mention here are given a clear narrative context (biblical, mythological, allegorical, or historical), the paintings from the cashmere series, by contrast, are not.

Instead, they can be understood as a repertoire of poses and figural arrangements that provided archival prototypes for future ideas while honing Sargent’s skills in compositional design and brushwork technique. In this way, they might be understood as comparable in function to the volume of nude studies now at Harvard’s Fogg Museum of Art. As Fairbrother has analyzed, some of the charcoal drawings in this volume may have served as studies for mural figures, some “employ extravagant poses and surprising
angles of vision that evoke the dramatic figural detail of Baroque pictures," and some can be viewed as finished pictures in their own right. While the cashmere pictures, like these nude drawings, can be interpreted as figure studies that indicate Sargent's working process, I would argue that they go further than the nude studies in offering suggestions of narrative beyond the studio practice of working from a model. They prompt us, in other words, to try and label them with identities other than that of model and with narrative subtexts other than that of posing for the artist.

Their figural dispositions offer multiple associational possibilities. First, the prostrate women in this series bear similarities to images of death or near-death in popular periodicals published at this time. Illustrations of women in a “swoon,” drowned, or otherwise murdered, dating from this time, show women comparably sprawled on the ground. Their deaths or unconscious states rationalize the suggestive, perhaps titillating, abandon with which their bodies are posed. At the same time, the foreshortened viewing angle of Woman Reclining and Reclining Figure, in particular, makes them appear like Baroque depictions of floating saints and angels assuming to heaven. The green backdrops of these two watercolors are rendered in vague, blurry washes of color that seem to swirl around the figures--adding to the sense that they are floating rather than lying on firm ground. At the same time that these pictures elicit such associations, however, details within the works counter them—we recognize, through the figures' body language, that they are neither dead nor floating.

Comparably, their costumes inspire comparisons with a wide range of figural imagery—from prostitutes and harems to virgins. The prone figures, for example, might
be compared with images of reclining prostitutes such as those in Courbet’s *Demoiselles au bord du Seine*, one of whom wears an Indian shawl wrapped around her body, or to harem women such as the one featured in Edmund Dulac’s illustration to Quatrain LXXII of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Kháyyám* (Fig. 69) published in London in 1909. This latter figure is swathed in a solid blue cloth intertwined with a patterned fabric, creating a serpentine design around the woman’s body in a way similar to the drapery effects in *Woman Reclining* and *Reclining Figure*. Likewise, however, Sargent’s figures resemble images of the Virgin Mary, robed and hooded. The fact that Sargent’s images can have associations with both sexual and virginal female prototypes contributes to a frustration of viewing or reading these images. The pictures conjure up a variety of associations, only, in the end, to deny each one by simultaneously suggesting competing, contradictory associational potentials. Viewers are prompted to consider: the subject could be this, it is like this, and like that, but it is not this, and it is not that, etc. Ultimately, it is not fully any of the possibilities alluded to, and we are left confronting the process of art that creates meaning. As with the Zuleika series, Sargent maintains the tension between a picture alluding to art and meaning and a picture that asserts its process of construction.

Sometimes, however, we seem to be aided in our interpretive attempts by the titles attached to certain works. The title of one painting in this series, *Princess Nouranihar* (Fig. 54), of 1910, for example, refers specifically to one of the main characters in William Beckford’s “orientalist” novel *Vathek*. Apparently, everyone in Sargent’s circle was “enthusiastically reading” this novel at the time, and as we know, Sargent had numerous copies of this work. In Sargent’s painting, three women
wrapped in white and gray cashmere shawls lie asleep at the edge of a hilltop. Flowering bushes surround them, while the tops of snow-covered mountains loom just beyond. Sargent’s image and Beckford’s heroine have little in common, save vague associational parallels. Princess Nouranihar makes her appearance only half-way through Beckford’s novel. The beautiful daughter of an Arabian Emir who lives in the mountains, Nouranihar seduces and humiliates men, but is in love with her effete, childish cousin. The wealthy virile caliph, Vathek, obsessed with gratifying all of his desires at any cost, kidnaps her and makes her his bride. Beckford delights in describing, in minute detail, sensational stories of incest, pederasty, and sadism generally resulting from Vathek’s obsession. In the end, Vathek and his bride arrive in hell. Sargent’s image obviously suggests none of the atrocities carefully detailed by Beckford. Rather, his painting comes closest to resembling the description of Nouranihar and her retinue towards the beginning of her entrance into the novel: “a troop of girls on the mountains, whose sharp air gives their blood too brisk a circulation.” Vathek, upon first seeing Nouranihar, compares her to “one of those beautiful blue butterflies of Cashmere.” She is described as energetic, independent, and abundantly healthy, and as such, is considered masculine, particularly relative to her effeminate male cousin. While Sargent’s women are hardly portrayed as energetic, they have obviously climbed quite high to reach their position amidst the clouds, and their cashmere shawls, trimmed in blue-gray could be a reference to Vathek’s Cashmere butterflies. Sargent may be suggesting by the title that his figures are comparably seductive in their languorous poses and implied physical health and independence (no men seem present). The two women on the right, entangled in sleep as
if one entity (one rests her head in the lap of the other), allude to both lesbian love, and, for the close readers of *Vathek* in Sargent’s audience, perhaps the love between Nouranihar and her cousin, who were described as appearing like identical twins, with “the same tresses, the same fair complexions.” Our path to them is blocked by flowering brambles that appear deliberately positioned to prevent our entry into the realm they inhabit. A narrow opening to the left can lead us through these bushes and up over a rock to the space where the women lie. But as positioned, we are outsiders looking on this realm that seems both fantastical and lifelike. While *Princess Nouranihar*, by its very title, offers a more specific subtext than do the other images we have looked at thus far, its narrative reference is still more allusive than exact, and the sense that this is an actual documentation of modeling for the purpose of creating an artistic narrative is still maintained to some degree.

Because the figures are sleeping, with clouds wafting around them, Sargent also allows us the possibility of imagining that, having read *Vathek*, these women are dreaming fantasies in which they inhabit that world. Sargent’s image, in other words, could be interpreted both as a depiction of daydreaming and as a generalized enactment of those daydreams. The same could be said for the other paintings in the Zuleïka and Cashmere series. We might imagine that the books Sargent and his coterie were reading during this holiday time might have provided the impetus for role-play. The readers and sleepers in paintings such as *The Brook*, *The Chess Game*, *Woman Reading in a Cashmere Shawl*, and *Reclining Figure* could be understood as enacting the texts they are reading or the dreams they are dreaming.

185
Such pastimes also allowed Sargent's models to remain relatively still while giving them something to do while Sargent was painting them. Their activities thus additionally function to counter the perception, given by his slashing brushwork, that he has captured an instantaneous moment. Because his paint application suggests swift execution, we are led to believe that Sargent simply sat down and painted what appeared before him. In this way, the paintings feel like snapshots rather than timeless, carefully constructed images, and thus, we are persuaded that the images represent the "reality" of what he saw. Yet this impression is called into question by the implication of the figures' pastimes, the implication that modeling for Sargent takes time—time that they want to fill in some manner, particularly as they are neither professional models nor patrons. Poses in other paintings by Sargent contribute to the lie that Sargent is capturing the moment (see for example, Mrs. Meyer, discussed in Chapter Three); the poses in these genre works do not. While his painting style suggests the reality of the fictions he presents, his models' activities suggest the fiction of this "reality."

Ultimately, the paintings we have discussed can be understood as functioning analogously to the costumes portrayed in them. The costumes help to construct identities (enigmatic ones) for the models while suggesting a masquerade, a transformation of the figures into "other" selves. Sargent's painted canvases, as surface cloths onto which Sargent's identity and those of his sitters were formulated, function comparably as masquerade. The images we have analysed assume the guise of artistic prototypes while suggesting, at the same time, that it is only a guise. These works are thus both
masquerades of identities and of art itself, and as such, call into question the essential
nature of both.

**Cashmere: “the semblance of a picture”**

I turn now to consider more closely his most ambitious costume piece of these series, *Cashmere* (Fig. 41). I do so because, while we do not have much written evidence of viewers’ responses to the other costumed pictures discussed, we do know how they reacted to *Cashmere*. Their reactions confirm that the visual strategies and effects outlined above were recognized by Sargent’s turn-of-the-century audience as well.

With *Cashmere*, the analogy of costume to canvas is most evident, for Sargent seems to have adapted the shawls’ design as the design for this picture. The figures in *Cashmere* parade across the canvas in a manner similar to the pine motifs moving across the border of the shawls. The women, their heads slightly forward, move in one direction, just as the pine motifs, their ends curling forward, seem comparably to move in one direction. Sargent’s women, in spacing and pose, are obviously less rigidly repetitive than the pine motifs of the shawls, yet the variations in the figures resonate with the nature of authentic Kashmir designs, known for being more variable than machine-made designs. In one of his final touches to the painting, Sargent suggested a line of pale flowers, each one represented by a single vertical stroke of his brush. These strokes help to reinforce the linear movement of the figures and connect them to each other. They are stroked across the canvas at just the proportional point (approximately one-third from
the bottom of the canvas) that the trim of pine fronds begins on the large, otherwise single-color shawls.

Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1909, the painting has prompted numerous questions about its meaning, yet at the same time, it has defied viewers’ attempts to define it. Laurence Binyon, in his 1909 review, described the work as follows:

A little procession of young girls is moving up the hollow of some green glen. Each is robed in one of those white cashmere shawls once so familiar, with a patterned border of which the blues and purples mingle to the eye in a warm pearly grey. One walks lost in thought, intent upon her steps; another looks out of the picture, clear-eyed, with the shy confidence of girlhood, under the soft folds of the shawl that frames her face. What are they doing? Whither bound? We do not want to ask, content to see the movement of these gracious and slim figures against the vague green of the hills...And yet the touch of strangeness is enhancing. From a description one might expect the picture to be merely a whim, a momentary effect that shaped itself amusingly in the artist's fancy; and most painters would have made of it something quaintly remote, or a pseudo-classical reminiscence of Greek marbles, or just a decorative masquerade. But it is none of these. It is youth, it is charm, it is life...

In this passage, Binyon first describes the work and then struggles with himself about its ultimate meaning. He is prompted to ask questions in order to resolve narrative: “What are they doing? Whither bound?” Then he censors such questions and claims the picture’s beauty alone is satisfying enough and should prevent us from needing to ask such questions. Then he continues, “And yet...” Ultimately, he cannot escape from his desire to pinpoint its subject, its meaning, its intent. He thus proceeds with a list of what it is not, in order to come closer to what it is. I will return to this point later. I first want to call attention to Binyon’s back-and-forth struggle to seek narrative meaning and, alternatively, to deny the relevance of such potential meaning.
It is the same struggle Richard Ormond and James Lomax display seventy years later in their description of the painting. In a 1979 catalogue entry for the painting, they too follow their description with a series of questions: "Who are these girls? Where are they going? Why do they gaze out so soulfully?" They then begin the process of answering these questions by contemplating other hooded female subjects that Sargent had painted. Having done so, they stop themselves: "One should perhaps not read too many symbolic allusions into Cashmere." Ormond again summarized the painting's effect in a 1998 catalogue entry: "Who they are and what they are doing is far from clear, but the picture creates a deliberate air of soulfulness and mystery." 60

Resonant with Binyon, Ormond, and Lomax's reactions, a cartoon from 1909 by Max Beerbohm parodied the painting (Fig. 70). In this cartoon, Sargent himself struggles to understand these robed figures. The caption begins with Sargent asking, "What is it they want? What?..." Beerbohm suggests that these figures belong to a mysterious and foreign "Cashmiote Society" and that even Sargent needs the best London interpreter to understand them. 61

Despite a desire on the part of scholars and critics to dismiss narrative or symbolic readings of Cashmere, they situate the painting in relation to other works in order to come closer to an understanding of this one. Ormond, for example, compared Cashmere to the numerous pictures Sargent had made of "Arab women with heads covered, posed in groups" (see, for example, Fig. 71). 62 He was quick to point out, however, that the Arab women "represent a real world," while Cashmere, relative to these works, appears "invented." 63 Sargent's hooded women could also have prompted
comparisons with another group of real-life, hooded women, namely Catholic nuns. Certainly these two disparate types of female societies were the subjects of much public fascination. Their cloistered lifestyle and concealing garments were the subject of London periodical exposés that included photographs and descriptions of their daily routines. While clearly very distinct groups, formed by different institutions of culture and religious belief, both nuns and Arab women were deemed by Sargent’s cultural milieu as curiosities whose lifestyles were anti-modern and whose sexual lives were “other.” While Sargent’s figures might visually relate to these two groups of women, his women function more as evocations than as actualities.

On the other hand, Binyon, as we have seen, contrasted Cashmere to “pseudo-classical reminiscence[s] of Greek marbles” and “decorative masquerade[s].” Binyon no doubt was referring to numerous paintings popular on both sides of the Atlantic of women dressed in vaguely classical dress, assuming poses taken from classical statuary, and organized in frieze-like arrangements recalling Greek and Roman figural groups from, for example, the Parthenon or Ara Pacis (Fig. 72). Paintings of this type include Burne-Jones’ The Hours, 1883, Frank Millet’s Thesmophoria, c. 1894, and Thomas Dewing’s The Days, 1887 (Figs. 73-75). As did the artists of these processional paintings, Sargent used the same model for all of the figures in Cashmere to orchestrate a balance between repetition and variation for decorative effect. In the earlier decorative works mentioned above, created in the context of the Aesthetic Movement, formal issues of design, color, and line took precedence over moral or narrative imperatives. Comparably, critics focused on the formal qualities of Sargent’s painting. The London Times, for example,
proclaimed it "exquisite in design, movement, and colour." Yet, as Binyon recognized, the differences between these earlier works and *Cashmere* are significant.

While the earlier processional works have been praised on the basis of an art for art's sake aesthetic, they all—through their titles and the presence of specific props—have more allegorical or symbolic resonance than Sargent's *Cashmere*. In addition, like the contrast between Pre-Raphaelite paintings and *Ellen Terry* discussed in Chapter Two, the earlier decorative works mentioned here exhibit "tight draughtsmanship" and "intricate surfaces," while *Cashmere* displays loose bravura brushwork and sketchy passages that appear to reveal the process of constructing the image. Sargent's painting technique also gives a sense of immediacy and life-like animation far different from the ethereal, distant, other-worldly women painted by Burne-Jones, Millet, and Dewing. The comparison I have made suggests that, as with other genre scenes examined in this chapter, Sargent has painted an image that intentionally alludes to or participates in specific artistic conventions of image-making. He does so, however, in a painting style that gives an illusion of "reality" by its suggestion of the momentary. What is remarkable to Binyon about *Cashmere* is its "life." Perhaps its "life" is all the more noteworthy because viewers can recognize the artistic fictions or references to other art at the same time that they are struck with its "realism." Ultimately, however, depending on the point of comparison, Sargent's figures appear relatively imaginary or realistic. They ride the line between these two modes.

In this way, *Cashmere* can be compared with Julia Cameron's photographs from the mid-nineteenth century. Her images are the only other examples I have seen of

191
women cloaked in cashmere shawls in a fashion comparable to that worn by the figures in *Cashmere*. Julia Cameron's photograph *The Five Wise Virgins*, 1864 (Fig. 76) particularly bears a striking point of comparison. The image shows five young models cloaked mainly in white drapery trimmed with pine patterns assuming various poses arranged in a frieze. Their forms are visually cramped by the boundaries of the image—their heads touch the top of the photograph, and their bodies crowd close together as if to squeeze into the photographic frame. Thus, no background provides a context in which to locate them, but they do hold the requisite lamps that enable the allegorical identities Cameron gives them through title.⁶⁹

This photograph is typical of the images she produced at mid-century of young women, friends and servants, robed as madonnas, saints, and allegories. The titles she gave her photographs, *The Three Marys*, *La Madonna della Pace*, *Flos and Jolande*, and *Lady Elcho as a Cumean Sybil*, for example, declare these women's identities and provide a specific narrative context in which to understand them. Representing "transcendental icons...pious little girls, budding brides, and devoted mothers," they offered examples of the ideals of Victorian womanhood as articulated in the mid-century writings of Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin.⁷⁰ As images of literary and biblical figures, they also served as a challenge to claims of photography's verism and its presumed limitations as a medium that could not operate in the realm of fantasy and imagination. Nevertheless, because the images are photographs, we are aware that these women are models dressed up and posed as people they are not. The real artifice of the picture is made manifest by the medium itself.
Cameron’s son made sure her photographic work continued to be seen long after her death, and her influence was still strong in 1908 when Sargent painted *Cashmere*.71 Pictures by other photographers, reproduced in such magazines as *Lady’s Realm* the year Sargent painted *Cashmere*, featured draped and hooded young women with titles such as *Saint Catherine* and *Purity*, reminiscent of Julia Cameron’s camera work.72

Such photographs decidedly differ from Sargent’s paintings in their overt allegorical and biblical references that emphasize moral and spiritual imperatives. Nevertheless, Cameron’s work comparably creates the same tension manifest in Sargent’s *Zuleika* and *Cashmere* series: a tension between presenting an image of an imaginary realm and presenting an image that calls attention to its fabrication.

Critics’ recognition of this tension in *Cashmere* is evident not only in their uneasy naming of potential meaning, but also in their focus on the process by which this image had been constructed. The *London Times*, for instance, after describing the work as “a delicious fancy” stated: “One young girl, draped in a cashmere shawl of softest white, has been his model, and by repeating her figure half a dozen times he has made a kind of frieze, or procession picture...”73 The critic for the *Athenaeum* went a step further, writing, “Mr. Sargent also sends a number of studies of the same model in the same shawl called *Cashmere*. They are deftly painted, and united into the semblance of a picture with extreme cleverness.”74 The first sentence of this description would lead us to believe that Sargent is exhibiting a number of separate works rather than one painting. This critic continues to interpret the image as fragments, stating, for instance, that “they are deftly painted,” rather than “the picture is deftly painted.” While the *Times* critic called
attention to the process by which Sargent transformed model and drapery into a
“delicious fancy,” the Athenaeum critic suggested that Cashmere is perhaps not a picture
at all, but rather, a representation of a picture—multiple figure studies “united in the
semblance of a picture” (emphasis mine).

Sargent enabled these statements to be made about Cashmere in a number of
ways. He created the painting from two separate canvases, and the canvas seam—
evidence of the process by which he created this picture—can be seen just to the right of
the bare-headed woman. In addition, the space around the women appears perfunctorily
filled in—further calling our attention to the figures as separate studies. With the bare­
headed central figure, for example, thick green strokes of paint outline her face, move
around her head and down her back, creating her own type of hood. This thick green then
connects with the torso of the figure behind in a way that ultimately appears unfinished
and contrived. This hooding green cannot be rationalized within the vague suggestion of
green ground or foliage behind the figures, for its shape too closely aligns with the
woman’s head and awkwardly overlaps the orange passage behind it. We can only
understand this green as possibly covering over a section of the painting—perhaps a hood
for the woman that was originally considered and ultimately edited out. Such an edit,
while hidden with green paint, is not altogether erased; Sargent leaves visible the paths he
has taken to reach this final image.
I have thus far suggested the ways in which Sargent operates at the interstice of realism and the imagination with his Zuleika and Cashmere series. I turn now to consider one final work depicting a cashmere-draped woman that I believe most overtly articulates Sargent’s self-conscious positioning within the critical debate about the extent to which art should be lifelike or imaginative. Villa Torre Galli: The Loggia (Fig. 56), is one of a number of pictures Sargent painted in the fall of 1910 during his stay just outside of Florence. Joining Sargent during this visit were the painters Wilfrid and Jane de Glehn, the painter Sir William Blake Richmond and his wife, Clara, Sargent’s sister Emily and her friend Eliza Wedgwood.

Villa Torre Galli depicts Jane in the foreground draped in a cashmere shawl reading a book or letter and her husband Wilfrid sitting in the background at his easel directly under a copy of Giambologna’s statue of Venus, which stood in the loggia. Richmond, his back to us, sits at his easel at the left of the composition, while his wife, Clara, stands behind him looking at a book or album. The composition suggests a triad of couples: Wilfrid and the Renaissance sculpture, Richmond and his wife, and Jane and the unseen Sargent. The sculpture of Venus seems to function as a muse, peering over the shoulder of the seated Wilfrid. The sculpture’s shadow, positioned directly over Wilfrid’s easel, appears as if it were smoke or an ethereal spirit rising from the painting upon which the artist works. The artist and his easel, in turn, form a broad pedestal that visually supports and lifts the sculpture. Wilfrid and his Renaissance counterpart form a
stable triangle whose symmetry and stability allude to Renaissance ideals of pictorial composition. Another artist/muse relationship is suggested on the left by the pairing of the Richmonds. The darkly dressed Clara stands behind her lightly smocked husband just as the white Venus stands behind the darker figure of Wilfrid. In contrast to Wilfrid and Venus, however, the Richmond group is on the periphery of the composition and forms an asymmetrical triangle that appears less constructed or contrived.

We might imagine that the relational dynamics presented could wittily suggest that Wilfrid is inspired by Renaissance art and Richmond is inspired by his wife— Wilfrid’s muse is “ideal,” while Richmond’s muse is “real.” On the other hand, Wilfrid appears to be sketching the “real,” less “ideally” composed scene of Richmond and his wife, while Richmond may be sketching the “ideal” artwork of Venus or the “ideal” pyramidal composition she forms with de Glehn. Richmond, the older artist, was an academician, known for his allegorical subjects and love of Michelangelo, while Wilfrid, much younger, was known for Impressionist works in the style of Sargent. With this knowledge, we might surmise that the second interpretation is more apropos. Whatever the case, the particular identities of the artists themselves and their actual artistic affiliations seem less important to this work than the fact that Sargent has set up an oppositional dynamic between two artists in suggesting their contrasting use of or reliance on the “ideal” versus the “real.” Sargent delineates and observes this dynamic unseen, from across the loggia.

Jane and the unseen Sargent provide a third foil in this triadic pictorial structure. In contrast to the positions of the other women, standing behind the artists, Jane sits in
the near foreground, just in front of where we imagine Sargent is working. While she does
not assume the position of the traditional muse, she prompts artistic inspiration by her
aesthetic form and becomes a primary focus of Sargent’s painting. Ormond notes that in
this picture Jane “is far removed from the others in mood as well as in space. She might
be one of Sargent’s idealized Alpine models who has inadvertently strayed into this scene
of real life.” With this observation, Ormond perceptively identifies a dichotomy
between the ideal and the real that is in play within this painting. The dichotomy,
however, is more complicated than Ormond’s identification of Jane as “ideal” and the rest
of the scene as “real.” Compared to the nude Venus behind Wilfrid, Jane, of course, is far
more “real.” While Wilfrid’s literally statuesque muse might represent the “ideal” and
Richmond’s muse, the “real,” Jane occupies a position between the two poles—between
an actual world of holiday leisure and an imaginary, timeless world of art. Cropped by
the painting’s edge, she is both in and out of this picture. On two levels, then, she
appears to be both art and life. Sargent positions himself so as to assume a relational
partnership with her, and in this way, he appears to define his own stance in the “ideal
versus real” debate. He rides the fence and revels in the ambiguities of his interstitial
position.

Significantly, he does so (not only in this image, but also in the Zuleika and other
Cashmere pictures) through images of beautiful, alluring women, sometimes seductively
posed as sexually available. I turn now to consider the particular eroticism of his Zuleika
and Cashmere pictures in order to elucidate its function in Sargent’s articulation of his
creative vision.
Seduction and denial

The erotic poses in these series, while common in artistic convention, may appear startling to our late twentieth-century eyes when we consider that at least one of these poses was performed for Sargent by his fourteen-year-old niece, Rose-Marie. As David Lubin has pointed out, however, images of alluring young girls suggestively presented were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century. In The Brook (Fig. 44), two of Sargent’s nieces, wearing Turkish dress, lie on the banks of a tumbling brook. Rose-Marie faces us in the center foreground dressed in blue and yellow, while her sister Reine, age eleven, lies dressed in green to the left of the composition. Rose-Marie’s body position is overtly seductive. Her lower torso lies flat, while her hips and legs twist around to face us in a traditional pose of sexual availability seen, for instance, in Delacroix’s Odalisque of 1845 (Fig. 77), as well as Sargent’s nude drawing of Nicola D’Inverno (Fig. 78). Rose-Marie’s left hand clutches her hip, emphasizing its curve, while her right hand rests near her crotch. Our attention is visually drawn to her pelvic area, for no other part of the picture is bathed so brightly in yellow light. Sargent has concentrated dark strokes just under her right hand that, while rationalized as shadows, are readily read as sublimated signifiers of pubic hair (these strokes are the same brown color as her hair). Her overly long fingers part elegantly, yet impossibly, between the third and fourth fingers in a way that subliminally suggests she is coyly revealing her crotch. Such a hand gesture was part of a longstanding tradition in paintings of nudes. (Manet’s Olympia, which Sargent so openly admired, is just one modern example.) This gesture imparts modesty but at the
same time calls attention to female sexuality. The fact that Rose-Marie is clothed, however, deflates the impact of this gesture. Furthermore, her hand position slips just below and to the right of its conventional site—she is actually resting it on her upper thigh. This almost-but-not-quite gesture could suggest Sargent's ambivalence about sexualizing his niece. The gesture enables viewers to associate the image with other paintings of seduction and sexuality while allowing the model to maintain propriety. Tellingly, this suggestive hand is not painted as smooth, seductive flesh. Instead, it is painted in jarringly thick strings of impasto that give it a hard, bony or wooden quality. Its thick rigidity is all the more evident for being in striking contrast to her thinly, smoothly painted face. Critics were quick to notice this contrast when it was exhibited at the New English Art Club in 1907. The London Times, for instance, declared “the faces charming; but the hand...seems to have been painted so that those who have denounced the hands in every Sargent picture might find themselves justified.” Such a hand, we might imagine, would befit a wooden marionette more than a flesh-and-blood young woman. The materiality of her hand contributes to the suggestion that the sexual gesture is performative rather than natural.

Carter Ratcliff has described this painting as a “web of landscape textures.” The word “web” is apt for conveying the visual effects of the strings of paint that weave on the surface of the canvas. But just who is spider and who is prey in this visual tangle? On the one hand, Sargent could be considered the metaphorical spider, capturing his nieces in thick webs of paint for viewer delectation. On the other hand, Rose-Marie, in the center of this web, appears her own alluring spider. A photograph of Sargent working
on *The Brook* and surrounded by umbrellas positioned by a series of ties (Fig. 79) reinforces this suggestion. The umbrellas’ polygonal shapes and the intersecting lines of structural frets and tethers appear weblike and comparably function as capturing and filtering contraptions. On the one hand, Sargent appears the spider amidst these contraptions. On the other hand, the painting itself, with thin easel-legs supporting its compact body, appears a possible spider luring Sargent as its prey. On the photograph’s two dimensional surface, a series of thin lines formed by an umbrella tether, easel legs, and paintbrushes, visually draw Sargent and his painted creation towards each other. Most suggestively, one of Sargent’s brushes, its tip highlighted by the sun, appears to emerge from Sargent’s crotch. This tip points upwards, almost-but-not-quite touching the edge of the canvas at the bottom of Rose-Marie’s skirts. With *The Brook*, creating art allows for the possibility of a union between artist and subject that is suggestively sexual and otherwise inappropriate—but with Sargent, it is a possibility not fully realized.

In *Dolce Far Niente* (Fig. 46), the foreground figure, wearing the same blue trousers and beaded vest, lies in a position comparable to Rose-Marie in *The Brook*: back against the ground, knees bent and twisted to one side. As Ormond puts it, “the spectator appears to be on top of her.” Compositionally, her body, cropped at the hips, is our way into the painting. Yet ironically, this erotic entry is almost unnoticeable at first blush. Her veiled head lies in shadow, her vest blends with the yellow ochre of the sun-drenched ground, her green robe appears as tufts of grass, and her blue trousers are rendered in the same tone as the shadowed ground on which they twist. Our eyes are
drawn to the other five figures in the work before we discern her and try to make sense of
her contorted anatomy. Her hand on the left, caressing the very edge of the picture plane
that delineates our world from hers, is the most noticeable signal that she is there.
Extending further his strategy in The Brook, Sargent manages to depict female sexual
availability and seduction in a way that is simultaneously blatant and furtive.

This time, the sublimation of sexual desire and availability happens by means of
camouflage. This sprawled foreground figure so easily merges with her environment that
we might well miss her. Her camouflage results from Sargent's "Impressionist"
experiments with light and color. Scholars have generally defined Sargent's involvement
with Impressionism as confined to five years in the mid to late 1880s when he visited
Claude Monet at Giverny, actively collected Impressionist works, and created such figure
paintings as Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose, 1885-86 and Paul Helleu Sketching with His
Wife, 1889. It can be argued, however, that his interest in Impressionism lasted his
entire career. Sargent had a particular understanding of the word "Impressionism," of
which he felt only Claude Monet was an accomplished practitioner. In one of the few
instances where Sargent verbalized a theory of art, he gave his definition of how Monet
would understand the term to MacColl in 1912: "The observation of the colour and value
of the image on our retina of those objects or parts of objects of which we are prevented
by an excess or deficiency of light from seeing the surface or local colour." Sargent went
on to explain that "to the average vision it is only in extreme cases of light and dark that
the eye is conscious of seeing something else [other] than the object, in other words
conscious of its own medium—that something else is what the impressionist tries to note
As Evan Charteris has pointed out, Sargent is less than articulate in his explanation and flawed in his understanding of the retina "as though it could be watched and studied as a separable portion of the organ of vision." Nevertheless, Sargent’s convictions give us some entry into his own understanding of “Impressionism.” His phrase “conscious of its own medium” is particularly significant. He suggests by this phrase that Impressionism visualizes the very process—the very act—of seeing, over and above the subjects portrayed. Based on such comments, we can surmise that Dolce Far Niente and the other Zuleika pictures fall within his definition of Impressionist experiments. In these works, Sargent depicted an environment where extremes of light and shadow are juxtaposed. In such a situation, Sargent was able to call attention to “that something else”—to what he understood to be “the colour and value of the image on our retina.” The bare feet of the foreground figure in The Chess Game provide one of the more obvious examples of this effect. Areas of the figure’s feet in direct sunlight appear almost yellow, while areas in shadow are variously brown, blue, and green. It is difficult to tell from this image what the “surface” color of his feet would be. Ironically, in painting situations that enable Sargent to call attention to the act of vision itself, he effectively arrives at pictures where the subjects are difficult to discern. They become hidden in a maze of sunlight and shadow. Many scholars have focused on how this happens in The Hermit (Il Solitario), in which an old man and two deer are camouflaged by the dappled light of a forest, but no one has given as much attention to this effect in his images of prone, costumed women.

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Olson has called these images, "[Sargent's] nieces turning into rock formations."\(^8\)\(^9\) In *Dolce Far Niente*, once we notice the hidden foreground woman, we are prompted to search for other figures comparably camouflaged. We half expect to find other signs of human life in the jumble of white rocks at the water's edge in the central background, because in color and shape, these rocks mimic the group of white-robed figures at the water’s edge in the foreground. A conflation of rocks and figures happens most obviously in *Princess Nouranihar* (Fig. 54), where the foreground women mimic the distant forms of the blue-gray mountains dressed in snow. In this example, however, light and shadow are less responsible for the effect than are shape and local color.

Comparably, in *The Brook*, Rose-Marie’s blue trousers and pale caftan tumble down the picture’s right corner like a frothy waterfall continuing the vertical flow of sparkling blue water seen in the central background. Her belt matches the colors of the rocks that line the river bank, and her fingers match the flame-like colors of the ground foliage, rendered in comparably long, thin strokes. In addition, Reine’s green robe helps to merge her with the surrounding green grass. In *Turkish Woman by a Stream* (Fig. 48) the conflation of figure and ground is comparable but even more complete. Her green robe, like the green grass of her surroundings, appears to function simply as another impediment to the flow of blue that is primarily water. The figure’s green-cloaked, jutting elbow, like a peninsula, visually interrupts the stream and seemingly diverts the flow of the water’s ultramarine blue to the right, where it merges with the flow of her blue trousers towards the agitated blue jumble of her cashmere shawl in the foreground.

203

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Sargent's use of comparable colors, strokes, and shapes to define both the figures and their environment in these and other paintings has been briefly described by Warren Adelson and others as creating unified, all-over pictorial surfaces indicative of a modernist style. This strategy, however, also creates associational links between figure and ground. While the visual juxtaposition of harem figures with nature is rare, Sargent's merging of the two participates in the conventional and related linkings of women, non-western cultures, and "primitive" others with nature. In this, he participates in a turn-of-the-century culture invested in the notion that a panacea for the ills of modern urban civilization could be found in a retreat to nature—a retreat aided by an emulation of those "primitive" or non-western "others" who were understood as already living in a state closer to nature. In the Zuleika series, languorous poses and idle activity are offset by the visual romp of Sargent's brushwork; this juxtaposition conveys a sense of abandonment, ease, and freedom that appears seductive. Significantly, these camouflaged "others" prompt hard looking. We work to discern whether one passage is part of a leg or a rock, and whether another passage is foliage or hair. With boundaries between figure and ground sometimes elided and unstable, the process of identification is not always easy. In a modern turn-of-the-century culture, where surfaces are valued as aids for labeling, Sargent is creating images in which the pictorial surface ironically prevents us from clearly seeing just what is what. His choice of subject matter suggests that this confounding condition, one that provokes visual desire, may be a liberating, paradisal escape.

Other painters such as Edward Vuillard, however, created pictures where women seem to dissolve more fully into their environment. Sargent's merging of figure and
ground is never as complete. He often makes very subtle distinctions between colors that ultimately let us know what is figure and what is ground. The blue of Rose-Marie's trousers in *The Brook*, for example, is greener than the blue of the brook; and the green of Reine's caftan appears more artificially vivid than the more subdued greens of the grass and foliage. Sargent thus rides the line between suggesting a figure/ground merger and declaring distinctions between the two—just as he rides the line between suggesting imaginary narratives and declaring role-play, and, comparably, imaging sexual availability while suggesting its impossibility.

Ultimately, with his use of camouflage in these pictures, Sargent brings desire into play by soliciting a searching vision. The site of this solicitation is often an erotically posed woman. By this means, Sargent embodies visual desire as sexual desire, visual access as sexual access, perhaps with the intention of making the act of vision seem all the more exciting.

With many of the works in the Cashmere series, however, it is the voluminous wrapping shawls, rather than the merging of figure and ground, that sublimate sexual desire and availability. Of course, not all of the cashmere-draped figures strike conventionally seductive or erotic poses that might overtly reference desire in the first place. Certainly the body language of the figures in *Cashmere*, for example, is physically distant. Likewise, Rose Marie in *Repose (Nonchaloir)* (Fig. 57) is inaccessible compared to the subjects in the aesthetic prototypes to which this painting refers. The bodies in *Cashmere* and *Repose* appear relatively lost in the materiality of the clothes they wear. While cashmere draped women in other Sargent paintings strike subliminally more
suggestive poses, their bodies are comparably concealed by their costumes. Such is the case with *Woman Reading in a Cashmere Shawl* (Fig. 52), for example. The figure’s pelvis turns towards the viewer in a position similar to that of Rose-Marie in *The Brook*, yet her form relatively dissolves in the tumble of cloth draping her. In the foreground, a smooth blue-green phallic form thrusts diagonally into the center of the picture and seems to part and push into the agitated frothy rumple of the woman’s cloak in a way that subliminally suggests a sexual meeting between the woman and the viewer who stands outside the picture’s realm. The seemingly frenzied repetition of dark brown lines that form chevron shapes at the tip of this phallus suggests an activity of desire that may or may not achieve its goal, may or may not get under that wrap, while the woman’s robed form seems to glide down the side of this blue-green shape. The figures in *Woman Reclining* and *Reclining Figure* appear perhaps more explicitly seductive in body language. Their vertical orientation, like that of the foreground woman in *Dolce Far Niente*, suggests that the viewer is on top of them. Posed with alluring abandon, they would be accessible if one could only unwrap the complicated packaging of their figures.

Sexual desire and denial is made particularly manifest in *Two Girls in White Dresses* (Fig. 55). In this instance, cashmere shawls are mixed with English bonnets. Like the reclining women in *Woman Reclining* and *Reclining Figure*, the foreground woman is oriented vertically to the viewer, yet Sargent chose an even more foreshortened perspective for this picture. Our viewing position suggests we could be kneeling on the ground, ready to crawl onto her dress. Presumably as a result of the foreshortened perspective, her body dramatically twists to the point of anatomical distortion and
seeming dislocation, so that we have to work to make out where her hips are in relation to her torso, for instance. Just at her crotch, almost at the center of this composition, a cascade of paisley erupts, spilling towards the viewer. This near-triangular form functions as both a shield, visually stopping us at the surface, and as an arrow, pointing the viewer to a destination of sexual desire.

For Sargent, decorative costumes are the primary sites of his visible stroking. To some extent, in all of the pictures we have discussed, we as viewers are drawn to the orgiastic strokes of Sargent's brush at the site of dress. The multiple shifts in the direction of these strokes suggests, subconsciously perhaps, an activity prompted by arousal, frustration, and obsession. Sargent's stroking can be interpreted as an attempt—one that we as viewers reenact—to get at the body, or at least realize the figures' forms, yet his strokes, ultimately, remain on the surface. Getting underneath is impossible.

**Conclusion**

Significantly, as previously mentioned, the models that posed so seductively for the artist, and by extension the viewer, were Sargent's relatives and married friends. In other words, they were not, in fact, sexually available to Sargent. Additionally, as proper European women, they were able to assume poses that suggested sexual availability only under the pretext of role-play, under the aegis of art. With these images, Sargent may be playing with the myth of the model as sexually available to the artist. He suggests this possibility is a constructed one, as he makes us aware that the models are performing
availability—but only up to a point. They are, after all, draped in veils, hoods, and long wraps that limit views of the flesh. While their bodies twist and contort for the viewer, they are cloaked to excess, and access is ultimately denied.

Sally Promey has suggested that camouflage, draping, and veiling in Sargent’s work “had to do in some significant way with privacy, as social behavior and as intellectual conviction.” A plethora of evidence from correspondence, newspaper articles, and friends’ recollections all paint a picture of Sargent as someone who carefully safeguarded his privacy. The camouflage and wraps in his Zuleika and Cashmere series participate in an ongoing theme of privacy suggested in his work. They function as a “deflection of the intrusive or exposing eye”—a deflection as effective as that of the elaborate dresses and theatrical poses his formal portraits displayed.

In appearing potentially available but ultimately hidden, his Zuleika and Cashmere figures create a dynamic of appeal and frustration for the viewer that is an analog for the dynamic of comprehending the pictures’ meanings as a whole: a process of almost-but-not-quite grasping it. This chapter has elucidated this process by locating the multivalent references to artistic prototypes that these images simultaneously elicit and counter. It is not only through these means, however, that the cycle of appeal and frustration is prompted. The ways in which these images call attention to their own construction—by foregrounding role-play and the artistic means of laying down paint, sewing up canvas, and otherwise revising the painted surface, for example—prevent the images from resting easily in the imaginary realms they evoke. With these pictures, Sargent thus responds to critics who had asserted that his works were lifelike but unimaginative, and he does so by
referencing and calling into question signs of both life and the imagination. The paintings ultimately straddle various polarities: the figures appear simultaneously virginal and sexual, inaccessible and available, real and fictive; the resulting works appear both sketchy and finished, lifelike and artificial.

Notably, key visual issues raised by these small figure paintings operate in his portraits well. With Ellen Terry, Mrs. Meyer, Londonderry, and A Vele Gonfie, for example, Sargent references artistic prototypes of subject and style in a way that call attention to these images as representations of or about representation. In varied ways, these portraits also prompt reading while offering ambiguities that complicate the reading process. Additionally, his Impressionist technique signals an immediate reality while simultaneously making that “reality” difficult to read. Finally, theatrical elements of dress, setting, and body language confound any assumption that we can identify essential selves through a study of outward appearances. The difference with the Zuleika and Cashmere paintings, as I have already noted, is that they are not portraits. Outside of portraiture, Sargent is able to depict an eroticism more blatant than was permissible in the formal portraits of celebrities, aristocrats and nouveau riche for which he was so well known. The eroticism of his Zuleika and Cashmere series embodies the very process of desire and frustration, reading and its denial, that operates in the experience of all of the images we have discussed in this dissertation. The experience of ultimately not "knowing," of being unable to see forms, pinpoint meanings, or establish essential identities, variously troubled or excited Sargent’s turn-of-the-century viewers.

Countering efforts to wage a “relentless war against ambivalence,” Sargent’s paintings
often explored the interstices of meaning or identity to present ambiguity.\textsuperscript{96} In doing so, they called into question signifying practices of identification relied on for the judgement of art and, more broadly, the maintenance of the social order.
Notes to Chapter 4


8. See Chapter One, 29-41, in particular, for a discussion of the critical discourse about Sargent’s art.


10. Van Hook, Angels of Art 151-57. (Quotes on 153 and 154, respectively.)

11. Van Hook, Angels of Art 156.


14. Ormond, “In the Alps” 89.


17. Sally Promey, Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent’s ‘Triumph of Religion’ at the Boston Public Library (Princeton, NJ, 1999) 252-71. Promey argues that “the only sort of interiority Sargent was willing to display in public was actually a bid for personal privacy” (268), and she considers his use of veils, costumes, tents, hoods, shrouds, and blindfolds as “accenting the sort of privacy and interiority in experience that Sargent desired” (262). She notes, “In Sargent’s art we see people seeing within, and we frequently get a glimpse of mood or tone, but this artist’s paintings steadfastly refuse to let us trespass on someone else’s privacy” (262). Fairbrother, “Sargent’s Genre Paintings,” has also focused attention on Sargent’s privacy: “Being publicly known for images of other people was perhaps Sargent’s best way of remaining private himself” (47). He implies that Sargent’s privacy may have been a strategy for professional survival in a homophobic society (“Sargent’s Genre Paintings” 30, and John Singer Sargent 83 and 142).


20. Ormond, “In the Alps” 84.


22. Examples include An Artist in His Studio, c. 1903-4, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Artist in the Simplon, c. 1911, Harvard University Art Museums: Simplon Pass: Mountain Brook, c. 1911, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and The Master and His Pupils, 1914, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Sargent depicted Jane de Glehn and his sister Emily painting at easels as well, but as Kathleen Butler has pointed out, the women artists that Sargent painted were, by comparison, amateurs. Very different societal expectations were attached with their activity (Kathleen Butler, “The Labor of Leisure: John Singer Sargent in the Simplon Pass,” in “Tradition and Discovery: The Watercolors of John Singer Sargent,” diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1994, 36-73). For a discussion of the social construction of the female artist in relation to her male counterpart during the Gilded Age, see Sarah Burns, “Outselling the Feminine,”
Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America (New Haven and London, 1996) 159-186. (For an earlier version of this chapter, see “The ‘Earnest, Untiring Worker’ and the Magician of the Brush: Gender Politics in the Criticism of Cecilia Beaux and John Singer Sargent,” Oxford Art Journal 15.1 (1992): 36-53.) Jane de Glehn, during the time she was modeling for Sargent in Turkish dress, complained in a letter to her mother, “Sargent hasn’t done a sketch of Wilfrid yet darn him! I wish he would” (Jane de Glehn, Emmet Family Papers, Archives of American Art, roll 4758, frame 1352).

23. Jane de Glehn, letter to her mother, Emmet Family Papers, Archives of American Art, roll 4758, frame 1352, quoted in Ormond, “In the Alps” 68.

24. The model for Cashmere, now identified as Reine Ormond, was originally thought to be Rose-Marie Ormond, for example (Lomax and Ormond 100). The female models for Dolce Far Niente have not been identified, but Ormond believes the foreground figure is Jane de Glehn. The female model for The Chess Game is thought to be either Polly Bernard or Rose-Marie (Ormond, “In the Alps,” 86-89).

25. Jane de Glehn, letter to her mother, Emmet Family Papers, Archives of American Art, roll 4758, frame 1322, quoted in Ormond, “In the Alps” 84.


28. Reproductions of exhibition pictures in the *Pall Mall Magazine* from 1907 to 1909, for example, included many more subjects from Arthurian legend. When rare pictures with “orientalist” themes were reproduced, they were usually portraits of westerners in eastern garb or images with explicitly biblical narratives. “The Pictures of 1907,” “The Pictures of 1908,” and “The Pictures of 1909,” *Pall Mall Magazine, Extra,* May 1907, 1908, 1909.


33. For the most recent discussion of *Fumée d’ambre gris*, see Kilmurray and Ormond 88.


36. Ormond, “In the Alps” 86, makes this point.


38. See, for example, Benjamin-Constant, *Evening on the Terraces, Morocco*, 1879, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Eugène Giraud, *Terrace on the Banks of the Nile*, 1878, Private Collection. Reproductions of these works can be found in Thornton 48-49.
39. Rare examples of harems depicted in lush green surrounds include Théodore Frère, *Algerian and her Servant in a Garden*, 1844, Private Collection; Eugène Delacroix, *Turkish Women at the Bath*, 1854, Wadsworth Atheneum; and Edgar Degas, *Portrait de Mlle. Eugenie Fiocre: a propos du ballet “La Source”*, 1867-68, Brooklyn Museum of Art. (See Thornton for reproductions of these works.) While some images depicted harem women reading or playing chess, such activities were not specifically identified with harem cultures, compared to smoking narghiles, for example. Elaine Kilmurray has compared Sargent’s images of harems to paintings by Watteau, Fragonard, and the fête galante (Kilmurray and Ormond 246).


41. Numerous histories of the Kashmir Shawl and its European counterpart have been written in the past few decades, including Monique Lévi-Strauss, *The Cashmere Shawl* (New York, 1988); Valerie Reilly, *The Paisley Pattern: The Official Illustrated History* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1989); Yale University Art Gallery, *The Kashmir Shawl*, exh. cat. (1975); F. Ames, *The Kashmir Shawl and its Indo-French Influence* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1986). These histories consider the origin of the shawls in Kashmir, their rise in popularity in Great Britain and France in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the changes in production techniques, material resources, and designs in both Kashmir and artistic firms in England and France, and the reciprocal effects of economics, fashion, and politics on the creation of such shawls.

42. Reilly 9.

43. Levi-Strauss 19; Reilly 15.


46. Significantly, the “maidens” of Cashmere are definitively labeled “English.” Since the costume was not defined as “English,” the only clues of “Englishness” would have come from the figures’ complexion, hair, and facial features. Ormond, however, has identified the model for all of the faces as Reine Ormond, who was not English; her mother was American and her father Swiss (Ormond, “In the Alps,” 93). See also Chapter Three, 145-6, for a discussion of an English dislike for decorative dress.

48. Additional portraits dated around 1907 include Mrs. Edward Deshon Brandeege, Helen Olivia Brice, Lady Eden, Izme Vickers, The Honorable Lady Langman (Eleanor Lyell), and Mrs. Louis E. Raphael (Henriette Goldschmidt). In addition, the portrait, Lady Williamson, 1906, depicts a cashmere shawl draped over a chair. Later portraits with cashmere shawls include The Countess of Rocksavage, 1913, Sylvia Harrison, 1913, and Rose-Marie Ormond, 1912. Reproductions of these works can be found in the photographic collection of works by John Singer Sargent, Witt Library, Courthauld Institute.


53. Fairbrother, “A Private Album” 70-79. (Quote is from 74.)


55. We know that Sargent had initially planned floating “apocalyptic angels,” at least one of whom was posed in the zig-zag posture of traditional assumption figures, in between lunettes for the Boston Public Library (Sally Promey, “Sargent’s Truncated Triumph: Art and Religion at the Boston Public Library, 1890-1925,” Art Bulletin 79.2 (June 1997): 225 and fig. 16 on 227). Sargent was working on these murals during the years he painted his Cashmere series. Yet his cashmere-draped figures bear no exact visual correspondence with his sketches and final versions of the library murals.

56. Ormond, “In the Alps” 110.


216
58. Fairbrother, "Sargent's Genre Paintings" 30-48, notes that reclining figures are pervasive throughout Sargent's oeuvre.


60. Lomax and Ormond 101; Kilmurray and Ormond 249.


62. Ormond, "In the Alps" 90.

63. Ormond, "In the Alps" 90, 92.


65. Ormond likens this effect to that of a piece of music with "seven variations on a theme" (Kilmurray and Ormond 249).


69. Ormond suggests that the figures of Cashmere by Sargent could be "taken for the seven wise or foolish virgins except that they lack the necessary lamps" (Ormond, "In the Alps" 90). Again, Sargent does not offer enough information to enable us to locate them in the realm of the symbolic or allegorical.

70. For my best beloved sister Mia: An Album of Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron, exh. cat. (New Mexico Art Museum, 1994) 16.

71. While a generation apart in age, Sargent and Cameron knew and even imaged some of the same people, namely Coventry Patmore and Ellen Terry.

72. See "Woman's Work with the Camera: Symbolic Art as Expressed by Photography," Lady's Realm 1908: 6 and 8, in particular.


75. For information about the painting’s creation and Sargent’s stay at the Villa Torre Galli, I rely on Kilmurray and Ormond 256, and Ormond, “Around the Mediterranean” 126-28.

76. Of course, since we cannot see the images on their easels, we cannot know for sure what the artists are painting. As Ormond suggests, Richmond and Wilfrid could be painting each other “in what might be described as an act of double exposure” (Kilmurray and Ormond 256).

77. Ormond calls Sargent “the unseen observer” in this work (Kilmurray and Ormond 256).


80. Fairbrother compares Sargent’s nude drawing with an erotic photograph of a reclining man from the same time period (Fairbrother, “A Private Album,” 72).


83. Ormond, “In the Alps” 86.


86. Charteris 125.
87. Promey, *Painting Religion* 263-64, suggests, “[p]erhaps Sargent discerned that sight is always a bit about camouflage…”


89. Olson 240. Adelson also notes the merging of figure and ground in these works (“In the Modernist Camp” 35).

90. Adelson, “In the Modernist Camp” 35-38.

91. *Repose* alludes to paintings such as Frederick Leighton’s *Flaming June*, c. 1895, Museo de Arte, Ponce, Puerto Rico; Albert Moore’s *Beads*, 1875, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh; and John White Alexander’s *Repose*, 1895, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which show comparably decorative, sleeping women lounging on long sofas in an interior setting of equally decorative furniture and objects. Yet all of the women in these earlier works differ from the woman in Sargent’s *Repose* in the extent to which their dresses delineate their figures. The pseudo-classical, diaphanous robes in *Flaming June* and *Beads* cling to the women’s forms, revealing the curves of breasts and legs. The dress in Alexander’s work is not diaphanous, but its form outlines the curves of her figure in a way that is comparably sensual. The figure of Sargent’s woman, by contrast, is completely hidden in her voluminous clothes. The shawl wraps tightly around her torso in a way that appears binding and constricting, but reveals no curves, other than an elbow jutting to the side. For discussions of Sargent’s *Repose*, see Kilmurray and Ormond 259-60 and Van Hook 104.

92. See Van Hook 152, for a brief discussion of this myth.

93. Promey, *Painting Religion* 270. See also note 17 above. Promey discusses this aspect of Sargent’s art in the context of interpreting the Boston Public Library mural cycle as a public statement about the privacy of religion.

94. See Chapter One, note 115.


219
ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Albany Institute of History and Art, McKinney Library. Will Low Papers.

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
   Cecilia Beaux Papers; William Merritt Chase Papers; James Carroll Beckwith Papers; Dwight Blaney Papers; Emmet Family Papers; Lucia Fairchild Fuller Papers; Isabella Stewart Gardner Papers; Alma Strettell Harrison Letters; William Cushing Loring Papers; R. L. Ormond material relating to John Singer Sargent; Gary A. Reynolds Papers; F.W. Sargent Papers; John Singer Sargent Collection; John Singer Sargent Letter to Mrs. Henry White; John Singer Sargent Letters to Mrs. Charles Hunter.

Boston Athenaeum. Sargent/Fox Papers.

Colby College, Miller Library. Violet Paget Papers.


Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Massachusetts. John Singer Sargent letters; Box of catalogues, magazines, reviews, newspaper clippings and photographs concerning John Singer Sargent.


Syracuse University, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections. John Singer Sargent Letters.

220
University of Rochester, Rush Rhees Library, Department of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Archives. John Singer Sargent Letters.

University of Pennsylvania, Furness Memorial Shakespeare Library, Rare Book & Manuscript Library. Portraits of actors and actresses.

OTHER UNPUBLISHED SOURCES


DISCUSSIONS OF SARGENT AND HIS ART DURING HIS LIFETIME


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Art Clippings from the Pen of Walter Cranston Lamed and Other Critics at the Fair. Ed. J.S. Merrill. Chicago, 1893.


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"Opening Revels at the Royal Academy." Punch 3 May 1905: 321.


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226


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Sitwell, Sir Osbert. Left Hand, Right Hand! Boston, 1944.


240


“Types of Noses.” *Saturday Review* 8 July 1893: 43-44.


“A Vanishing Type.” Spectator 20 Apr. 1907: 611-12.


“Woman’s Work with the Camera: Symbolic Art as Expressed by Photography.”


244
2. John Singer Sargent, Mrs. Henry White, 1883.
6. Max Beerbohm, "Mr. Sargent at Work," 1907.

251
9. Henry Fuseli, **Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth**, c. 1766.
12. Mrs. David Bowers (nee Elizabeth Crocker) as Lady Macbeth, nineteenth-century.
Miss Charlotte Cushman as Lady Macbeth

14. Miss Charlotte Cushman as Lady Macbeth, 1850s.
16. Isabella Glyn as Lady Macbeth, nineteenth-century engraving from a daguerreotype by Paine of Islington.
17. Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, reading the letter by the fire, I.3, 1888.
No. 110. Athletics. Strong Woman performing her tour de force.

21. Detail from "Un 'Carr' d'Heure in the New Halléry Gallery,"

*Punch*, May 25, 1889.
26. John Singer Sargent,
No. 291. The Perils of Steep Perspective! "Hold up, mother; it's only like the switchback!"

30. Detail from "Royal Academy Peeps,"
Punch, May 8, 1897.
31. "Reception at the Sargent Exhibition of Paintings Last Night,"
Boston Herald, February 21, 1899.
32. John Singer Sargent, Charles Stewart, Sixth Marquess of Londonderry, Carrying the Great Sword of State at the Coronation of King Edward VII, August, 1902, and Mr. W.C. Beaumont, His Page on That Occasion, 1904.
34. Thomas Lawrence, Lord Castlereagh, as displayed in the ball room of Londonderry House.
35. Photograph of the ballroom of Londonderry House.

279
334. "Call yourself a soldier! Look at me!"

37. Detail of "The Pick of the Pictures,"
Punch, May 10, 1905.
40. Detail of "Opening Revels at the Royal Academy,"

Punch, May 3, 1905.
43. Photograph of Jean-Louis, Guillaume, and Conrad Ormond, Peuterey, Val Veny, 1907.
49. John Frederick Lewis, *An Intercepted Correspondence*, Cairo, 1869.

51. John Singer Sargent, *Reclining Figure*, c. 1908.
59. Frances Benjamin Johnston, 
*Portrait of Ellen Terry*, 1907.
60. John Singer Sargent, Mrs. Huth Jackson, 1907.
62. "No. 3.—Selected by Mr. Dudley Hardy, R.I.,"
from a photograph by Reutlinger.
*Strand Magazine*, May 1908.
63. John Singer Sargent, *Bible Illustration*,
64. John Singer Sargent, Study for the Virgin of the Nativity in the "Joyful Mysteries," c. 1903-12.
Mr. Sargent (to Cook's Interpreter): "What is it they want? What?...No! confound it: really this is too bad! Don't they know that I've made up my mind, absolutely and irrevocably, not to accept any more commissions?"

71. John Singer Sargent, *Door of a Mosque*, 1891.
72. Flamens and the Family of Augustus.
Frieze from south side of the Ara Pacis Augustae, 13-9 B.C., Rome.
79. Photograph of Sargent painting The Brook at Peuterey, Val Veny, c. 1907.
IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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