Gender and Visual Relations in Victorian Art and Literature

Literature Review: Introduction (draft)

Broadly, this review is comprised of three sections, the first of which focuses on establishing the predominant depiction of women as objects of vision within nineteenth century works of art and literature. The prevalence of this depiction is emphasised with reference to a variety of artistic works, with images of chained naked women, for example, being provided by statues such as Powers’ *The Greek Slave* (1844) and Babb’s *The Victim* (1905), and paintings such as Millais’s *The Knight Errant* (1870) and depictions of Andromeda by (amongst others) Burne-Jones (1884-1885; 1885-1888), Doré (1869), Etty (c. 1835-40; 1840; c. 1840), Kennedy (1890), Leighton (1891) and Poynter (1869). Similarly, voyeuristic images of sleeping (or otherwise unaware) women displayed in a manner designed to appeal to either the spectator or the spectator and a male character(s) are featured in works such as Bocklin’s *Sleeping Diana Watched by Two Fauns* (1877) and *Sleeping Nymph and Fauns: Fauns Spying on a Sleeping Nymph* (n.d.), Leighton’s *Cymon and Iphigenia* (1884), Alma-Tadema’s *Tepidarium* (1881) and Etty’s *Candaules, King of Lydia, Shews his Wife by Stealth to Gyges, One of his Ministers, as She Goes to Bed* (1830). In addition, while this review’s focus is predominantly on issues relating to visual politics, it is also helpful to consider other prominent binaries so as to emphasise the way in which social distinctions can feed into one another and work in tandem to the point where they may be felt to be monolithic. The most blatant example of such dichotomous thinking within the Victorian era is the angel / whore binary, and this is demonstrated by numerous artworks: images of women as martyrs or angelic / ethereal figures include Delaroche’s *The Young Martyr* (1853; 1855), Waterhouse’s *The Missal* (1902), Bocklin’s *The Vestal Virgin* (1874) and *The Birth of Venus* (1868), and a host of paintings by Rossetti, such as *Silence* (1870), *Beata Beatrix* (1870) and *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-1879), while the linking of women with domesticity is highlighted in images such as Hicks’ *Woman’s Mission: Companion of Manhood* (1863) and Cope’s *Life Well Spent* (1862). Further to the theme of separate spheres, E.C. Barnes’s *The Seducer* (1860) serves a cautionary purpose, with images of women being taken captive or punished also featuring works such as Rossetti’s *Found* (1853-1882) and (in a more mythical setting) Draper’s *Sea Maiden* (1894). On the other side of the binary, meanwhile, is the frequent portrayal of female transgression in terms of scheming, dangerous females (typically based on myths and legends), with figures such as Vivien, Circe, Medea, Medusa and various sirens being depicted by a multitude of artists, including Burne-Jones, Waterhouse, Bocklin and von Stuck.

The depiction of women as objects of vision is also evident in literature: Haggard’s *She* is abundant in Petrarchan imagery (including the dead woman as object of beauty, the fragmentation of the female body and the likening of woman to a statue and sculpture) and depictions of voyeurism as male characters gaze upon the title character. However, it is in poetic works that the emphasis on the female as object is made most evident: Dante Gabriel Rossetti produced various poems on this theme, with *The House of Life* sonnet sequence offering several examples, such as ‘Beauty’s Pageant’ (xvii), ‘The Portrait’ (x) and ‘Genius in Beauty’ (xviii). ‘The Portrait’ also finds a counterpart in a longer poem that shares the