

## White Girls: Avant-Gardism and Advertising after 1860

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This paper explores a particular moment in the history of the uncertain divide between fine art and material culture by analyzing certain “women in white” of the early 1860s. I focus on Wilkie Collins’s sensation novel *The Woman in White*, serialized in *All the Year Round* in 1859–60 and appearing in book form in 1860; and James McNeill Whistler’s scandalous 1862 painting, *The White Girl*, which he retitled in 1867 *Symphony in White, No. 1*. I describe how the world of fine arts and that of sensational entertainment shared a similar fascination with the spectacularized, white, female body at this moment, suggesting that the two cultures were more intertwined in Victorian eyes than they are in the canons of today. By considering how aestheticism and sensation intersected in the 1860s, I revise our notions of both phenomena: Whistler’s avant-garde painting experiments expand outside the frame to partake of sensation’s consumer craze, while the wildly popular artworks—and female spectacles—that were deemed “sensational” are shown to have invited ambiguous reading practices and displayed a formal complexity usually only associated with high art.

Until very recently, Whistler and Collins would not have been discussed in the same scholarly forum, despite the evident links between artist and author. Whistler is known as an innovative painter whose experiments with color and tone, beginning in the 1860s, established him as a practitioner of “art for art’s sake,” and whose works are an important stepping stone to the high-art, modernist canon (see Dorment and

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ABSTRACT: James McNeill Whistler’s painting *The White Girl* (*Symphony in White, No. 1*) caused a scandal for depicting a woman dressed all in white, uncontained by any clear framing narrative. Though the painting is usually read into a history of modernism for its experimental play with tones of white, in fact the painting was linked by Victorian viewers to the mass-cultural phenomenon surrounding Wilkie Collins’s sensation novel *The Woman in White*. By examining the two works together, this article shows that the divide between the world of fine arts and that of sensational entertainment is perhaps more entrenched in our own canons than it was for Victorian spectators and consumers.



**Fig. 1.** James McNeill Whistler, *The White Girl (Symphony in White, No. 1)*, 1862, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Image © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Harris Whittemore Collection.

MacDonald 76-78; Weintraub 465-68). Under the radical aesthetic mantra, artworks were to have no didactic or useful message, but were to exist only as beautiful objects for their own sake. In *The White Girl*, a woman wearing a white muslin dress stands poised before a thickly draped white curtain (fig. 1). Playing with different shades and textures of white, the painting might be seen to perform what Nicholas Daly has called a “bravura minimalism” (2). White is the perfect color for modernist experimentation, signifying in and of itself the kind of aesthetic indeterminacy associated with modern art. Whistler’s painterly experiment might be placed in a modernist teleology of white abstraction that extends to Kazimir Malevich’s *Suprematist Composition: White on*

*White* (1918) and to the monochromatic white paintings by Robert Ryman in the 1960s. *The White Girl* was rejected by both the Royal Academy in London and the Salon in Paris; it showed to scandalous effect in alternative venues in both these cities, as viewers were shocked by the image's transgression of conventional visual codes. The unknown woman was uncontained by any explanatory framing narrative, appearing in a life-size portrait in a style deemed "sketchy" and unfinished. (In fact, the model was Jo Hiffennan, Whistler's mistress.) These rebellious elements have inscribed the painting into an originary story of modernism, echoing other such stories which often feature renegade artists gaining notoriety through unpopular visual experiments.

Wilkie Collins's novel, meanwhile, has only recently entered the canon of literary art, and its aesthetic status remains ambiguous. If *The Woman in White* is the most canonical sensation novel, that might not be saying much for a genre that has dwelled in the background of classic Victorian realism (Fantina and Harrison x-xi). Reviews in the 1860s often accused sensation fiction of promoting plot at the expense of character—an opinion still repeated by some contemporary scholars, and one that tends to frame the novel as more of a puzzle than a work of art (Brantlinger 12). Moreover, sensation's famously corporeal thrills would also seem to preclude entry into the refined world of high arts. D. A. Miller echoes Victorian critics when he suggests that sensation targets "the sympathetic nervous system," producing "adrenalin effects" that include "accelerated heart rate . . . , increased blood pressure, [and] the pallor resulting from vasoconstriction" (107; see also Mansel). The somatic connotations of sensation fiction align the genre with other kinds of lowbrow entertainment that targeted the senses, especially theatrical melodrama. Physical and sensory pleasure were influentially excluded from the realms of aesthetic judgment by Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of Judgment* declared that the most disinterested taste was a pure, intellectual appreciation of form rather than any immediate sensual response to an object. These histories of sensation's reception, both in the 1860s and especially today, would seem to place Whistler's high art painting in a very different realm than that of the popular novel and other sensational products.

In this paper, however, I see both works as functioning within the sensational moment, linked not by their corporeal effects but by their appearance within a mass-cultural craze packaged by both critics and consumers. That craze is evident in the commodities inspired by



**Fig. 2.** *The Woman in White* Waltz, by C. H. R. Marriott, lithograph cover of sheet music. London: Boosey & Sons Musical Library, [1861]. The British Library, London. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. h.842.a.(34).

*The Woman in White*, which included toiletries, bonnets, songs, even a quadrille (fig. 2). In fact, one strand of argument here will be to question whether the physiological effects of sensation can ever truly be

separated from their discursive and ideological constructions. (Here I am in disagreement with scholars like Nicholas Daly and Nicholas Dames, who ascribe to sensation a discernible biological effect in the receiver's body.) By emphasizing the constructed nature of the sensation phenomenon, I see works of what are now considered to be high art and mass culture as leveled within a plane of discourse: the painting functions as a part of material culture, and the novel as part of aesthetic culture. The culture wars of the 1860s served as a crucible for notions of high art, in part because art categories at the time were remarkably fluid. My analysis suggests that art culture itself was formed not only in the selective rooms of the Royal Academy, but also from the bottom up, as it were, both adapting and responding to melodramas, novels, and contemporary fashionable culture.

The avant-garde credentials of Whistler's *White Girl* were bolstered in 1862 when a reviewer in the *Athenaeum* attacked the painting for its lack of resemblance to Collins's *Woman in White* ("Fine-Art Gossip" 859). Whistler responded by firing off a letter to the *Athenaeum* declaring that he had no intention of illustrating Collins's novel, and indeed, had never read it: "My painting simply represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain" (5 July 1862). Here Whistler positions his work as an elite high art set in opposition to any sensational contexts. Yet most scholars have found it difficult to take Whistler at his word. The Berners Gallery, where the painting was shown, advertised the image under the title "The Woman in White," and, as Aileen Tsui argues in her important study of Whistler's titles, the artist evidently delighted in the publicity his painting was attracting with this alluring label. In an 1862 letter, Whistler boasts to George Lucas that the painting is "affixed all over town" and illustrates this fact with a gleeful sketch (fig. 3) of a sandwich-board man promoting "Whistler's Extraordinary picture the WOMAN IN WHITE" (26 June 1862; see also Tsui 452).

This lively sketch reveals one way that the painting was closer to the realms of Victorian mass culture than we might assume. Rejected from the Royal Academy, *The White Girl* was not stamped with the most respected seal of aesthetic approval at the time. It had to be exhibited and marketed separately, in a private gallery. And the advertising, or "puffery," promoting the show promised a spectacular vision of "the woman in white," the title of Collins's sensation novel. In fact, this advertising campaign was not unusual within the Victorian art world.

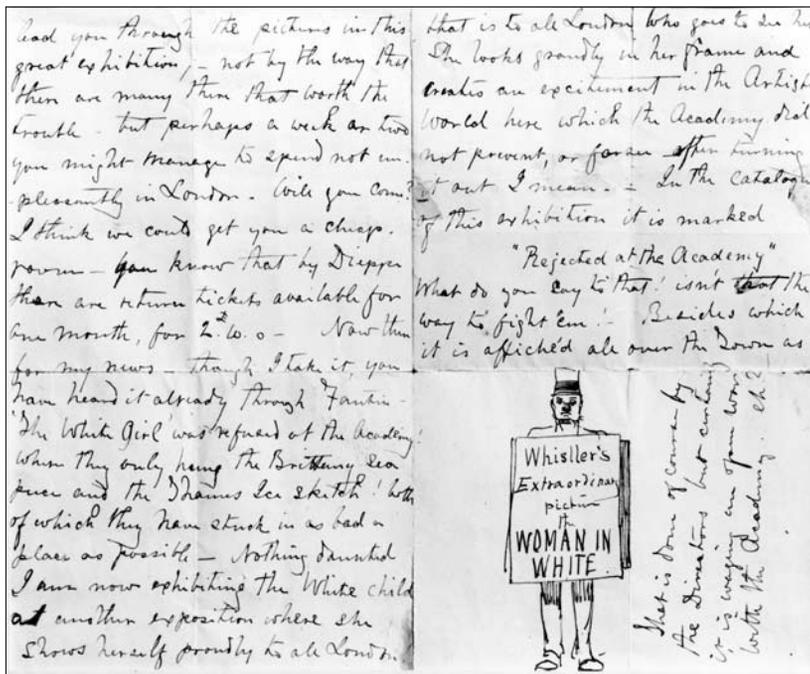


Fig. 3. James McNeill Whistler, detail of letter to George Lucas, 26 June 1862. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Gift of John F. Kraushaar.

As Richard T. Altick observes in *The Shows of London*, Victorian art displays participated in a broader exhibitionary culture that included mass entertainments like panoramas, waxworks, and freak shows (see especially 408-11). Since the later eighteenth century, entrepreneurial artists had been charging entry fees for the display of large-scale paintings illuminated by lighting techniques borrowed from the theater. A profit was to be made from the painting's display, even if the spectators had no intention to buy. In the summer of 1862, William Powell Frith's panoramic painting *The Railway Station* attracted more than 21,000 people in the seven weeks it was on display (Frith 334). A quick survey of journal advertisements in the *Athenaeum* in July 1862 (fig. 4) reveals the various exhibitionary contexts for *The White Girl*, which ranged from the Royal Academy show and Frith's panoramic scenes to the truly astonishing spectacle of a sideshow mummy, labeled in the advertisement as "Julia Pastrana Embalmed." I want to speak briefly now about Julia Pastrana, who stands alongside Whistler's white girl as another sensational public woman on view in the summer of 1862.

ROYAL ACADEMY of ARTS.—The EXHIBITION is NOW OPEN. In the DAY, from Eight A.M. to Seven P.M. Admission, 1s.; Catalogue, 1s.—In the EVENING, from Half-past Seven till Half-past Ten. Admission, 6d.; Catalogue, 6d.  
JOHN PRESCOTT KNIGHT, R.A., Sec.

THE NEW SOCIETY OF PAINTERS IN WATER COLOURS.—The TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION of this SOCIETY is NOW OPEN, at their Gallery, 53, Pall Mall (near St. James's Palace), from Nine till dusk.—Admission, 1s.; Catalogue, 6d.; Season Ticket, 5s. JAMES FAHEY, Secretary.

BRITISH INSTITUTION, Pall Mall.—The GALLERY, with a Collection of PICTURES by ANCIENT MASTERS and deceased BRITISH ARTISTS, is OPEN DAILY, from Ten to Six.—Admission, 1s.; Catalogue, 6d.  
GEORGE NICOL, Secretary.

FRENCH GALLERY, 120, Pall Mall.—The NINTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION of PICTURES, the contributions of Artists of the French and Flemish Schools, is NOW OPEN.—Admission, 1s., which will also admit to view Frith's celebrated Picture of the Derby Day; Catalogues, 6d. Mons. SURVILLE, Sec.

THE DERBY DAY, by W. P. FRITH, R.A., is NOW ON VIEW at the UPPER GALLERY, 120, Pall Mall.—Admission, 1s., which will also admit to the French Exhibition.

HOLMAN HUNT'S great Picture, THE FINDING OF THE SAVIOUR IN THE TEMPLE, commenced in Jerusalem in 1854, is NOW ON VIEW at the GERMAN GALLERY, 168, New Bond Street.—Admission, 1s.

GERMAN GALLERY, 168, New Bond Street.—The ROYAL FAMILY of FRANCE, Louis XVI. and Marie-Antoinette, in the PRISON of the TEMPLE, 1792, painted by E. M. WARD, R.A., is now ON VIEW. Admission free, on presentation of a private address-card.

FRITH'S celebrated Picture of THE RAILWAY STATION, NOW ON VIEW, daily, from Eleven to Six o'clock, at the Fine-Art Gallery, 7, Haymarket, next door to the Haymarket Theatre.—Admission, One Shilling.

MR. JOHN LEECH'S GALLERY of SKETCHES in OIL, from Subjects in 'Punch,' is open every day from Ten till Dusk, at the EGYPTIAN HALL, Piccadilly.—Admission, One Shilling.

NOTICE.—The GALLERY, 14, Berners Street, Oxford Street, OPEN DAILY, from Ten till Five, with nearly 200 Pictures by Frith, R.A., Rosa Bonheur, Millais, R.A., Phillip, R.A., T. S. Cooper, A.R.A., and the leading Artists of the day. Also, Whistler's extraordinary Picture, 'The Woman in White.' In progress, a large Picture for exhibition next year, 'Rotten Row in the Season,' with Portraits of the Royal Family, Aristocracy, Beauties and Celebrities of the time.  
FREDERICK BUCKSTONE, Secretary.

ROSA BONHEUR'S celebrated PICTURES, 'The Horse-Fair,' 'The Scottish Raid,' 'The Spanish Muleteers,' 'The Highland Shepherd,' 'Shetland Ponies,' and 'Skye Terrier,' NOW ON VIEW, at the Gallery, No. 5, Waterloo Place, Pall Mall.—Admission, 1s.

JULIA PASTRANA EMBALMED, Standing Erect, dressed as in life, is pronounced by the Medical Profession to be the greatest scientific curiosity ever exhibited in London.—Burlington Gallery, 191, Piccadilly. Open from Eleven to Nine. Admission, 1s.

Fig. 4. Advertisements, *Athenaeum* 5 July 1862: 24. Image courtesy of the Yale University Library.

Pastrana was a famous Victorian sideshow performer, a Mexican indigenous woman who astounded audiences by combining a deformed, hirsute body with all the graceful accomplishments of a Victorian lady. At least one scholar has suggested that her appearance in London in 1857 inspired the character of Marian Halcombe, the mustachioed heroine of Collins's *Woman in White* (Stern 226-27). After Pastrana's death, her



**Fig. 5.** “Miss Julia Pastrana, the Embalmed Nondescript,” *Penny Illustrated Paper* 21 (1 Mar. 1862): 136. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; John Johnson Collection; Human Freaks 3(7).

embalmed corpse was displayed in a glass case in London during the summer of 1862. That this grotesque spectacle was advertised alongside art shows at highbrow galleries—and indeed, appeared on view at the Burlington Gallery in Piccadilly, just a few streets away from London’s most fashionable art venues—captures the mixed, heterogeneous nature of the city’s culture of display. An image of Pastrana’s mummy in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* illustrates the ways that this grisly scene was made respectable for middle-class viewers (fig. 5). The picture also reveals some of the surprising ways that Pastrana’s exhibition defied the usual Victorian

taxonomies of class, gender, and race, complicating the expected divide between this freakish entertainment and the sights of the art world. Though the spectacle of the deformed woman's corpse would seem most appropriate for a circus tent, Pastrana is shown in a museum setting being perused by a respectable bourgeois couple. Her body doesn't fit neatly into a single gender, combining a hairy face and masculine features with an hourglass waist and dainty feet. And the foreignness of her dark skin is mitigated by a white dress and white stockings, lightening her figure.<sup>1</sup> These confusions are amplified by the couple spectating in the background, whose figures visually echo the spectacle they consume—the bearded man matches the bearded lady, and even his posture mirrors that of the mummy. I'm going to address later the question of Pastrana as a "white girl"; but in the meantime, I would suggest that the artful details in the *Penny Paper's* image lend elements of formal complexity to the spectacle, bringing the scene of sensational female exhibition closer to the realms of art exhibition than we might have expected.

The indeterminacies surrounding Pastrana's display, as captured in the *Penny Paper* illustration, have their match in the confusing referentiality of Whistler's *The White Girl*, which draws upon melodramatic conventions while also confounding them. A girl dressed in innocent white stands upon a wolf-skin rug, her vulnerability heightened by the gaping, toothy jaws beneath her feet. Critics observed that she held a broken flower or lily, a rebus for the defloration that haunts the terms of the image. Yet the apparent legibility of the girl's victimhood is confused by her untamed red hair, which connoted the avant-garde Pre-Raphaelite women of Rossetti, and also hinted at an innate sensual nature, a lustfulness that might have compelled her to an impulse now repented. The story of a girl following her own lascivious whim into fallenness, lured on by an unscrupulous upper-class gentleman, was, as Walter Hartright puts it in *The Woman in White*, "common, [all] too common" (419). A reviewer in the *National Magazine* alludes to the painting's implicit sexual narrative when he asks why the Berners Gallery "should have chosen to make itself famous by the extraordinary advertisement of the only really repelling subject in [the collection]" ("Monthly Mirror" 143). The white girl's sexual sin would seem to be confirmed by the very advertising campaign that markets her. The painting's aura of melodrama and crass advertisement coincided with its white-on-white avant-gardism, thus offering, like Pastrana's image, a blurring of elements from both high and low culture.

In the longer version of this paper, I also consider a third female sensation in the public eye in the early 1860s, Catherine Walters, a.k.a. "Skittles," the notorious and successful courtesan who drew great crowds of admirers as she rode in Hyde Park during the season (see Blyth).<sup>2</sup> Walters caused a scandal at the Royal Academy in 1861 when she modeled for a painting by Edwin Landseer, *The Shrew Tamed* (now lost), in which a young woman reclined beside a calmed thoroughbred horse. In Lynda Nead's account, reviewers were incensed by the painting's bold display of female sexual dominance. Aggrieved mothers wrote to *The Times* to complain that a prostitute was sharing Academy wall-space with portraits of their more respectable daughters—the "pretty advertisements of our pretty, chaste wares" were being displaced by "A Pretty Horsebreaker" (qtd. in Nead 61).<sup>3</sup> It seems ironic that mothers would cry foul of Walters while invoking the Royal Academy as little more than an advertising billboard for chaste girls on the marriage market. That all of these women, on view in both art and life, were received as sensations suggests an overlap between the Victorian worlds of art and femininity: both realms condemned theatricality, commercialism, and sensuality while depending upon all of these things to market their respective commodities, whether paintings or brides.

Sensation thus emerged as a problem of category containment, a class confusion surrounding objects and persons competing in the cultural market. In all of these cases, whether of the ladylike "bear woman" or fashionable prostitute, surface appearances jarred with internal truths. Questions of aesthetic evaluation had their analog in the questionable propriety of public women, which perhaps explains why art controversy and female sexuality came together in the sensation surrounding certain women on view in the early 1860s. Not surprisingly, both Pastrana and Walters recur in reviews of sensation novels in the early 1860s, where critics often ranted against modern life as exemplified by terrible trends in both mass entertainment and in the behavior of women.<sup>4</sup> As one reviewer complains about Skittles and sensation novels in 1863: "It is an unsatisfactory sign of the time when the photograph of an impudent courtesan [sic] is to be found among those of statesmen and bishops, and sells better than any of them; . . . [and] when a novelist in search of a sensation finds what he needs in this direction" ("Modern Novel" 439). For this critic, the sensation moment is defined by a disconcerting mixture of high and

low culture, in which a prostitute outdoes the politicians through her superior marketing skills.

Collins's novel also served, like Whistler's *White Girl*, as a controversial site for debating what constituted high art as opposed to mere sensual entertainment.<sup>5</sup> Reviewers struggled to reconcile the novel's more lurid elements with its inventive and tightly crafted plot structure. The *Saturday Review* allowed that Collins was "a very ingenious constructor; but ingenious construction is not high art, just as cabinet-making and joining is not high art" (Page 83-84). Fine literature could only find its analog in sublime works of painting or sculpture, as opposed to mere artisanal production. Two weeks later, the *Spectator* published a rejoinder defending the novel's aesthetic worth: "Is a landscape-painter to be condemned as incapable of high art because the figures in his picture are not . . . done after the manner of Raphael or Michael Angelo? . . . Or is there, in fine, only one style of work worthy of high esteem in any given brand of art, whether painting, poetry, or literary fiction?" (Page 94). Collins's *Woman in White* provoked critics to question the grounds for aesthetic distinctions, even while moving to create a new canon using the language of the old. Paintings stood at the most favorable end of the aesthetic spectrum, while comparisons to melodramatic theater signaled a novel's failure. (Thus one reviewer accuses *The Woman in White* of creating "a world as mythical as that portrayed on the boards of a penny theatre" [Page 108].) Commentary on the novel ranged over the whole spectrum of the Victorian representational world. Mrs. Oliphant's review describes "the rise of a Sensation School of art" visible in novels, art, and theater—a dangerous development in all of these media, in her opinion (568). Critics constructed the sensation phenomenon as a multimedia effect that spanned many realms of aesthetic consumption, high and low.

That ambiguity (or multiplicity) of effect is also evident in *The Woman in White* itself. I want to turn now to consider how Collins's novel, like Whistler's painting, combines sensations both exhibitionary and aesthetic in ways that destabilize the boundaries between both categories. We are introduced from the first to the novel's exhibitionary mindset when Walter Hartright meets the quaint Italian professor Pesca and describes him as "the smallest human being I ever saw, out of a show-room" (3). Walter is familiar with all the entertainments the city of London has to offer, including human freak shows. The novel fittingly takes place between the years 1849 and 1851, coinci-

dent with the massive spectacle of the Great Exhibition; and it closes in the Paris morgue, where Walter rubs elbows with a “French mob” to view the sensational sight of Count Fosco’s corpse, a common, if gruesome, touristic pastime for both Parisians and British visitors (561).

The novel’s most famous sensational sights, of course, are of its women in white—scenes which I interpret less for their nervous impact upon perceiving bodies than for their creation of sensation as spectacle, beheld by both narrator and reader: “There, in the middle of the broad bright high-road—there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven—stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments, her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her” (14). The sudden appearance of the ghostly figure is theatrical but also pictorial, a moment of splendid visual pause, almost a *tableau vivant*, as the whiteness of the woman’s clothes is set off against the dark cloud of London. The mysterious woman here offers a similar ambiguous indeterminacy to that of Whistler’s *White Girl*; her manner is “not exactly . . . [that] of a lady,” yet also not that of “a woman in the humblest rank of life”; her “white garments” are respectable enough, yet “not composed of very delicate or very expensive materials” (14). If white clothes were associated with domesticity and homely interiors, there is something extremely disquieting and even prurient in a woman in white appearing outside, at night, on a public road to London.

This initial encounter is the first in a series of striking and inexplicable pictorial tableaux that are theatrical but not quite melodramatic. These scenes are exhibitionary, but also exceed mere mass-cultural shock value. Indeed, they are notable for their static, pedestaled nature, almost as though seen through a frame. When Walter realizes that Laura Fairlie is the spitting image of his mysterious stranger loosed from the asylum, the realization comes in the form of another picture, as Laura stands poised on the evening terrace: “There stood Miss Fairlie, a white figure, alone in the moonlight; in her attitude, in the turn of her head, in her complexion, in the shape of her face, the living image, at that distance and under those circumstances, of the woman in white!” (50). The sense of sculptural pause is heightened by the dramatic white spotlight of the moon, setting Laura off as a “living image” against the dark evening. The novel is filled with such scenes of dramatic visual iconicity, creating miniature sensations at each moment.

This recurring pictorialism ultimately serves to create a kind of formalism within the novel, aligning it with the artistic methods of aestheticism. The relentless emphasis on white objects—a gown, a face, a road, a veil, a marble cross—generates an overarching symbolic web of whiteness uniting different moments in the narrative. If anything, this novel might claim, as much as a Whistler painting, to be a “symphony in white.” White objects are offered in pictorial tableaux, doubly framed by both the narrator’s perceiving eye and the architecture of scenery. This dominant pictorialism emerges, in part, because the novel is narrated in a state of retrospection. Walter Hartright, whose account takes up the bulk of the novel, repeatedly refers to his story as a kind of “drawing” or “tracing”—appropriate for a man whose occupation is that of a drawing-master. Introducing Laura to the reader, he wonders, “How can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations, and from all that has happened in the later time? How can I see her again as she looked when my eyes first rested on her?” (39). Walter expresses self-consciousness about the temporal distortions and flaws in his account by framing visual moments in the past. He thus becomes a spectator in the gallery of his own memory, moving through a series of haunting and enigmatic pictures whose meaning will only become apparent later in the story. If aestheticism, as captured in Whistler’s *White Girl*, involved the defamiliarization of a common subject (the fallen woman) by the striking layers of textured whiteness, Collins’s novel similarly creates layers of whiteness in character memories that self-reflexively mirror the novel’s own patchwork narrative means.

It might seem counterintuitive to align the pictorialism of *The Woman in White* with the kind of avant-garde indeterminacy found in Whistler’s *White Girl*. The novel’s framing discourse is one of legality, proof, witnessing, and irrefutable testimony, a positivist thrust affirmed with the revelation of secrets and tidy moves toward closure. Yet *The Woman in White* is also notable for a counter-discourse of uncertainty, loss, and gaps in representation, as seen in the extreme self-consciousness of Walter’s narration: “I trace these lines, self-distrustfully, with the shadows of after-events darkening the very paper I write on” (16). Walter’s white page is yet another version of the disturbing blankness erupting into the novel, describing not merely a problem in representation but also one of identity, as the women in white become interchangeable: Laura becomes Anne, and can’t even remember her former self. It seems a false dichotomy to separate the novel’s sensational pictorialism from what I am describing

as its submerged, avant-garde sensibility. It does feel strange to put these two things together because avant-garde qualities like ambiguity and self-consciousness about representation are supposed to be difficult to discern, as opposed to the easily consumed eye-candy of popular culture. Yet, as I think the examples of Julia Pastrana and Catherine Walters suggest, icons of popular culture might also offer a difficulty in interpretation, and even thematize for Victorian critics the problematic distinctions of surface appearance versus authentic self.

A final concluding detail: I did promise to address the fact that Pastrana was not a “white girl,” unlike the other female figures mentioned here. I think the contiguity of discourse linking her to other public women in 1862 changes our understanding of what whiteness itself means in the famous women on view at this moment. Unlike the whiteness of neoclassical sculpture—disembodied, pure—sensational whiteness is embodied, textured, layered, consumable, even penetrable. The impasto, thickly layered pigment of Whistler’s *White Girl* suggests exactly this possibility. Shades of off-white defined materialized female bodies for audience consumption, even while challenging the associations of whiteness with purity, domesticity, and propriety.

In the end, if Whistler’s visual methods worked to foreground the tones and textures of his paintings, they also invited a sensuous engagement with the female body in a manner quite compatible with the thrills of sensation—suggesting that the popular media culture of the early 1860s might have provided an unexpected source for the later, more exquisite, sensations of the Aesthetic movement to come.

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## NOTES

I am grateful to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University for supporting this research.

<sup>1</sup>The *Penny Illustrated Paper* copies its image from a photograph of Pastrana’s mummy in which her dress is dark and her legs bare. The print transforms the photograph by representing her in a white dress and white stockings. The photograph is reproduced in Bondeson 231.

<sup>2</sup>When the Berners Gallery, advertising Whistler’s “Woman in White” in journals like the *Athenaeum*, also promises a painting depicting “Rotten Row in the Season,” we can assume that Walters was a prominent figure (Advertisement).

<sup>3</sup>Robin Spencer argues that Whistler’s *White Girl* is a “parody” of Landseer’s painting, with the woman’s feet set defiantly upon the wolf-skin rug (310).

<sup>4</sup>A review of *Lady Audley's Secret* in the *Spectator* in 1862 compares Lady Audley to "a monstrosity,—a moral Julia Pastrana—a *lusus naturae*" (1196).

<sup>5</sup>That Collins did not perceive his own novels to be sheerly mass-cultural objects is evident in his essay "The Unknown Public" (1858), where he ridicules the penny-magazines consumed by millions of working-class readers.

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