Why Women Fell: Representing the Sexual Lapse in Mid-Victorian Art (1850-65)

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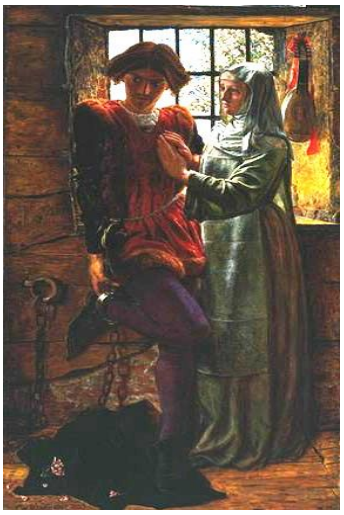
The fallen woman relentlessly troubled the Victorian world. In a period obsessed with the idealisation of female virginity, the consequences of sexual experience outside wedlock often resulted in ruin.[1] While Victorian society advocated the idea of the angel in the home, its art is overrun with images of the sexualised woman. Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as *The Woodman's Daughter* by John Everett Millais and Abraham Solomon's *Drowned! Drowned!* persistently attempt to explain the fall and, in doing so, controversially position the female as victim. In emphasising her blamelessness, the fallen woman is apparently separated from the dangerously independent figure of the prostitute. Masculine anxieties surrounding disease and illicit sex seem to be negated as, unlike a prostitute, the vulnerable female does not pose a threat to society. But it is not so clear cut; the boundaries between the fallen woman and prostitute blur, presenting them as equally vulnerable. Indeed, the issue of dishonour is never straightforward; the male artist reclaims an element of power by reducing sexualised women to objects of pity.

Throughout the mid-nineteenth-century the use of subjects from literature was typical of many narrative paintings. Artists relied on the middle and upper class art audience belonging to a literate society. Originally exhibited at the 1853 Royal Academy, William Holman Hunt presented his first Shakespearean piece.

[1] I would like to acknowledge The Tate Britain, Fitzwilliam Museum, Ashmolean Museum, Guildhall Art Gallery and the Arts and Social Studies Library at Cardiff University for giving me permission to reproduce the images in this article.



Hunt, W. H., 1853. *Claudio and Isabella*. London: Tate Gallery.
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Entitled *Claudio and Isabella* and taken from the play *Measure for Measure*, and inscribed on the frame with the quotation 'Claudio. Death is a fearful thing. / Isabella. And shamed life a hateful' Hunt's oil painting depicts the dramatic scene in which Claudio pleads with his sister to sacrifice her chastity to save his life (Shakespeare, 1999, III.i., l.115-116). It is also interesting that the painting was exhibited with a further quotation in the catalogue from the same scene in which Isabella states: 'Ay, but to die, and go we know not where… / 'Tis too horrible! / The weariest and most loathed worldly life, / That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment / To what we fear of death' (Shakespeare, 1999, III.i.117, l.127-31). Once again Hunt attempts to connect his visual representation with its literary source; the way in which Claudio's words are foregrounded seems to work in conjunction with the visual image to silence Isabella and emphasise the amount of pressure that is placed upon her by a male relative. During 1849 Hunt began work on pen and ink designs for this project, only to have them rejected a year later by his Royal Academic commissioner. Regardless of such setbacks the finished painting was met with general approval. After its 1853 Royal Academy exhibit *The Illustrated London News* commented that 'the face of Isabella…is heroic and commanding in the extreme' (14 May 1853,

p.378). Furthermore, *The Athenaeum* elaborated on the skill of the artist in stating that 'Mr Hunt will command attention, let him paint what he pleases' (7 May 1853, p.567). Although the first half of the review offered approval and praise for Hunt's artistic skills, this appreciation broke down when the critic commented on the Shakespearean figures: 'Claudio is…a lout, and Isabella…never could have inspired the passion of Angelo. If Mr. Hunt will not give us beauty, at least let him refrain from idealizing vulgarity' (7 May 1853, p.567). Consequently, there seems to be an element of unease surrounding the painting, a hint of impropriety that is at odds with its conventional subject matter.

This becomes particularly significant in *Claudio and Isabella* if we note the artist's subtle manipulation of his pictorial symbols. Even though Shakespeare was an acceptable source for high art, Hunt has selected an emotionally charged moment full of moral and sexual undertones. The knowledge that Claudio, who has already impregnated the unmarried Juliet, is willing to contribute to his own sister's ruin emphasises his disregard for the virginal female body. Although Isabella does, in fact, successfully uphold her valuable honour, Hunt foregrounds the amount of male pressure that she is forced to withstand. Turning his eyes from her anguished face, Claudio scowls in the gloom of his cell. His distorted body and shackled limb is indicative of moral weakness when juxtaposed with his sister's upright posture. Sunlight pierces the cell to illuminate the whiteness of her habit. Isabella's intimacy with religion is represented not only through her attire, but also through the church that very faintly rises between the nun and her manacled brother, acting as a reminder of Christian ethics. Even with the protection of the Church, however, the female body is shown to be vulnerable. While the apple blossom encompasses her veiled head to link Isabella with the natural world, the fallen blooms scattered over Claudio's black cloak can be taken as a symbol of his willingness to forfeit her virginity for his own protection (ed. Parris, 1984, p.103). Indeed, it is only

her duty to God that rescues the woman from any sense of duty to her brother. What Hunt confronts us with is a complex representation of a possible sexual fall that seems in conflict with the straightforward narrative of the painting.

Such associations are disturbing rather than comforting. The viewer is faced with an aggressive male sexuality that exonerates the woman from any stain of desire. In this instance, family pressure is portrayed as a threat to female respectability. Hunt's preliminary sketch for this work, however, has not developed this overt stress on female chastity as a positive virtue.

Photograph © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. UK

Hunt, W. H., 1850. Study for *Claudio and Isabella*. Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum. (Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)

The study for *Claudio and Isabella* shows a very different relationship between the brother and sister; Isabella is presented in a less restrained position. As Leslie Parris points out, she clings to her tormentor in a 'vice-like' grip (1984, p.248). This hint of despair matches Claudio's fear of impending death to present the couple as equally distraught. Furthermore, the drawing contains less emphasis on Isabella's devotion to God. Her

identification with the order of St Clare is weakened as the white scapular worn over her gown is symbolically absent. Although Claudio's sharply drawn limbs and pointed footwear differ from the finished painting, his physical characteristics remain largely unchanged. It is the problematic figure of Isabella that evades the control of the artist. In the completed painting, Hunt has manipulated the body of the woman to foreground her piety and status as a victim. By erasing the sketch's original sense of equal suffering, the artist transforms the power structure to categorise the female as the prey. Even Shakespeare's defiant heroine is unable to escape the containments of this Victorian male artist.

Centrally, Hunt represents the woman as both vulnerable and valuable. Although *Claudio and Isabella* subtly addresses the issue of trading female virginity, this unsettling topic is only rendered respectable by its Shakespearean source. Explorations into the causes of the feminine fall and decline into prostitution, nevertheless, flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century. W. T. Stead's notorious 1885 campaign against juvenile prostitution for example, exposed the impoverished parents who were forced to sell their daughters into the sex trade. Published in *The Pall Mall Gazette* under the title 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', Stead explains how he entered the 'maze of London brotheldom' to reveal the underground world of sexual slavery (ed. Ledger and Luckhurst, 2000, p.34). The image of prostitution as 'The Great Social Evil' was challenged by the campaign's emphasis on the stolen innocence of the virgin. In conversing with Stead, a brothel owner reveals how one parent 'agreed to hand me over her own child, a pretty girl of eleven, for five pound, if she could get no more' (ed. Ledger and Luckhurst, 2000, p.38). The sexual ruin of the child is insignificant as money becomes the mother's only concern.

Indeed, prior to Stead's campaign, Charles Dickens used fiction to portray the prostitute's lack of control over her sexual fall. Throughout *Oliver Twist* it is the figure of Nancy who evokes the reader's sympathy.

After restoring Oliver to safety she tells the angelic Rosa Maylie, 'Thank Heaven…you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and – and something worse than all – as I have been from my cradle' (Dickens, 1999, p.323). The purity of the crib is corrupted with poverty and vice as an unspoken sin darkly hints towards her identity as a prostitute. A sense of being born into a world that has both violated and entrapped the woman haunts the text. There is a logic at work here as the Victorian novelist and social reformer redefine an image of deviant femininity; the prostitute is contained in a new and less threatening role of child-like victim.

An awareness of such elements alters our understanding of why women fell and the male obsession with justifying this sexual decline. What we start to notice is the alternative representation of the fall in terms of stolen childhood innocence. Indeed, *The Woodman's Daughter* by John Everett Millais draws upon Coventry Patmore's ballad of the same name to depict the ill-fated lovers in their infancy.[2]

[2] Two stanzas taken from 'The Woodman's Daughter', (Patmore, 1949, pp. 24-28, II 37-48) accompanied the painting in the 1851 Royal Academy catalogue.

Millais, J. E., 1851. *The Woodman's Daughter*. London: Guildhall Art Gallery.
(Reproduced by permission of the Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London)

The poem tells the story of Maud, a poor woodman's daughter, who is seduced by the son of a wealthy squire. As a result of their different social standings, the man can not marry Maud who, in her despair, drowns their illegitimate child and descends into madness. Displayed at the 1851 Royal Academy, Millais transforms the fallen women. Although the literate spectator would be aware of Maud's subsequent seduction, infanticide and madness, by locating her in this childhood scene he firmly establishes the girl's naïvety while placing the blame on her male seducer. It is perhaps this radical hint of seduction and male lust that hindered the painting's sale. *The Times* remarked that both Millais and William Holman Hunt 'have unfortunately become notorious by addicting themselves to the antiquated style…which is to genuine art what the mediaeval ballads in *Punch* are to Chaucer' (7 May 1851, p.8). Such a comparison to *Punch* reduces *The*

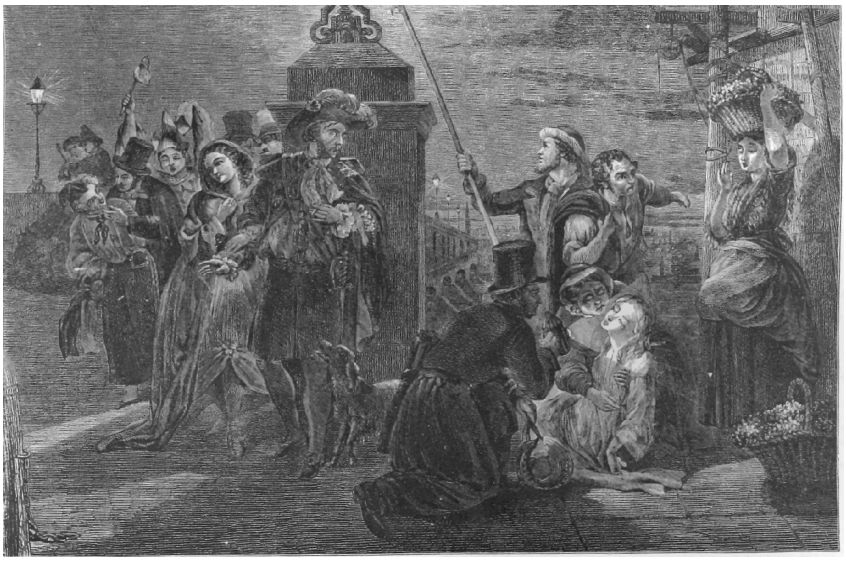
Woodman's Daughter to a joke. It is only the intervention of John Ruskin that saves its reputation. In defence of Millais and Hunt, the acclaimed Victorian art critic wrote to *The Times* stating that 'their fidelity to a certain order of truth…ought at once to have placed them above the level of mere contempt' (13 May 1851, p.8). The importance of reality over convention is foregrounded. Millais gains credit for radically explaining the history behind the sexual lapse rather than simply its effects.

Time and time again, the threat of the sexually impure female is negated through art. *The Woodman's Daughter* restores the tainted woman back to her original innocence to erase any hint of adult female lust. Indeed, it is the girl's masculine counterpart that is labelled with the sin of excessive sexuality. Although female deviancy is often associated with the biblical figure of Eve and her weakness in desiring the apple, Millais manipulates this stereotype to position the young boy in the role of tempter. His offering of fruit lures the girl away from her father as she holds out her hands to receive his gift with eagerness. Immediately the pictorial resources suggest that there is something unsettling in this friendship. An overwhelming use of the colour red points to the passion that will engulf the adult boy while his stiff posture, sullen face and scarlet-garb are at odds with the dissolving green tones of the forest. Additionally, the visual disparity between the children emphasises their incompatibility and the tragic consequences that will occur as a result of their class divide. The bird's feather at the boy's feet, coupled with the axe in Gerald's hand, hints towards the violence with which the story will end. The impact of male desire allows a threatening form of danger to prey upon the ignorant female.

The Victorian male artist, as if in a state of panic, inundates the spectator with references to the blameless nature of woman. Both the fallen female and the dangerously sexualized figure of the prostitute are exempt from any hint of deviancy.[3] Although in reality the prostitute's control over

[3] It is relevant to note that this discussion is of a specific period in Victorian art as late Victorian and *fin de Siècle* artists such as Aubrey Beardsley do not adhere to this view.

her own income and survival in the masculine public sphere rendered her relatively powerful, she is stripped of this independence and reconstructed as a fallen victim. The male artist merges such separate identities to produce a unified image of feminine suffering. An example of this is the wood engraving of Abraham Solomon's *Drowned! Drowned!* which explicitly labels the prostitute as simply the prey of masculine desire.



Solomon, A., 1862. *Drowned! Drowned!* wood engraving in *The Art Journal*, March 1862, p.73. (Reproduction by permission of Cardiff University's ASSL Library)

Like so many Pre-Raphaelite artists, Solomon drew upon Shakespeare as an acceptable source for his work as the title is taken from the death scene of Ophelia in *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1999, IV.vii. l.185). In choosing such sources this drowned prostitute is overtly linked to a Shakespearean heroine; indeed, the moral tone of Solomon's work is clear. Following the painting's first exhibit in 1860, the artist received mixed reviews. *The Illustrated London News* observed that it 'is "the old, old story" over again. A […] misguided girl has […] committed herself, her sins and her sorrows to the cold bosom of the Thames' (2 June 1860, p.544). Additionally, *The Athenaeum* found further fault in stating that 'haggard as the girl's face is, the remnants of beauty would have heightened the pathos of this mournful

subject' (12 May 1860, p.655). A sense of unease surrounds Solomon's representation of the drowned prostitute as her lack of ideal beauty offends the critic. It is not until 1862 that the moral message of this work is fully recognised. After reproducing the painting in the form of a wood engraving, *The Art Journal* declared that 'no more eloquent and impressive a sermon could be preached…even by a St. Paul' (March 1862, p.75). Although Solomon dismisses the high art ideal of woman as a timeless object of beauty, his ethical approach evokes sympathy for the prostitute. With this in mind it becomes clear that masculine anxieties surrounding deviant femininity are appeased as the suffering prostitute is pitied rather than feared.

What we witness is the problematic emergence of a darker side to the Victorian male, a powerfully darker side that allows unregulated desire to destroy female honour. *Drowned! Drowned!* portrays the upper class male as the villain of the narrative painting. The image depicts a group of masqueraders led by a man who freezes in horror upon recognising the drowned prostitute. Such elements of familiarity and panic, therefore, are clearly designed to signal his role as her seducer. Dressed in the costume of a seventeenth century noble, his true self is masked in this carnivalesque environment. A sense of danger simmers as the flirtatious party of masqueraders cannot be identified and categorised by their clothing alone. It is, however, the visual chaos of their tilting bodies that symbolises immorality. In contrast to the leaning postures of these revellers, the group gathered around the corpse stand upright and tall. Honest values of the orderly working class are forgrounded as their genuine concern clashes with the selfish dismay of the male seducer. Furthermore, Lynda Nead suggests that the prostitute's dead body is arranged to draw upon the form of the traditional 'pietà' (1988, p.183). This visual reference of morality is coupled with the policeman's bull's eye that illuminates the woman's face to construct an almost angelic image. Any reference to her sexual fall is erased

and replaced by male frivolity and desire. Although the prostitute has broken the law in committing suicide, any sense of criminality is transferred to her seducer. The male is presented as the real danger to feminine virtue.

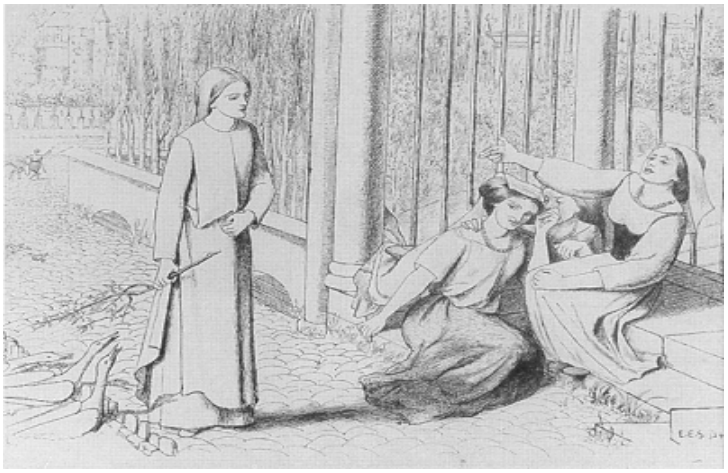
The nineteenth century observed a new enthusiasm for redefining the tainted woman. Solomon was not alone in exposing the injustice of punishing the fallen female regardless of whether she had lost her virginity through seduction or rape. Henry Mayhew's social investigations gave the prostitute an opportunity to be heard. An infamous street-walker reveals to Mayhew how she was 'drugged [...] and ruined, and for days I was inconsolable […] When I became quiet I received a visit from my seducer, in whom I had placed so much silly confidence' (Mayhew, 1968, IV p.240). The victim's destruction is sealed while her rapist is free from punishment; the woman is left powerless. Moreover, the bastardy clauses of the 1834 New Poor Law refused outdoor relief to unmarried mothers and, therefore, often forced the impoverished fallen woman into prostitution.

Such desperate circumstances were, however, recognised by a few influential people. As early as 1846 Dickens managed Urania Cottage, a refuge for fallen women or those in danger of a sexual lapse. Aided by the radical philanthropist Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts, he gave the fallen female an opportunity to learn skills to help them start a new life in the colonies. In discussing the tainted woman with Coutts, Dickens states that 'society has used her ill and turned away from her, and she cannot be expected to take much heed of its rights or wrongs […] she is degraded and fallen, but not lost' (1953, p.78). An image of naïvity transforms the sexualised woman into a passive victim of laissez-faire society. Consequently, she is removed from the public sphere of the streets and controlled by the male philanthropist.

Further rescue missions emerged following the controversial Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s. Designed to improve the sexual health of the British Armed forces, the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864,

1866 and 1869 stated that any woman thought to be a common prostitute and connected to a military base could be forced to undergo a medical examination and detained for up to three months in hospital (ed. Mitchell, 1988, p.859). Once more the hypocrisy of society and the legal system emerges as the powerless female is both punished and humiliated while the male is exempt from any such measures. Outraged by the hypocrisy of the Acts the purity movement evolved from rescue organisations, such as the 1858 Female Mission to the Fallen, to campaign for the same ethical standards for both sexes. In addition to art, therefore, moral reform cited the seduced woman as the victim of both carnal lust and the double standards of society. What is significant is that her dependence upon charity again categorises the prostitute as helpless. Indeed, whereas Victorian society advocated the need to cast aside a fallen woman, in reality their art and philanthropic movements undermine this ideology at every level. So called sexual and moral corruption is displaced to encourage sympathy rather than contempt.

The real complication of why women fell, however, arises from the depiction of feminine desire in art. Although the Victorian male artist strove to desexualise the fallen woman, attempts to restore the angel back into the home were often challenged. Taken from Robert Browning's poetic drama *Pippa Passes*, Elizabeth Siddall boldly compares the innocence of the milliner Pippa with the crude sexuality of the prostitute in her drawing *Pippa Passing Close to Loose Women*.



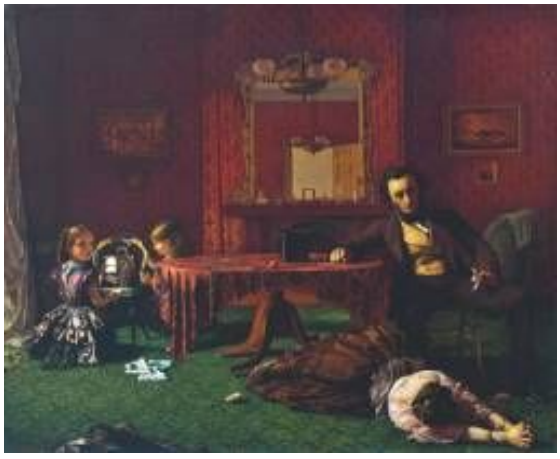
Siddall, E., 1841. *Pippa Passing Close to Loose Women*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum. (Reproduction by permission of Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

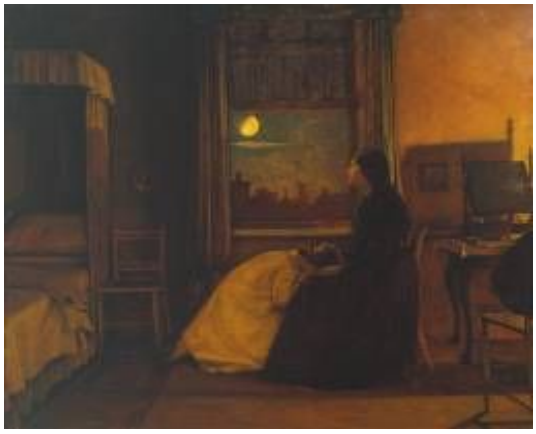
While male artists relentlessly portray the prostitute as suffering, Siddall emphasises her connection with social disorder. The flamboyant clothing and reclining bodies of the sexually loose women contrast with Pippa's upright posture, orderly appearance and downcast gaze to overtly categorise the silk milliner as pure and modest. In Siddall's drawing, however, the innocent and fallen are not differentiated across class, but within class; poverty is not offered as an excuse for prostitution. Although the working class Pippa is represented as destitute, the upholding of her virginity suggests that bodily lust led the loose women to fall. It is further significant that the artist modelled the face of Pippa upon her own features. The knowledge that Siddall was discovered working in a milliner's shop before being introduced into the Pre-Raphaelite circle, intimately connects the artist with her subject.[4] Although her subsequent position as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's mistress adds an element of sexuality to her biography, Siddall nevertheless seems to actively link herself with the virtuous Pippa. There is a sense that she uses art to distance herself from other Pre-Raphaelite models and mistresses such as the notorious Annie Miller. Even though

[4] The underpaid Victorian milliner was often associated with sporadic acts of prostitution. Mayhew states that the drudgery of the textile industry often forced women into street-walking as a means of escape and to supplement wages (Mayhew, 1968, IV p.217)

William Holman Hunt offered Miller a new existence away from the London slums, she refused his rescue attempt in favour of frivolity. What is important is that Siddall confronts the spectator with a more complex representation of the fallen woman, displaying traits of both sexual desire and moral weakness.

While premarital intercourse was condemned but often justified by the Victorian artist, female adultery was identified as the most unforgivable sexual sin. Indeed, according to numerous etiquette books that influenced domestic ideology the moral purity of the wife upheld the Victorian home as a sanctuary for the nuclear family. In his triptych entitled *Past and Present*, Augustus Leopold Egg tests the limits of propriety.





Egg, A. L., 1858. *Past and Present*. London: Tate Britain.
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Originally displayed with no title at the 1858 Royal Academy, Egg broke all rules to present the adulteress as the subject of high art. To help decipher the symbolism of his painting, the artist included an extract from a fictional diary in the exhibition catalogue:

> August 4th. Have just heard that B- has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was last seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been! (Catalogue description of *Past and Present,* 1858)

Such words allow for a single interpretation: unnatural female desire has destroyed the middle class home and split the family to cause suffering for all involved. It is significant that Egg's radical work received critical condemnation that possibly hindered its sale. *The Illustrated London News* declared that 'we are at a loss what to say about A. L Egg's three-part picture…except this, that we wish he had never painted it' (8 May 1858, p.470). Similarly, the disapproving critic for *The Athenaeum* stated, 'there must be a line drawn as to where the horrors that should not be painted for public and innocent sight begin, and […] Mr. Egg has put one foot at least beyond this line' (1 May 1858, p.566). In allowing the adulteress to exist through art, the critics fear that her deviancy will grow to corrupt the spectator. Masculine attempts to contain the sexualised female are defied as the fallen woman breaks free from her portrayal as sexless and weak.

The first scene in *Past and Present* is laden with emblems of feminine lust. A middle class interior containing fashionable furnishings, ornaments and two well-dressed children confirms that the mother did not stray through poverty or neglect. The spectator is, as such, presented with an ideal bourgeois family. An absence of any male seducer further implies that the wife willingly partook in an illicit affair. Time and time again, feminine weakness is represented by the archetypal fallen figure of Eve. In addition to the catalogue's allusion to the adulteress's 'fall', the rotten apple is

suggestive of the forbidden fruit and Eve's weakness in the face of temptation. The serpentine clasping of the wife's hands, combined with the picture of mankind's expulsion from Paradise placed above her miniature, portrays the female as destroying the Eden-like haven of the Victorian home. Her diagonal body dissects the painting to physically divide the family and point towards the mirror reflection of an open door. Indeed, her fate echoes that of Eve as she must fall from the security of the family and assume a new identity outside of the home. Moreover, a significant element of the narrative painting is Clarkson Stanfield's depiction of a shipwreck entitled *The Abandoned* that is placed directly over the husband's portrait. This reference to desertion overturns contemporary Victorian stereotypes of the female as the forsaken figure. By contrast, the male is positioned as the discarded object of adultery. Additionally, the artist seems to locate the blame for such turmoil with the woman's reading of immoral French literature. Julia Thomas further suggests that in this same scene a tumbling house of cards built upon the inadequate foundation of a Honoré de Balzac novel signifies that foreign decadence has penetrated English society at its roots (1999, pp.366-7). The delicate card-castle crumbles to emphasise how adultery destroys both the home and its inhabitants. Why the woman fell seems clear; her guilt is fixed as the narrative devices point towards unregulated carnal desire.

Egg uses adultery to defy the notion that women were devoid of sexual cravings. His visual representation of infidelity in *Past and Present* seems to relate to Henry Mayhew's social investigations into female deviancy:

> By ladies of intrigue we must understand married women who have connection with other men than their husbands…This sort of clandestine prostitution is not so common in England as in France. (Mayhew, 1968, p.258)

As a result of her extra-marital relationship and connection with France, in reading the Balzac novel, the unfaithful wife in Egg's triptych fits Mayhew's description of a lady of intrigue. Seeming to build upon Mayhew's connection between adultery and clandestine prostitution, the last picture in Egg's triptych depicts the fallen wife outside respectable society as her body litters the city streets. Huddled in a sewer below the Adelphi arches she clutches her illegitimate child while posters advertising Haymarket plays and excursions to Paris expose her immoral surroundings and sexual existence. Additionally, the Thames draws upon traditional representations of the drowned prostitute to signal the adulteress's inevitable fate.

A simultaneous moment of suffering, however, is presented as a fragment of cloud below the moon unites this picture with that of the now adult daughters in the triptych's middle painting. Although such imagery implies that a maternal bond cannot be broken by Victorian society, there is a menacing feeling that the girls are entwined with their mother's destiny. They display signs of carrying her sin as the barren interior contrasts with the opulence of the discovery scene while the mourning attire signals not only the death of their father, but their existence in a form of living-death outside decent society. Furthermore, this bond between mother and daughters relates to the nineteenth century ideas of William Acton who declared that adultery was hereditary. In his work *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, he states that 'it is better not to marry the daughter of a divorced woman…I believe that the sin of unfaithfulness is often inherited' (quoted in Nead, 1988, p.50). The adulteress is, therefore, presented as more dangerously deviant than the seduced woman. Her sin will not die with her as her licentiousness is believed to have been passed onto her daughters; they too are shunned by society. Although *Past and Present* displays hints of sympathy for the adulteress, Egg controversially refuses to present this type of fallen woman

as completely blameless and, more importantly, completely powerless to manage the consequences of her actions.

In a world where patriarchal society enveloped woman in her circumspect role as daughter, wife and mother, little space was allocated to the sexualised female. In contrast, the complex issue of the fallen woman and prostitute occupies much of the art, literature and social reform, constituting an alternative representation within the ideology. Time and time again, a woman's sexual lapse is blamed upon poverty or male seduction. The Pre-Raphaelite obsession with restoring the innocence of the fallen woman produced work such as *The Woodman's Daughter* by Millais. Contemporary anxieties surrounding 'The Great Social Evil', therefore, are negated as both the prostitute and fallen female lose all of their dangerous independence. Although artistic attempts at disempowering the woman were frequent, Siddall's *Pippa Passing Close to Loose Women* and Egg's *Past and Present* overtly challenge this ideal. The unsavoury topic of desire is foregrounded as the fallen female breaks free from her passive stereotype. Why the woman fell is rarely straightforward; her representation is often manipulated to appease and empower the male spectator.

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