

The Art of Getting Better:

Representing Convalescence in Nineteenth-Century Painting



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‘The image of the perfect lady, in time, became the image of...the female invalid.’¹

Introduction

A cult of invalidism had run through the veins of a society that had seen dramatic changes over the course of a century. My curiosity for this subject was first awakened when I discovered the *Invalid's Magazine Album*.² It was begun by middle-class children in Hampstead³ who wanted to create a community of invalids through personally contributing and circulating this journal to children as far afield as Cornwall. One illustration, of a young girl being visited in her sick-bed, in particular stood out [Fig.1].



Invalid's Magazine Album (LMA/4292/01/001)

[Fig.1]

¹ Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (eds.) 'The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as Invalid', in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp.26-57 (p.26).

² LMA/4292, London Metropolitan Archives.

³ Material surviving from 1903 – 1914.

It has the caption: "Una was put in a great four-posted bed and received more affection than anyone."⁴ Using the term *affection* suggests the patient is indulgent in her sickness. This is something which has been associated with the middle-classes who saw it as a privilege to have their needs attended to. Harriet Martineau's *Life in the Sick Room* written in 1844 set precedence for identification with the invalid figure. In her writing she speaks of the sick-room as

a sanctuary of confidence...We may be excluded from much observation of the outer life of men; but of the inner life, which originates and interprets the outer, it is scarcely possible that in any other circumstances we could have known so much.⁵

The need for space where one can escape and have time to reflect on the world that men are changing, whilst women attend to the psychological development of the home, was a desperate and real need. Further evidence of this is to be found in *The Invalid's Own Book by a Fellow Sufferer* (1852). This booklet was written by someone referred to as Lady Cust who states the purpose of her work in the preface: 'The compilation of this little work originated in the attempt to cheer and profitably employ some of the solitary hours of one who for many months has been confined to the bed of affliction.'⁶ It might be said that the creation of a community of sufferers is a reaction to the increasing alienation that existed in an industrial society.

⁴ LMA/4292/01/001

⁵ Harriet Martineau, 'Some Gains and Sweets of Invalidism', in *Life in the Sick-Room* (ed.) by Maria H.Frawley (Canada: Broadview Press, 2003), pp.147-160 (p.154).

⁶ Lady Cust, *Invalids Own Book*, 2nd edn (London: Aylott & Jones, 1852), Preface, Brit.Lib. 4407.a.53.

Painting Convalescence

The illustration in [Fig.1], lead to an interest in the visual representation of invalids. The term invalid comes from the Latin *invalid-us* meaning not strong, infirm, weak, and inadequate.⁷ I performed searches on the catalogue of the Bridgeman Art Library and began to discover the term 'convalescent' attached to paintings of invalid women. I found it interesting that these women were framed as delicate and in need of rest and recuperation, as if they were inherently sick.

I would like to examine paintings of middle-class convalescence as depicted by male artists in the mid-Victorian period. My theory is that modernity had an immense impact on the way that women viewed themselves. I will argue that some respite was taken in a period of convalescence and this was in fact an important coping mechanism, which was an active and not readily passive decision. Staying put, keeping still, and reclaiming a time of one's own in the space of the sick room, may have been a silent protest to all that was constantly moving in the outside world.

My work will add to existing scholarship on representing invalidism by undertaking a specifically visual study of the convalescent figure, as opposed to the largely literary approach previously undertaken by Miriam Baillin, Maria Frawley and Diane Herndl-Price. The aim of this dissertation will be to explore evidence to support a case for the category of 'convalescence' to be placed in the Art Historical Canon.

In Chapter 1, I will examine the representation of femininity as a product of modernity by focussing on the work of James Tissot. Chapter 2 investigates the seaside as a fashionable place to convalesce and a means of escape from the city by using examples from a variety of artists. Chapter 3 looks at convalescence in childhood and in particular the forming of character in middle-class girls. Here I have chosen to consider works by John Everett Millais and Frank Holl.

⁷ James A.H. Murray, *New English Dictionary on historical principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

Existing Criticism

The direction I have chosen to take is the path to wellness and not one that focuses on illness, as this has been covered in the work of Sander Gilman, Elaine Showalter and Roy Porter. Much attention has been given to representations of madness and illness by Gilman in, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS*, for example. Gilman has discussed the employment of the stereotype when constructing the social identity of illness. Labelling women as suffering from a hysterical condition is, to put it simply, a method of control. Hysteria could be said to be an analogy for the inertness manifested in the lack of power the middle-class woman had outside the home. Within the parameters of my thesis it will often not be necessary to decide whether a subject is suffering from a particular illness. How it is represented and what this says of the society that produced it is my concern here. This is best understood in the following terms: 'What the cause of that "illness" is remains unspecified. It may be somatic or psychosomatic or, as is usually the case, a complex mixture of physical and psychic causes and/or symptoms.'⁸

Gilman says, rather interestingly, of images of illness: '...why does Western culture have the need to create categories that control them?'⁹ Women were being controlled on the canvas through perpetuating the image of the delicate female. My interest is in the creation of a category for the convalescent figure because an optimistic representation of the necessity of convalescence has been neglected. Susan Casteras has outlined the following genres that represent women in nineteenth-century art: Victorian Girlhood, Middle-Class Heroine, Fashionable Woman, Sister of Charity, Wayward and Fallen Woman, New Woman, Femme Fatale, to name some examples.¹⁰ Sickly women might be apparent in all of these categories as a method of patriarchal constraint and desire.

⁸ Sander L. Gilman, 'How and Why do Historians of Medicine Use or Ignore Images in Writing their Histories?', in *Health and Illness: Images of Difference* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1995), pp.9-32 (p.12).

⁹ Gilman, *Health and Illness*, p.20.

¹⁰ Susan P. Casteras, *The substance or the shadow: images of Victorian womanhood* (New Haven; Yale Center for British Art, 1982).

Woman's eroticized image is frequently laid bare. They are painfully beautiful and will suffer for their sin or succumb to a maddening self-sacrifice, such as in Millais's *Ophelia* (1851) for example.

Bram Dijkstra writes about *The Cult of Invalidism* in which he believes the misogyny of depicting the invalid remains hidden: 'Many late nineteenth-century women felt themselves being strangled, felt as if they were losing their minds, caught in the patterns of a society which had come to see even expressions of insanity as representative of feminine devotion to the male.'¹¹ I have kept this statement in mind when looking at the examples I have chosen. Even though they are not represented to the extreme of self-sacrifice, we will observe milder evidence of devices employed to firmly put woman in her place on the canvas.

The method of Art History

In order to help classify the convalescent as a category I want to answer the following questions: Can we group the paintings of convalescents in to early, mid and late Victorian? Are these works more a product of modernity? Is illness romanticized in the representation of the middle-classes? The majority of examples I have found are from the 1870s, with earlier depictions being more refined and later depictions in an emergent state of crisis. It is this middle-ground that I seek to analyse.

Lisa Tickner acknowledges the problems faced by the historian of art:

The historian's task is to comprehend the work in the circumstances of its original production, but this may ultimately prove impossible. First, because social 'context' is limitless...Second, because images are not words: they are embedded in discourse, they are not anti-words, but they

¹¹ Bram Dijkstra, 'The Cult of Invalidism; Ophelia and Folly; Dead Ladies and the Fetish of Sleep', in *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-si-cle Culture* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1986), pp25-63 (p.37).

cannot be translated into language without residue or loss. How to talk about art poses a particular challenge...¹²

It is therefore difficult not to be subjective when analysing a painting as the signifiers are not words but symbols. Each point of reference will inevitably mean different things to different people. Should we find and explain the universal meaning that speaks to its audience? Wolfgang Iser has said of interpretation that 'there is no common code – at best one could say that a common code may arise in the course of the process.'¹³ So here we start with nothing and can only unpack the meaning of the abstract symbolic order, which may indeed start with a personal frame of reference. In 1876, J.Sully describes how art was to be understood as a social process and must therefore contain traits of its collective audience:

Now psychological inquiry...tells us that art is essentially the production of a social and not a personal gratification, that it can only appeal to emotions which are common to society and which moreover express themselves in mass...in a public and sympathetic form.¹⁴

In this case, I hope to move towards an understanding of the image as contextual background to the period.

Putting in Context: The impact of modernity on the middle-classes

During the 1870s, modernity made a partner of the Impressionist style in Paris. Artists such as Degas and Monet demonstrated the immediacy of this artistic movement by working *en plein air*. They captured the pace of life in the shimmering light that fell on the subjects of the Parisian Boulevard

¹² Lisa Tickner, 'Afterword: Modernism and Modernity', in *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British art in the early twentieth century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp.184-213 (p.210).

¹³ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Rudiments of a theory of Aesthetic Response', in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (John Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp.20-50, (p.21).

¹⁴ James Sully, 'Art and Psychology', in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology & Philosophy* (Jan 1876), pp.467-478, (p.473), British Library: PP 1247.

cafés. The depiction of the contemporary scene is important to artists working during this period, which also translated to London. People wanted to understand the changing world around them and demanded an alternative to the rather staid history paintings. Lisa Tickner has said of modernity that there was a '...comprehension of modern life as fluid, energetic and chaotic rather than ordered and patterned...the negative side to this was exhaustion, alienation and ennui.'¹⁵ I will show that the reaction to the chaotic is apparent in the examples I have selected, whether it is the stillness of being in the fatigued body or in actively seeking out a remedial approach by the seaside. Convalescence and its air of timelessness worked in opposition to the industrial world.

Anson Rabinbach's study of fatigue and modernity helps to explain our relationship with these terms when applied to the nineteenth century: 'Fatigue was also a metaphor for the modern form of psychological suffering, for inertia, loss of will, and depletion of energy.' The term neurasthenia emerged in the 1860s to describe nervous exhaustion from the brain and spinal cord.¹⁶ The inert middle-class woman became sick of appearances and a retreat in to convalescence may have been a well-deserved rest. The creation of the middle-class dynamic left a section of society caught between being better off and still aspiring to be a member of the upper-classes. To be frail and dependent was viewed as a woman's right, which stemmed from the well established relationship between idleness and the aristocracy. There was a need to create a distinction between the middle and working classes:

While there are many reasons to associate a Victorian culture of invalidism with the middle classes, the preeminent one is that the figure of the invalid, so often imaged as incapable of work or as debilitated by work, raised the specter of idleness. Whether associated with working-class malingerers or with the dissipations and ennui of the leisured (and

¹⁵Tickner, p.191.

¹⁶ Anson Rabinbach, 'Mental Fatigue, Neurasthenia, and Civilization', in *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (California:University of California Press, 1992), pp.146-178 (p.153).

therefore “idle”) classes, idleness threatened the respectability of the middle class.¹⁷

It is important to remember this when looking at the paintings of convalescents as they were specifically aimed at the middle-class market. The attainment of wealth was displayed through one’s possessions in a growing consumerist society. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have remarked: ‘there were tensions between this culture and the aristocratic leadership which stressed lavish expenditure on clothes, food, furnishings, equipages and entertainments, part of the traditional trappings of leadership.’¹⁸ The middle-classes did not want to be seen as idle but as having qualities of refinement. To be seen to be languishing a little reflected a class who were actively part of the creation of the modern environment.¹⁹ Medical opinion in the eighteenth century distinguished between the classes and resonated with the next generation: ‘Physicians confirmed the dangers of inactivity, noting that hysteria, like melancholia in men, rarely occurred in lower-class, working women.’²⁰

The middle-class invalid woman was positioned as both absent and present in society. There was a definite element of being seen to be delicate for the appearances of the providing fathers or husbands. The withdrawal of these women from society is equally significant in their struggle to have an independent voice and so they retire to the sick room. There is also the very real need for a period of convalescence in an era without the aid of drugs and the assistance of doctors was an expensive alternative. Perhaps the paintings helped to console the individual and provide a hopeful meditation towards recovery from patriarchal oppression.

¹⁷ Maria Frawley, ‘Invalids and Authority in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, in *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp.11-63 (p.43).

¹⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, ‘“My own fireside”: the creation of the middle-class home’, in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class 1780 – 1850*, 4th edn. (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.357-396 (p.360).

¹⁹ The first connection of fatigue and overwork appears in medical literature of the late 1870s. Mentioned in Rabinbach, p.38.

²⁰Laurinda S. Dixon, ‘Of Vapors and Vanity: The Swinging Eighteenth Century’, in *In Sickness and in Health: Disease as Metaphor in Art and Popular Wisdom* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004) pp.62-81 (p.66).

Chapter 1

James Tissot and Femininity in the Private Sphere

'...artists painted sick women, fragile and feverish, in the last stages of consumption or some other wasting disease.'²¹

'Although there is no denying that his preoccupation with convalescence is primarily a reflection of his love for Mrs. Newton, the appearance of this theme in his work may also indicate the influence of a general trend.'²²

The focus of this chapter will be on the subject of convalescence in the domestic arena as depicted by James Tissot (1836 – 1902). It was during his time in London (1871 – 1882) that he became interested in this theme. My aim is to discover the environment that provoked this fascination in convalescent women at this key point in the century.

Why Convalescence?

In 1876, Tissot's *A Convalescent* [Fig.8] appeared at the Royal Academy exhibition. In France, Tissot's style had evolved from historical subject matter to a growing interest in capturing the essence of modernity in society portraits. Charles Baudelaire had encouraged artists to study contemporary subjects in order to connect with modern life: 'Every old master has had his own modernity; the great majority of fine portraits that have come down to us from former generations are clothes in the costume of their own period.'²³ John Ruskin referred to Tissot's portrayal of the fashionable as capturing 'vulgar society'²⁴ thus referring to those with aspirations beyond their class. The fashionably dressed woman that appears in the majority of Tissot's 'convalescents' is Kathleen

²¹Stephanie Golden, 'A Good Woman Is a Sacrificing One', in *Slaying the Mermaid: Women and the Culture of Sacrifice* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998) pp.80-101, (p.94).

²² Nancy Minty, *Victorian Cult of Beauty* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989), p12.

²³ Vanessa R.Schwartz & Jeannene M.Przyblyski (eds) 'Charles Baudelaire the painter of modern life (1863)', in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), pp.36-42 (p.40).

²⁴ Michael Wentworth, 'James Tissot', in *James Tissot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.1-7 (p.2).

Newton. Kathleen was a divorcée who became Tissot's lover and tragically committed suicide at the age of 28 after enduring tuberculosis. However, to contemporary audiences she was just an artist's model adopting her role as sickly maiden. Tissot's relationship with Kathleen Newton would inevitably influence his work, as her illness gradually took the life from her, he sought to immortalise her on the canvas.

The Imperial Dictionary of 1865 defines convalescent as, 'one who has recovered his health after sickness.'²⁵ This notion of recovery gives a sense of hope in paintings on convalescence. In my research it has become apparent that there are surprisingly few men depicted as convalescents, unless they are elderly or have returned from war. This closely relates to a definition of 'invalid' in association with disabled military men recorded in 1704.²⁶ An early example of this is William Mulready's, *The Convalescent from Waterloo* (1822), which I will discuss in Chapter 2.

Masculine Convalescence

In *The Warrior's Daughter or A Convalescent* (1878) [Fig.2] we witness an interesting juxtaposition. In the title there is reference to an old war veteran²⁷ who has struggled for his country, earning his right to be pushed in his grand Bath chair by an attendant. The *Athenaeum* referred to the warrior as 'a battered old officer.'²⁸ The background is Cumberland Terrace which is the grandest of the terraces on the edge of Regents Park. It is significant of Imperial rule with the central pediment, not seen in this painting, representing Britannia and the 'various arts, sciences, trades, etc., that mark her empire.'²⁹ The gentleman's top hat signifies his status as middle-class, yet the subject here is his daughter who gazes out with a pale frailty to one who might rescue her. John Laver has referred to

²⁵ John Ogilvie's *Imperial Dictionary* (London: Blackie & Son, 1865).

²⁶ www.oxfordreference.com [accessed 05 May 2010].

²⁷ Tissot fought in the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71).

²⁸ **Krystyne Matyjaskiewicz (ed.), James Tissot** (Oxford: Phaidon and Barbican Gallery, 1984), p.119.

²⁹ *The London Encyclopaedia*, 3rd edn. (eds.) Hibbert, Weinreb, & Keay, (London: Macmillan London Ltd, 2008), p.227.

the girl as being rather immature and almost frightened.³⁰ This contrasted with the wintery silhouette of the tree casts a sinister shadow on the scene, particularly amidst the neo-classical architecture which looms in the background. This is perhaps a comment on the passing of the previous generation whose grandeur is now fading.

Woman is not the subject of convalescing here, even though her sickness is indicated by her pale complexion and red lips. Her position is clear as she flouts the charge of her father as he too casts an authoritative glance towards us. Age and youth are further symbolised in their clothing: ‘...his hat and coat are the same color as the facades, while the young woman’s outfit rhymes in color with the young green grass of the lawn.’³¹ The daughter’s garments are worth considering as definition of her femininity. Tissot’s mastery of fashionable detail is apparent here in the fur collar, which appears to ‘enoble her while at the same time subverting her apparent demureness and providing a symbolic substitute for her limited sexual powers due to her tuberculosis.’³² The women Tissot depicts are always well-dressed and never seemingly in a state of undress even when they are convalescing. This insinuates a need to imprison the female body in order to maintain a level of respectability.

During the 1870s, the deviant femme fatale figure was prominent in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. These women were not the idealised angel of the house and domestic realm. Instead they were seducers, who conveyed

...a sense of magnetism and even potential danger with their mystical silence, half-closed eyes, sensuous mouths, and hypnotic looks of anesthetized expectancy. This alluring being is, however, ultimately unattainable, for the wall or bower which often literally holds her back

³⁰ Laver, James, *“Vulgar Society” The romantic career of James Tissot, 1836 -1902* (London: Constable & Co, 1936), p.40.

³¹ Nancy Rose Marshall & Malcolm Warner, ‘City Life’, in *James Tissot: Victorian life/modern love* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.70-79 (p.76).

³² Elizabeth Prelinger, ‘Tissot as Symbolist and Fetishist? A Surmise’ in, *Seductive Surfaces*, ed. Katharine Lochnan (New Haven; London: Yale University Press), pp.185-212 (p.205).

reinforces the curious paradox of her being both sexy and yet ethereally soulful, desirable and inaccessible.’³³



James Tissot, *The Warrior's Daughter or A Convalescent* (1878, oil on panel, Manchester Art Gallery)

[Fig.2]

This association between man suffering through action and woman suffering through inaction is expressed in the sentiments of John Ruskin's *Of Queen's Gardens* (1865):

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer and defender...his energy for adventure,

³³ Casteras, *The Substance or the Shadow*, p.42.

for war and for conquest...But the woman's power is not for rule, not for battle...but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision.³⁴

This represents a fundamental ideology of the home and the necessity for separate spheres that also complement one another. For a woman to be independent was seen as sexually deviant and Lynda Nead says the, 'condition of dependency was believed to be a natural and gratifying component of respectable femininity.'³⁵ In order for dependency to be assured such middle-class women were thought to be in a continual weak and fragile state which also entirely suited the medical profession.³⁶

Positioning Invalid Women: Marriage and Divorce

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, new ideas around the ability to control ones own mind, and therefore the body, were emerging and had implications for how woman defined her lot. Civil divorce was introduced in 1857. By 1870 the Married Woman's Property Act allowed women to keep their earnings and own property, whereas previously it would automatically have gone to their husband. If they wished to, women had the freedom to live independently for the first time. A fear that women would leave her responsibilities behind resulted in a plethora of sick women trapped on the canvas. This was to remind her that refined idleness was all she could aspire to and was in effect a form of control. In 1875, Wilkie Collins provided the following snapshot of the times in *The Law and the Lady*:

The old morality's all wrong, the old ways are all worn out. Let's march
with the age we live in. The wife in England and the husband in Spain,

³⁴ John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens from *Sesame and Lilies* (1865)', in *John Ruskin: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.154-174 (p.158).

³⁵ Lynda Nead, 'The Norm: Respectable Femininity', in *Myths of sexuality: representations of women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp.12-47 (p.29).

³⁶Nead, p.29.

married or not married, living together or not living together – it's all one to the new ideas.³⁷

These convalescent women were on the road to recovery from the prison of patriarchy.

Invalidism became a sign of one's position, 'not only as a sign of ladylike good breeding and true femininity but as an indication of the wealth and social status of the husband who could afford to maintain a sickly, idle wife.'³⁸ The idea that the 'vulgar society' of the new middle-classes was being depicted had resonated from Ruskin's criticism of Tissot's work. The term 'convalescent' adds a glimmer of hope for this divorcée, who is possibly being given the chance at forging towards a new life but still at the mercy of man. Diane Price Herndl describes the complex relationship between woman, her body and conflicting discourses:

For the woman caught between medical discourses that defined her as ill, aesthetic discourses which asserted that she was better that way, and New Thought arguments that she could take control of her own life and urged her to do so, the self-discipline of willed and artistic illness could offer the simplest resolution to these competing forces.³⁹

This internalised and silent protest is just one side to a sickness that permeated the lives of the middle-class. In general, it appears that it became a rite of passage to be ill and to be looked after. Apart from the reality of a very real illness it is also a statement on the unmet needs of middle-class women as they stare out blankly from the canvas.

³⁷ Benjamin speaking to Valeria. 'Wilkie Collins, Chapter 39: On the Way to Dexter', in *The Law and the Lady* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.299.

³⁸ Golden, p.95.

³⁹ Diane Herndl-Price, 'The Writing Cure: Women Writers and the Art of Illness', in *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp.110-149 (p.125).

The impact of modernity finds women caught between the old world and the new as they move towards independence. This manifests itself in the figure of the convalescent who is reaching out for society to recognise her validity. It is society that has 'disabled' these women who attempted to free themselves through the adoption of a role of invalidity, which was tragically sometimes a self-destructive one. Woman's voice was muffled in this climate and labels were applied in order to try and explain the condition of her:

Large numbers suffered from a mysterious malaise...mystified physicians gave it such vague labels as "neurasthenia," "nervous prostration," and "hysteria." This syndrome has been interpreted as an effect of the life of dependency and essential idleness that these women were supposed to lead. With no productive work to do and no intellectual stimulation, their only functions the sexual ones of bearing children and looking attractive, they took up being ill as a form of occupation, or even vocation, a way of getting attention and exerting some "psychological and emotional power."⁴⁰

Women were seeking attention because they were truly frustrated and bound by patriarchal rule. This was a method of defying the system whether consciously or not. Instead of a "cult of the invalid" which demands only the notion that it was a fashionable and dedicated religion, I suggest that there was an epidemic of invalidism. These inner rebellions are manifest in the physical symptom of inertia which we can compare to ideas on hysteria as an epidemic. It has been said that, 'All accounts of epidemic hysteria show that symptoms occur within a unified group against a background of fear and ignorance.'⁴¹ Depictions of convalescent women were not women of ignorance, but women biding their time. These women were in defiance of the submission of their

⁴⁰ Golden, p.94-5.

⁴¹ 'Epidemic Hysteria', *The British Medical Journal*, 2 (Nov. 26, 1966), in *Jstor* <<http://www.jstor.org>> [accessed 26 July 2010], p.1280.

invalid mothers from the generations before them. However, we must not forget that these images are through the eyes of men, whose own hysteria of control had stemmed from their fear and their ignorance.

Tissot's Convalescents

There are a distinct range of signifiers within convalescent art in the domestic sphere. It is necessary for the subject to be resting an elbow on an armchair/chaise longue, or in bed but not necessarily asleep so that we can gauge some idea of health returning, a blanket/shawl for warmth and comfort, a pillow/cushion, and an attendant nurse or the absence of one. White clothing is also common to complement the washed-out complexion and give an innocent/deathly appeal. The scene might be in a garden for its restorative properties or an interior of the sick room. These paintings were bought for the middle-class home, thus displaying: '...pale young women reclining in limp exhaustion against the raised pillows of a bed or a lounge chair, often with an anxious, sad, or thoughtful parent, husband, or friend looking on.'⁴²

There was clearly a market for such depictions which Tissot supplemented with the production of etchings. Tissot's first London print was, *A Convalescent* (1875)⁴³ [Fig.3] which mirrors the painting of the same name [Fig.8]. The focus in the etching is on the woman, not the overall scene, which emphasises its sentimentality as we empathise with her poor condition. She is propped up on a prominent pillow and a shawl protects her. *The Convalescent* [Fig.4] was Tissot's first published print also produced in 1875. In this small elegant study we are drawn to her sunken eyes beneath her fashionable hat. One hand supports her wrist to give the air of delicacy. Dianne Sachko Macleod says that paintings had a 'use' value over artistry. Such narrative paintings acted as conversation pieces and the choice of art was a '...key element in the affirmation of a middle-class identity that was

⁴² Golden, p95.

⁴³ This was produced the year before he met Kathleen Newton.

distinct from the leisured existence of the aristocracy.’⁴⁴ The middle-classes wished to aspire to aristocratic refinement but it was also evident that they had suffered for their position.



James Tissot, *A Convalescent* (1875, Drypoint & etching, Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale)

[Fig.3]



James Tissot, *The Convalescent* (1875, Drypoint & Etching, Charles Jerdein)

[Fig.4]

⁴⁴Diane Sachko Macleod, 'Introduction', in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.1-19 (p.1).

Desiring Convalescence

Tissot's, *Girl in an Armchair: The Convalescent* (1870-2) [Fig.5], is propped on to the arm of the garden chair not looking overly sickly. Instead, the sensual surfaces of her dress and reddened lips, blushed cheeks and flowing hair conduct a sexual allure. This representation conforms to the ideal of the Pre-Raphaelite beauty who display sickliness in 'lowered head, averted eyes with heavy lids, upturned lips, hair softly framing the face in deep loops or falling free.'⁴⁵ Her stark white dress with fashionable folk-style embroidery and her black jet cross are perhaps indicative of the late stage of mourning which illustrate her path to rejuvenation.⁴⁶ The glass of the conservatory is just visible which further indicates female fragility.



James Tissot, *Girl in an Armchair: The Convalescent* (1870-2, oil on panel, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario)

[Fig.5]

⁴⁵ Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall,' *Art History*, 7, No.2, (June 1984), (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp.206-227 (p.223).

⁴⁶ Edward Maeder, 'Decent Exposure: Status, Excess, the World of Haute Couture, and Tissot' in Lochnan, pp.77-93 (p.87).

Margaret Flanders Darby has observed that the conservatory says something of the ideas around the “nature” of nineteenth-century women under patriarchy.⁴⁷ It is reflective of her artificial environment and enclosure in the domestic sphere. The wall here provides the barrier to her attainability as does the foliage that frames the painting. This painting is quite theatrical in its staging compared with the later convalescents which embrace his personal connection with his lover Kathleen Newton. The sense of time slipping away has a greater poignancy when she is portrayed on the canvas. This could be comparable with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall’s relationship. Through love the ‘art then signifies the relation of inspired masculine creativity and its object – passive feminine beauty.’⁴⁸ Wentworth aptly applies this same sentiment, ‘Tissot continues to rely on the unfailing charm of a heroine for whom disease is only love transformed.’⁴⁹

The next painting that Tissot produced on the invalid subject was, *A Morning Ride* (1872-3) [Fig.6]. The young woman sentimentally holds out for the last hope of life. The rhododendron is symbolic of danger, ‘...as she reaches out for what is surely the last time to touch a rhododendron flower at some English spa.’⁵⁰ The language of flowers was a coded system that painters employed to develop another level of meaning either intentionally or subconsciously through association. Her gentleman companion is comparatively nonchalant, as he leans over the donkey and glances out to something else of interest. The donkey might be thought of as representative of women, who has no choice but to support her man and probably suffer as a result. The branch that he holds under his arm is to keep the beast in order. The woman in the background is symbolic of the invalid’s former self when she was strong and youthful. The enveloping flowers ally woman with nature and rather morbidly with the flowers soon to lie on her grave.

⁴⁷ Margaret Flanders Darby, ‘The Conservatory in St.John’s Wood’, in Lochnan, pp.161-184 (p.183).

⁴⁸ Cherry & Pollock, p.217.

⁴⁹ Wentworth, ‘The Siege of London’, in *James Tissot*, pp.84-124 (p.112-113).

⁵⁰ Wentworth, p.112.



James Tissot, *A Morning Ride* (c.1872-3, oil on canvas, New York: Private Collection)

[Fig.6]



Ford Madox Brown, *The Convalescent (Emma)* (1872, pastel on paper, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery)

[Fig.7]

In the same year, Ford Madox Brown produced, *The Convalescent (Emma)* [Fig.7]. This shows his second wife suffering on her sick bed clutching some purple pansies, which meant 'you occupy my thoughts.'⁵¹ In Brown's pastel image the woman appears as if she were a marble effigy, possessing the stony features of a death-mask if it were not for her half-opened eyes. The redness of her hair also shows the vigour of life has not quite left her. Susan Sontag says of sufferers of tuberculosis that they 'may be represented as passionate but are more characteristically, deficient in vitality, in life force...the recurrent figure of the tubercular courtesan indicates that TB was also thought to make the sufferer sexy.'⁵² The weakness of her sex makes her more attractive than any visible sign of strength which would ultimately challenge the patriarchal system.

The confines of suburbia

In the 1870s, it might be said that the paintings were a comment on the residue of the new industrialised city and the sickness of modernity. In the gardens of the suburbs the consumptive hoped to escape the suffocation of a growing city but at the same time was suffocated by the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Tissot used his own garden in Grove End Road, St John's Wood, for the scene in *A Convalescent* (1876) [Fig.8]. St.John's Wood indeed epitomised suburbia where one could escape from the expanding city and lead another life. Kathleen Newton lived a few streets away from Tissot, in Hill Road, before they decided to live together. St.John's Wood was associated in the popular imagination with the pretty villas of courtesans.⁵³ That Kathleen Newton was a divorcée and kept mistress would have added fuel to the critic's fire, although their relationship was not officially made reference to until the twentieth century.

The use of the garden-scene was undoubtedly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites depiction of the seasons and their handling of light. Looking at [Fig.8] we appear to be on the verge of autumn with sunlight breaking through auburn leaves and dappling the scene with a sense of positivity. Is she

⁵¹Beverley Seaton's combined vocabulary, in *The Language of Flowers* (University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp.186-7.

⁵²Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd, 1987), p.29.

⁵³Hibbert, Weinreb, & Keay, p.777.

about to recover at the turning of the season or are the dead leaves, which predominantly hang over the convalescent, a symbol of false hope? The weeping-willow tree that spills over the colonnade certainly suggests a melancholy air and was traditionally a symbol of mourning. All does not appear to be well by the placement of the ruffled rug underneath the chairs of both women. The classical colonnade frames and confines the boundary of this sphere. Perhaps both women are convalescing in their bid for freedom from such confines in the alternative community they have created. The young woman is the prime convalescent as her pose adopts the position of half-weary elbow on the arm of the chair as she is propped up by a pillow. The whiteness of her costume matches her pale complexion. There are three chairs and two tea cups and a half-cut cake maybe to symbolise some unfinished business in her role as mistress of the home. The third and unoccupied chair next to the elderly woman rests a gentleman's hat and stick of the absent male. It suggests he may be attending to important matters contrasted with the inactive internality of the female. The young woman turns her back on old age which comes between youth and the lover, perhaps a reflection of beauty leaving this earth before its time. *The Graphic* gave this painting the following review, 'An oddly arranged picture, but with one figure, that of the convalescent in her garden chair, very interesting and graceful, and a sentiment in the autumn landscape that harmonises with the figure, a case of love-sickness, as we infer.'⁵⁴

⁵⁴ 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy', *The Graphic*, Issue 339 (Saturday, May 27, 1876), in 19th century British Newspapers Online <<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>> [accessed 28 May 2010].



James Tissot, *A Convalescent* (1876, oil on canvas, Sheffield Galleries and Museum Trust)

[Fig.8]

In the last year of Kathleen's life (1881-2) Tissot continued to record her beautifully wasting away. [Fig.9], literally translated is the young and suffering woman, whose youth makes this image all the more heart-rending. It appears more impressionistic in style and as a result captures the sense of life expiring. Her bony hands can barely grasp her shawl and her darkened eyes have the look of one giving up the fight. The body writhes at a discomfiting angle whilst still trying to maintain a fading femininity.



James Tissot, *Jeune Femme souffrante* (c.1881-2, oil on canvas, Gray: Musée Baron Martin)

[Fig.9]



James Tissot, *Soiree d'Ete (Summer Evening)* (1882, Etching & drypoint, Charles Jerdein)

[Fig.10]

In [Fig.10] we see the signifiers of illness; half-closed eyes, pillow and armchair, but this time she appears a little more worn, exhausted and in the last summer of her days. Casteras associates her place in the garden as a comment on the construct of her nature: 'Tissot's image makes the consumptive creature both invalid and recumbent, languishing in a secret garden in which she too is a precious flower that is tragically wilting in the bloom of her youth.'⁵⁵

Nancy Rose Marshall reminds us that these images were not 'merely poignant mementos for Tissot.'⁵⁶ There was a market that bought in to representations of the tragic early deaths of young women, as it was something all too familiar. Romanticizing this image may have been consolatory. In reality the time taken to convalesce was an essential and necessary option in the nineteenth century, as with few drugs it was in the hands of the individual to gain strength.

Tissot's convalescents can be seen as a comment on woman's struggle in the 1870s between real illness and the illness of inequality. There is considerable amount of attention devoted to convalescence and not just sickness as a subject in nineteenth-century painting. I have focused in this chapter on the middle-class woman and her position in society. We have seen that there was a certain privilege afforded in being seen to convalesce and in being dependent on the support of her husband. In the next chapter I will explore the seaside as a place for the middle-classes to convalesce.

⁵⁵ Susan P. Casteras, 'The Ideal of Victorian Girlhood', in *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (London: Associate University Presses, 1987), pp.35-50 (p.48).

⁵⁶ Nancy Rose Marshall, 'Image or Identity: Kathleen Newton and the London Pictures of James Tissot', in Lochnan, pp.23-52 (p.25).

Chapter 2

The Seaside as a Fashionable Place to Convalesce

‘What is the best kind of view for a sick prisoner’s windows to command? I have chosen the sea...We should have a wide expanse of land or water, for the sake of a sense of liberty...’⁵⁷

‘...the demand is being created for not merely a sandy shore...but for genuine health resorts where those who have drawn an overdraft on their physical and nervous systems may be enabled to forget for the time being their daily cares and simply devote themselves to entirely recuperating their strength...’⁵⁸

In this chapter I am going to examine the theme of the seaside as a place that the middle-classes chose for recuperation. Whilst I have been unable to find many paintings with the title of ‘Convalescent’ within the seaside genre, I have focused on paintings that show an invalid figure or make a reference to regaining health. I will be looking at a range of artists in this category whose works all date from the mid-nineteenth century on English shores with the exception of Abraham Solomon’s, *A Contrast* (1855).

A Change of Air

Harriet Martineau viewed the sick room as a prison from which a sense of freedom can be gained by a visit to the seaside. In 1859, a guide to Bournemouth commented on ‘the free circulation of the sea air in all its purity...such a balmy and refreshing air.’⁵⁹ Florence Nightingale was a key figure in advocating the importance in a change of air for one’s health. In 1860, an article was published promoting a revised edition of Nightingale’s *Notes on Nursing* in which convalescence is given some

⁵⁷ Martineau, ‘Nature to the Invalid’, pp.66-76 (p.67).

⁵⁸ Augustus Kinsey Morgan, *Bournemouth as a Health Resort* (London; Bournemouth: Simpkins, Marshall & Co., 1889), p.5, Brit. Lib. 7462.c.2.

⁵⁹ *Brannon’s Guide to Bournemouth*, 4th edition (1859), p.15, [ref. Bournemouth Library ephemera].

attention: 'Change, a change of air, is of the very first importance...He must go to another place, or even only to another room. Then he immediately begins to "pick up."' ⁶⁰

The population of Bournemouth in 1856 was 1,337 and by 1888 it had increased to 32,025 inhabitants.⁶¹ In the opening pages of Dr Morgan's guide he poignantly remarks that '...human life in this latter part of the nineteenth century is being carried on at abnormally high pressure.'⁶² The attainment of progress had come at a price which was felt most by the working and middle-classes. The working class could not afford a holiday but were being used to fuel the sweatshop of industry. The middle-classes were striving to obtain wealth and were also keen to reflect that wealth in the way they conducted their life.

Origins of the seaside retreat

In the eighteenth century, spa towns such as Bath attracted sufferers wishing to take the medicinal waters. Beddoes had remarked that in Bath 'the accommodations for invalids are infinitely better than at many other places.'⁶³ During this period, Dr Richard Russell endorsed the curative effects of sea-water in his *Dissertation concerning the Use of Sea-Water in Diseases of the Glands* (1752). This led to fewer people visiting the inland spas and more people attracted to the seaside. The advent of the railway was an additional factor in the accessibility of the coast for city dwellers wanting a short break.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ 'Miss Florence Nightingale on Convalescent Hospitals', *The Morning Post*, Issue 27039, (Wednesday, August 15, 1860), in 19th century British Library Newspapers Online < <http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>> [accessed 12 August 2010], p.6.

⁶¹Morgan, p.14.

⁶²Morgan, p.6.

⁶³ Thomas Beddoes, *Manual of Health: or, the Invalid conducted safely through the seasons* (London: J.Johnson, 1806), p.346, Brit. Lib. 784 a 44.

⁶⁴ The link from London to Brighton opened in 1841.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the seaside had become the fashionable 'health resort' which 'sought the custom of the self-improving middle-classes, or the petite bourgeoisie, in need of a tonic.'⁶⁵

Fashionable Ramsgate and Broadstairs

Different regions on the coast were associated with certain classes of visitor: '...where may the elegant recluse seek for rest and refined solitude? Our answer is, - Broadstairs...it is a kind of country cousin to Mayfair.'⁶⁶ The upper and middle-classes wanted to be seen to be retiring to a respectable location and the following guide goes on to purport a need for refined rejuvenation:

...where a man's mind may recover from the harassing nervousness of party-giving, and delicate girls breathe away in the pure sea air the debility arising from excessive waltzing...do indeed require – as any physician will tell the reader – a period of repose and quietude.⁶⁷

Ramsgate too was popular to those 'appearing on their first arrival scarcely able to walk, through weakness and ill health...in a few weeks, return[ed] home perfectly restored.'⁶⁸ William Powell Frith's painting of Ramsgate [Fig.11] began the vogue for seaside painting. The modern subject of the crowd scene, in this case at the beach, was of particular interest:

My summer holiday of 1851 was spent at Ramsgate. Weary of costume painting, I had determined to try my hand on modern life, with all its drawbacks of unpicturesque dress. The variety of character on Ramsgate

⁶⁵ John Hassan, *The seaside, health and the environment in England and Wales since 1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.40.

⁶⁶ *All about Ramsgate and Broadstairs*, (London, 1864), p.44, Brit.Lib. 10358.d.35.

⁶⁷ *All about Ramsgate and Broadstairs*, p.43.

⁶⁸ J.Bear, *The New Ramsgate Guide for 1867* (Ramsgate: Michaels Bookshop, 2006), p.4.

Sands attracted me – all sorts and conditions of men and women were to be found there. Pretty groups of ladies...reading, idling, working...⁶⁹



William Powell Frith, *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)* (1854, oil on canvas, The Royal Collection)

[Fig.11]

Frith's view of women as idly refined fits the aspirations of the middle-class. There are no obviously invalid characters in Frith's painting, yet it colourfully illustrates the rising popularity of resorts such as Ramsgate. This panoramic view captures the spirit of the attraction to the seaside in the mid-nineteenth century. Christopher Wood has commented on the visitors in this scene: 'All of them look respectably middle-class, but there is considerable variety, ranging from the more plebeian-looking group on the far left with the newspaper and the telescope, to the more elegant group in the centre underneath a parasol.'⁷⁰ Frith adds a thoroughly modern touch, as if he were a photographer seizing the momentary experience, by capturing the scene from the viewpoint of the sea. The bathing

⁶⁹ From Frith's *Autobiography* (1887), qtd. in Lionel Lambourne, ' "All Human Life is Here": Cross-Sections of Society', in *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd.,1999), pp.256-277 (p.258).

⁷⁰ Christopher Wood, 'Life at the Seaside', in *William Powell Frith: A Painter & His World* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2006), pp.30-41 (p.38).

machines, by the cliff, are evidence of the provision for health-seekers wishing to immerse in the sea with modesty. *The Hand-Book for the Sea-side, for the invalid and convalescent* (1857) purports the benefits of bathing to gain strength:

its immediate effects being a general stimulation of the whole nervous system...respiration is lightened, the heart is made to beat calm and free, the mind feels clear, the tone of the muscular system is increased, the appetite sharpened, and the whole organism feels invigorated.⁷¹

Frith's *Life at the Seaside*⁷² undoubtedly influenced the handling of Abraham Solomon's *Brighton Front* (c.1860). The similarity in the sprawling crowd that spills out on to the promenade and the sense of movement is suggested here by its impressionistic brushwork. The density of both these scenes is a visual record of their popularity by the mid-century. The class of visitor in *Brighton Front* seems to be middle-class with an abundance of crinolines and gentlemen in top hats. Alain Corbin has said of this outward show: 'the ritual of the bathing holiday [was] a response to the aristocratic model of castle life, a ritual invented by a middle class seeking to reinforce the legitimacy of its power by displaying it in new ways.'⁷³

Moving beyond the two women to the right of the picture, the eye falls to the bath chair in the centre which is occupied by an elderly gentleman. One young woman leans directly in to the chair in an almost swooning admiration. This calls to mind, *The Warrior's Daughter* by James Tissot [Fig.2], which also shows an elderly gentleman having earned his right to his invalid chair. We do not see any *young* men with a need to be delicately retiring in a chair here, as we will see of the representation of women. *Punch*⁷⁴ adequately satirises the contemporary opinion of women in [Fig.13]. The tag line has Fred expressing his concern for Charley who is in the invalid chair: "Nothing the matter, I hope?"

⁷¹ *The Hand-Book for the Sea-side, for the invalid and convalescent* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1857), p.11, British Library: 7470d.23. (Referred to as the *Handbook* from this point on).

⁷² Later referred to as *Ramsgate Sands*.

⁷³ Alain Corbin, 'Inventing the Beach', in *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp.250-281 (p.270).

⁷⁴ *Punch*, 65 (September 20, 1873), (London: 83 Fleet Street), p.114.

to which Charley replies: "Oh, no – rather hard up for excitement' that's all! So I thought I'd just take the girls out for a little exercise. Would you like to jump in and give them a turn?" The women are in a position as if they were horses pulling a carriage and subservient to men. The play on 'turn' in this case insinuates women are prone to a weak spell and also has undertones of a sexual nature.



Abraham Solomon, *Brighton Front* (c.1861, oil on panel, Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery)

[Fig.12]



Punch: Amusements for the Sea-side (September 20, 1873, London Metropolitan Archives)

[Fig.13]

Middle-Class vs. Working-Class



Abraham Solomon, *A Contrast* (1855, oil on canvas, Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery)

[Fig.14]

A Contrast (1855) [Fig.14] by Abraham Solomon is representative of the class divide. We are on the Boulogne⁷⁵ seashore and the separation of the two groups is marked by the post held by a local woman. The rustic costume defines the local women as working-class. The net on the pole and the basket indicates that they are fisherwomen, particularly in relation to the scene on the beach behind them. Their assertive posture connotes visible strength and is in direct opposition to the invalid woman in her blanketed chair. These women are comfortable in the open air whereas the invalid is slightly sheltered by the rocks. The catalogue entry reflects the reception by contemporary critics

⁷⁵ A French resort within reach of the English Channel.

who see rich women as inherently weak: 'Will Fortune never come with both hands full? Such are the poor in health; such are the rich that have abundance and joy and enjoy it not.'⁷⁶

The presence of a footman next to the invalid indicates her wealthy status. Breaking from her drawing, the invalid gazes feebly into the eyes of her husband as if threatened by the local women. There is something imposing about the size of the women, particularly as one has a hand firmly placed on her hip whilst she directly faces the invalidity of the middle-class. This action is a statement of her ability to look after herself. Working-class women were seen as being disruptive to family life, as they were thought to produce ill-prepared and uneducated offspring of an inferior breed. It is true that the, '...affluent non-working woman was seen as weak and delicate: she was inherently sick...the working-class woman was not sick, but sickening. She was a potential health hazard, harbouring germs of cholera, typhoid or venereal disease.'⁷⁷ The threat of disease does not seem apparent in this depiction as the local women have vigour from the climate which is beneficial for one's health.

Admiration for the invalid middle-class woman was expressed in the *Art Journal*, '... the sick woman's face is very beautifully painted.'⁷⁸ Her beauty is indicative of her refinement. The reading companion is a symbol of the educated middle-classes. The red skirt, pink shawl and russet headscarf of the fisherwoman emphasises the healthy redness of her cheeks. This is in stark contrast to the invalid's fading porcelain complexion and the muted colours of the middle-class group. The invalid wears a purple velvet and fur trimmed mantle which reflects her privileged status.

⁷⁶ The catalogue entry of Royal Academy Exhibition 1855, qtd. in *Solomon: A Family of Painters* (London: ILEA, 1985), p.54.

⁷⁷ Delamont & Duffin, p.30.

⁷⁸ James Dafforne, 'British Artists: Their Style and Character', *Art Journal*, 3 (March, 1862), p.73.

The dog with its raised paw echoes the pose of the husband and is a gesture of his loyalty.⁷⁹ A wedding ring on the hand nearest to his wife's secures his values in supporting her dependence. The wife's ring too can be picked out on the bony white hand closest to her husband's.

This painting is indicative of a society who fears mechanization, where the fisherwomen 'are not involved with industrialized labour but with a traditional, regional form of occupation.'⁸⁰ We might infer that progress has not been embraced by a society who is still rural in its labour force. But it also has overtones of a nostalgic longing for a distant and rural past.

The benefits of the seaside

John Hassan has remarked that the machine age had prompted a 'surge in popularity of the seaside holiday after 1850.'⁸¹ An imbalance between humanity and nature makes one reach out for something untouchable such as the power and lure of the sea. The Preface in the *Handbook* is dedicated to the commercial community: '...man's power of daily restoration is not equal to the amount of his daily exhaustion there is a leakage ever going on – a balance of uncompensated fatigue – which is accumulating as a debt against him.'⁸² This battle with fatigue and overwork are the price for modern society. Although the seaside *Handbook* does not generally assume a gender bias it makes comments such as: 'Pleasant conversation, or light reading, will be found assisting the cure; but anything like intellectual toil is decidedly injurious, the brain being less able to bear such efforts than at other times. Such attempts only retard the cure.'⁸³ This may have been aimed at women who were stereotyped as the mentally weaker sex and these words maintain that belief.

⁷⁹ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York; London: Harper & Row, 1979), p.105.

⁸⁰ Nead, p.31.

⁸¹ Hassan, p.5.

⁸² *Hand-Book for the Sea-side*, Preface.

⁸³ *Hand-Book for the Sea-side*, p.25.



William Gale, *The Convalescent* (1862, oil on panel, The Makins Collection)

[Fig.15]

William Gale's *The Convalescent* (1862) [Fig.15], shows a woman reclining on the beach with the support of her surrounding family. It is hard to discern whether she is rested or anxious as she looks out towards the sea in a vacant gaze. The accoutrements of the sickroom are here, in the comforting blanket and the attendant husband whose healthy rose-coloured cheeks contrast with his wife's greying face. The muted colour of the mother's dress implies that she has no care to be sporting a more vibrant colour.

In looking beyond her daughter we could suppose a rejection of the family duty that has held her back and weighed her down. Additionally, this is reflected in the position of the girl nearest the sea, whose isolation anticipates her role in womanhood on the periphery of society. The horizon is an important visual device in emphasising the psychological element of the group:

...the dark masses draw one towards the family group, as the husband's anxious gaze, near the painting's centre, makes one focus on his pallid wife. Her own eyes, however, look outwards to an imaginary horizon, the

correlative of which is the stretch of sea leading out towards the right of the canvas: something which might be seen in terms of futurity. A life-line, or which could equally well be seen as a blank expanse.⁸⁴

The mother may even wish she could entertain the freedoms of childhood, as her daughter playfully dangles the seaweed in a quest for discovery. The curly golden hair of the child is free from the formal bonnet, unlike the protective headscarf the mother wears. A claustrophobic air is created in the proximity of the group to the edge of the picture and in the closeness of the family unit. The open space behind the group is calling out for people to think with clarity. Once free from the distractions of urban life they might have a better relationship with God. This is timely as faith was in crisis particularly following the publication of *The Origin of the Species* (1859) by Charles Darwin which displaced the order of things. The limp hand of the convalescent is grasped in reassurance by her husband who mimics the role of the doctor. 'After the mid-century...the moral righteousness which had once been the prerogative of the clergy was taken up by the doctors. In a changing society, doctors saw themselves as moral as well as physical guardians of women.'⁸⁵

The girl holding the seaweed blends in with her natural surroundings: the colouring of her hair, cloak and shoes match the sand. Debates on gender and the 'woman question' were up for discussion in the mid to late nineteenth century. Central to this was the idea that woman must be closer to nature because of her biological structure and that education would dislodge the role of motherhood. There is a parallel in this work in which the represented convalescent is perhaps defying her role as mother in an empty stare. In her convalescent role she begins to recover from her inherent weakness and attempts to find strength from beyond the canvas.

This quiet alcove does not suggest chaos in its relative order and balanced composition; both sea and sky are calm. The encasement in this tranquil part of the beach may further allude to woman's

⁸⁴ Kate Flint, 'Conclusion' in, *Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.285-312, p.291.

⁸⁵ Delamont & Duffin, p.27.

position as being passive in society. The yellow flower in the bottom left-hand corner might be a dandelion which, in the language of flowers, means you are losing time or it is an oracle divining the future. A reviewer in 1971 said: 'Gale's *The Convalescent*...is but one more instance of the Victorian partiality for refined forms of illness in their art.'⁸⁶ The reviewer saw a sentimentalised image of woman, but I would argue that she is not simply to be pitied but to be recognised as a symbol of defiance.



Thomas Falcon Marshall, *Returning Health* (c.1870, oil on canvas, Worthing Museum & Art Gallery)

[Fig.16]

Thomas Falcon Marshall's, *Returning Health* (c.1870)⁸⁷ [Fig.16] is reminiscent of William Mulready's, *The Convalescent from Waterloo* (1822) [Fig.17] in its composition. In both paintings the focus group are positioned on a log leading from the left to the centre of the picture and balanced by two

⁸⁶ Keith Roberts, 'Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions', in *The Burlington Magazine*, 113 (July, 1971), in *Jstor* <<http://www.jstor.org>> [accessed 5 August 2010], pp.413-423 (p.419).

⁸⁷ This painting has the alternative title *A Sunny Day at the Seaside*.

children on the right of each painting. Mulready's painting was unusual at the time as it showed the effects of war on humanity and not the victory. It is thought that the army barracks in the distance were used as a convalescent home for wounded soldiers.



William Mulready, *The Convalescent from Waterloo* (1822, oil on panel, London: Victoria and Albert Museum)

[Fig.17]

A critic remarked in an obituary: 'Mr Marshall's sympathies were almost wholly with the simple folk and quiet scenes of village life.'⁸⁸ An interest in the representation of daily life is the concern of the modern painter who aims to capture a life that is disappearing whilst on the cusp of change.⁸⁹ Marshall's painting has similarities to Solomon's, *A Contrast*, with its robust and healthy local people who are distinct from the invalid visitor. Vitality is apparent in the colourful clothing of Marshall's children. This healthy young boy represents the future for the girl and her baby whilst also being a symbol for the nostalgia of rural life in opposition to the industrial town.

⁸⁸ 'Notes on Current Events', *British Architect*, 9:22 (May 31, 1878), in *British Periodicals Online* <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 5 August 2010], p.252.

⁸⁹ He was also an admirer of Frith.

The question here is: Which figure has their health returning? Our attention is drawn to the young girl in the middle of the group of women whose face is as pale as her upper garments. This girl cradles a baby which is supported by the woman to her left who shades the girl with a parasol. For pathos to have a greater impact we might believe that it is the baby returning to health or indeed that the young mother is on her way to recovery. What is puzzling is the woman on the other side of the girl who stares blankly out into the distance. Is she suffering too? Her role as companion in this picture might imply that her blank expression is contemplative and compassionate, which the viewer is invited to meditate on. The dog looks directly up to this woman which may be questioning her marital fidelity. The two women beside the girl mirror one another in their cloaks of black adding a sombre ambience. The presence of the stormy dark centre of the cumulus clouds emits the atmosphere of a passing turbulence. This is a quieter coastal resort than Brighton or Ramsgate. We sense something of the expedition this small group has made for the restorative properties of the peaceful seaside.

By the end of the century the seaside as a destination for cure had not waned in its attraction. Sea air and Convalescent homes were to be found together. The railways may have contributed to the increase in the pace of life but they also enabled a method of escape from the anxieties of modern society. The very appearance of invalids in these paintings verifies that many were seeking an alternative to city pressures and the suffocation of domestic life. The children of the next generation would follow in the footsteps of their mother's. When would the suffocation cease?

Chapter 3

Middle-Class Girlhood: Delicate Beginnings

‘...all this vigilance and care could not make little Paul a thriving boy. Naturally delicate, perhaps, he pined and wasted after the dismissal of his nurse, and, for a long time, seemed but to wait his opportunity of gliding through their hands, and seeking his lost mother.’⁹⁰

‘...initiate a cult of the Child, worship him, set him on high as the incarnation of all that is holiest in humanity, give him the utmost freedom, recognise him as God’s messenger to man’s higher self.’⁹¹

This chapter will discuss the presence of children in the convalescent genre and in particular the girls of the middle-class. I have opened this chapter with a quote from *Dombey and Son* (1848) by Charles Dickens which speaks of the fragility of the boy as an invalid. With his mother gone before him in childbirth he has no natural safety-net from a female influence in the household, particularly with the absence of a nurse. Dickens’ image of Paul is contrary to the subject of the invalid in genre painting, as there are comparatively few boys in the role of convalescent. There is a definite bias in the representation of the *delicate female* from girlhood to womanhood. Susan Casteras has provided useful criticism on Victorian Girlhood and in particular highlights the fact that ‘girls were rarely shown as adventurous or naughty, their range of experience in childhood reflecting what was expected of them as adults.’⁹² The pages of *The Boy’s Own Paper* are filled with tales of adventure and courageous war heroes, which is in direct opposition to the equivalent girl magazine that centres on the domestic realm. Girls were to imitate submissive and respectable behaviour which would result in their dependence. It is rare to see a mischievous girl on the canvas. Carolyn

⁹⁰ Charles Dickens, ‘Paul’s Further Progress, Growth, and Character’, *Dombey and Son* (1848), in *Literature Online* <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 20 August 2010], pp.65-79 (p.65).

⁹¹ Wilfrid M. Leadman, ‘The Decay of Childhood’, *Westminster Review*, 168:5 (Nov.1907), in *British Periodicals Online* <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 20 August 2010], pp.520-522 (p.520).

⁹² Lee M. Edwards, ‘Victorian Childhood’, *The Burlington Magazine*, 129, (Feb., 1987), in *Jstor* <<http://www.jstor.org>> [accessed 05 August 2010], pp.140-141 (p.141).

Steedman has described the need to define the experience of being a child: 'Childhood was a category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority or weakness...'⁹³ This helps to support the role of the mother as nurse and nurturer of the future race as she too comes from a position of dependency. Queen Victoria did not help woman's plight with following she wrote in 1870: 'Let women be what God intended, a helpmate for man, but with totally different duties and vocations.'⁹⁴

The second quote, at the head of this chapter, was written in 1907 when there was an emergent fear of the loss of innocence in childhood. The author calls for a return to the notion that children are closer to God, as they are without the stain of humanity upon them and consequently provide moral guidance for their parents. Casteras has remarked on the popularity of suffering children in nineteenth-century art: '...the sick or expiring child is a recurrent figure – sometimes portrayed as an embodiment of Christian endurance and acceptance, at other times as a victim of poverty.'⁹⁵ The high infant mortality rate inevitably resulted in parents cherishing the time spent with their children. The transience of convalescence could be thought of as an analogy for the precious nature of childhood.

During the eighteenth century 'children had begun to be identified as a group with their own interests and needs....the elevation of innocence, the unspoiled and the natural within romanticism, furthered the special place of children.'⁹⁶ This continued through the Victorian period in sentimental paintings that grasped a nostalgic sense of the transitory moment of childhood, whether this is on the path to recovery or in to adulthood.

⁹³Carolyn Steedman, 'Introduction: Lost and Found', in *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780 – 1930* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1994), pp.1-20 (p.7).

⁹⁴ <<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/struggle/suffrage1/suffragists.html>> [accessed 28 August 2010].

⁹⁵Susan P. Casteras, *Victorian Childhood: Paintings Selected from the Forbes Magazine Collection by Christopher Forbes* (New York: Abrams, 1996), p.4. NAL. 502C 296.

⁹⁶ Davidoff & Hall, 'Our Family is a Little World: Family Structure & Relationships' in, *Family Fortunes*, pp.321-356 (p.343).

The Girl of the Period

In Chapter 1, I discussed the move towards women's rights during the 1870's with the passing of the Married Woman's Property Act. In the previous decade Eliza Lynn Linton had written disapprovingly of the new generation of women emerging: 'The girl of the period is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face...whose sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury.'⁹⁷ With these small freedoms Linton feared the rejection of respectable motherhood by these women. Linton effectively compares such women with prostitutes, 'If we must have only one kind of thing, let us have it genuine; and the queens of St.John's Wood in their unblushing honesty, rather than their imitators and make-believes in Bayswater and Belgravia...to assimilate her as nearly as possible to a class of women who we must not call by their proper – or improper – name.'⁹⁸ She closes the article with a plea: '...all we can do is to wait patiently until the national madness has paused, and our women have come back again to the old English ideal, once the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world.'⁹⁹ That a woman might no longer see her children as her primary task was a cause for concern in society. It might be said that the sentimentalising of childhood became important in the middle-class home in order to maintain women's desire to bring up the future generation.

Middle and upper-class girls had been expected to gain social skills as opposed to advancement through education. They had been taught to sacrifice their needs from an early age in preparation for subservience to their husband. This was perpetuated in the art of the period and genre scenes of children became a popular and collectible subject for the rising middle-classes. Girls stare out from the canvas as their mothers did in anticipation of the self-sacrificing role that the world expected from them. To contrast, the paintings of women 'convalescents' might wish to be seen as wanting to return to a child-like state of care where their needs were accommodated. Susan Casteras discusses this to some degree:

⁹⁷ Lynn Linton, 'The Girl of the Period', *The Saturday Review*, 25:646 (March 14, 1868), in *British Periodicals Online* <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 5 August 2010], pp.339-340 (p.340).

⁹⁸ Linton, p.340.

⁹⁹ Linton, p.340.

The lines of sexuality, both in real life and art, blurred between the child-woman and the woman-child. What was womanly about the girl thus had visual and sexual appeal, and conversely, what was girlish about the woman was both socially encouraged and enticing, especially her purity, vulnerability, ingenuousness, and devotion.¹⁰⁰

Through the depiction of convalescent children we can gain an insight in to how adults viewed the world they themselves inhabited. The relationship between the child-like woman and the sexualising of her daughters is apparent in paintings of convalescent girls; the girl is being prepared for her future fragile role.

A fragile innocence



Frank Holl, *Convalescent* (1867, oil on canvas, Private Collection)

[Fig.18]

¹⁰⁰ Casteras, 'The Ideal of Victorian Girlhood', in *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, p.40.

In an obituary to Frank Holl a critic commented: ‘...”The Convalescent” (or “Getting Better”)...a sympathetic rendering of beautiful childhood, rich and subtle in colour.’¹⁰¹ This *beautiful childhood* can be compared with *Emma* [Fig.7] in Chapter 1. Holl’s girl [Fig.18] is similar in her bed-pose with a firm white pillow behind her. In *Emma* the woman clasps a handful of pansies and Holl’s convalescent gently holds together her hands with a buttercup just visible on her chest scattered on her blanket. This flower is a symbol of the childishness of playful pursuit before the girl got sick. It may also connote her return to recovery and what she has to look forward to. The very presence of wild flowers signifies natural beauty but also acts as a reminder of the fragility which will fade away. The association of the invalid with flowers is made reference to in *Bow Bells*: ‘By the sick bed...how have I seen the eye brighten as the fresh flowers have been placed on the pillow, and the feeble hand fondly grasp the fair thing...how the drooping sufferer will inhale their fragrance.’¹⁰²

Holl’s *Convalescent* is brushed with a predominant palette of white which suggests something of a fresh innocence. Health is returning to the girl’s cheeks and rosy lips which are complemented by the colour of the orange. An orange would have been an expensive purchase which middle-class parents would have afforded for their sickly child. Traditionally, the orange is ‘sometimes a substitute for the apple in the hand of the infant Christ...’¹⁰³ If we are to read the orange in this way it could symbolise the temptations which lie ahead and will have to be resisted in order to be a good mother. This cabinet painting¹⁰⁴ is a window on to the immediate bed-scene which demands an intensity of compassion. The small and marketable size of such paintings signals the personal and almost devotional intention in their celebration of childhood.

A carefree childhood is revealed in her rather Pre-Raphaelite style flowing locks. Casteras has said of this painting: ‘In spite of the title – or perhaps because of it – there is a certain latent sexiness which

¹⁰¹ M.H. Spielmann, ‘The Late Frank Holl, R.A.’, *Magazine of Art* (Jan, 1888), in *British Periodicals Online* <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 5 August 2010], p.412.

¹⁰² An Invalid, ‘Something more about flowers’, *Bow Bells*, 8:199 (May 20, 1868), in *British Periodicals Online* <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 5 August 2010], p.403.

¹⁰³ Hall, p.229.

¹⁰⁴ So called because of its small size (18x22 inches).

imbues this image of an ailing odalisque...'¹⁰⁵ It does not feel appropriate to read Holl's convalescent in this way, as surely this girl would need to be reclining with some flesh or at least the outline of her body exposed? However, I will not deny that the bed-theme may entice such a reading. In this case the artist appears to be demonstrating the expectation of the child's purity.

The angelic invalid appears again in Holl's *The Daughter of the House* (1879) [Fig.19]. A reviewer commented: '...a little girl painted in an admirably well-rendered effect of light, reclining on her convalescent couch, and well supplied with picture-books and toys.'¹⁰⁶ This time we see a little more of the interior of the sick-room. To the right of the pillow there is what appears to be a Japanese-style fan. Its presence is an indication of an interest in elements of Aestheticism which was emerging in design and perhaps also a sign of womanhood. The girl here is also dressed in a white night gown with a luxuriously detailed blanket covering her. She is spoilt with an orange, a parrot and an elegant turquoise necklace which a popular stone used in sentimental jewellery. Turquoise was thought to give protection to the wearer and the style of necklace prepares her as a future bride.¹⁰⁷ The flowers in the pot are in full bloom whose vitality symbolises that this girl is almost fully recovered. However, if these are begonias then in the language of flowers it denotes one with a fanciful nature. This would seem a fair reference for the playful nature of children, but the juxtaposition with the bird in the cage could further allude to them as a warning sign. The girl's direct glance towards the parrot is enough to distract her from the book which educates her. The caged bird is traditionally representative of a woman trapped by her femininity. Elaine Shefer explains that to 'Victorian spectators, it was recognized as a symbol linked to the history of sexuality.'¹⁰⁸ The realist style of Holl has been compared to seventeenth-century Dutch genre painters like Pieter de Hooch¹⁰⁹ who

¹⁰⁵ Casteras, 'The Ideal of Victorian Girlhood', in *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, p.46.

¹⁰⁶ Wilfrid Meynell, 'Frank Holl: Our Living Artists', *Magazine of Art* (Jan., 1880), in *British Periodicals Online* <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 5 August 2010], pp.187-191 (p.187).

¹⁰⁷ Bridal Choker on: <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O115545/necklace>> [accessed 25 August 2010].

¹⁰⁸ Elaine Shefer, 'The "Bird in the Cage" in the History of Sexuality: Sir John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1, No. 3 (Jan., 1991), in *Jstor* <<http://www.jstor.org>> [accessed 31 August 2010], pp. 446-480 (p.446).

¹⁰⁹ The work of Dutch painters received some exposure at the Royal Academy during this period.

used the symbol of the caged bird in this manner. In popular culture, Dickens draws attention to the derogatory association of women with birds: 'that singing birds was innocent company, but nobody knows what harm is in those little creturs and what they brings you down to.'¹¹⁰ As the daughter in the house she adopts her delicate role which is restricted to the domestic realm. Holl's use of light and compact quality of the scene equally imbues a warm sentiment that brings the child closer to the heart and nest of the home.



Frank Holl, *The Daughter of the House* (1879, oil on canvas, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria)

[Fig.19]

¹¹⁰ Dickens, 'A Trifle of Management by Mr. Carker The Manager', in *Dombey and Son*, pp.211-224 (p.216).

Adolescent Convalescence

It has been declared that adolescence was discovered in the nineteenth century: 'As industrial society came to subject children...to ever longer periods of...formal schooling, the transition from childhood to a generally recognised adult status became more drawn out and complex.'¹¹¹ Genre painting reflects this need to extend childhood to prepare children for the harsh realities of a competitive world.

The biological difference between men and women was drawn attention to by Charles Darwin. Ideas from his theory of natural selection inferred that men were evolving quicker because of greater exposure to competition than women who were protected in their domestic environment. This view necessitated that women would remain dependant on their men: 'For if the differences between men and women were fundamental, if woman was indeed intellectually inferior to man...there was still clearly a way of fitting the old pedestal into the new evolutionary chain of being.'¹¹²

From an early age young girls were taught of the fragile nature of their body and were told to rest when the *illness* of menstruation afflicted them. Here follows a typical response from a physician in 1871: "Another reason why every woman should look upon herself as an invalid once a month, is that the monthly flow aggravates any existing affection of the womb and readily rekindles the expiring flames of disease.'¹¹³ Girls were sutured in to the role of natural invalid and as young women they continued to be treated as a sick child at the time of menstruation.¹¹⁴ Towards the end of the century Harry Campbell wrote *Differences in the Nervous Organisation of Man and Woman*. Campbell's writing seeks to demonstrate the similarity in the nervous characteristics of the child with those of women: 'The peculiarities of the child-mind are of course such as belong to an inferior

¹¹¹ Carol Dyehouse, 'Adolescent girlhood: autonomy versus dependence', in *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.115-138 (p.115).

¹¹² Dijkstra, 'Evolution and the Brain: Extinguished Eyes and the Call of the Child; Homosexuality and the Dream of Male Transcendence', pp.160-209 (p.186).

¹¹³ 'A Physician's Counsels to Women in Health and Disease (1871) by Dr W.C.Taylor' qtd. in Delamont & Duffin, p.21.

¹¹⁴ Dijkstra, p.170.

grade of mental evolution.¹¹⁵ The belief that women had not mentally progressed past childhood due to a biological need to maintain all their energy for reproducing held firm:

Brain work required much vital energy – and hence brain work was properly the realm of the male...men created in the intellectual realm, while women needed to conserve energy to create in the physical realm...serious thought would compete dangerously with woman's reproductive capacity...¹¹⁶

Placing women and young girls in this convalescent position perpetuated the mythology of the passive and inactive female.

An unsentimental Millais

John Everett Millais increasingly painted children from 1860's and often used his own children as models. There is a melancholy air about these children as Millais tried to capture the faded optimism of the Enlightenment philosophy of innocence. The demands of the machine-age had resulted in many more children being exploited on the streets which heightened the middle-class need to protect their children from the ills of society. Reproductions of his fancy pictures¹¹⁷ appeared in the printed press such as the *Illustrated London News* which helped to commercialise the popularity of these children. The famous *Cherry Ripe* in 1879 secured Millais's name within this sentimental genre. Just a few years before, Millais produced two paintings with the subject of convalescence in a less sentimental vein. In using this theme Millais imbues a sense of mortality in to his subjects in order to dissociate with the sickly sentiment that had become linked to the fancy genre.

¹¹⁵ Harry Campbell, 'Woman an Undeveloped Man', in *Differences in the Nervous Organisation of Man and Woman: Physiological and Pathological (1891)*, in <<http://www.archive.org/stream/differencesinner1891camp>> [accessed 31 August 2010], pp.153-160, p.155.

¹¹⁶ Dijkstra, p.169.

¹¹⁷ Sentiment over narrative.

In these paintings we witness a somewhat freer style than in his Pre-Raphaelite years. The sincerity of this movement is maintained in Millais's children and evolves in to identification with the Impressionistic 'Aestheticism' of Whistler. ¹¹⁸



John Everett Millais, *The Convalescent* (1875, oil on canvas, Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museum)

[Fig.20]

Firstly, I would like to examine *The Convalescent* (1875) shown in [Fig.20]. This intimate portrait¹¹⁹ of a young girl in her white nightdress is captured as if she were in a studio with a dark background

¹¹⁸ Paul Barlow, 'Introduction: Millais and his critics', in *Time Present and Time Past: The Art of John Everett Millais* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2005), pp.1-8 (p.3).

¹¹⁹ (76.8 cm x 64 cm) dimensions provided by Aberdeen Art Gallery.

which emphasises her expression. Her dark eyes have passed suffering but there lingers the anxiety of an adolescent 'not long entered in her teens.'¹²⁰ The blanket and flowers are further signifiers of her fragile condition and of the care given to her. The blue cornflowers commonly symbolised delicacy which the girl has left behind her. In her hands she holds other wild flowers, perhaps sweet peas, which represent weakness or a delicate pleasure. The texture of her gown is most striking in its careful attention to the creases and folds of the fabric. It is in this texture that we see something of Whistler which calls to mind his *Symphony in White, No.1: The White Girl* (1862). Whistler's girl, perhaps on the periphery of innocence, stands motionless with vacant expression but at the same time commanding drama in her ghostly vision. Millais's brushwork illuminates *The Convalescent* in an immediate appeal to the emotions which we do not see in the more polished finishes of Holl's *Daughter of the House*, for example. The gown is tangible without the fresh crispness that would speak of rested slumber; this girl has experienced suffering and seeks protection. A reviewer in 1888 romanticizes the whole experience of this convalescence in the following lines:

Rich masses of auburn hair fall in sweet disorder over her shoulders, and, though the features have naturally a somewhat pensive cast, the whole air and attitude of this fair convalescent recall Gray's exquisite lines on those who long have tossed on the thorny bed of pain, and who, while regaining their lost vigour, find that – "The meanest floweret of the vale/The simplest note that swells the gale/The common sun, the air, the skies/To them are opening paradise."¹²¹

There is a subtlety in this painting that the reviewer sees as poetry on the canvas. The lines of Thomas Gray's poem speak of a rural past that provide a remedy to the convalescent through nature itself.

¹²⁰ James Dow, 'The Keppelstone Collection', *Magazine of Art* (Jan., 1888), pp.378-384 (p.378).

¹²¹ James Dow, p.378.

The demand for this subject is revealed in the personal notes of Alexander Macdonald who purchased Millais's *The Convalescent* for his wife. Macdonald paid £420 and he remarks: 'When Millais sent me this exquisite picture of this charming little lady how proud I was...It was a large sum to pay but may yet fetch 4 or 5 times the amount.'¹²²



John Everett Millais, *Getting Better* (1876, oil on canvas, Private Collection)

[Fig.21]

Recent research¹²³ has revealed that the model is not Alice Millais but Elizabeth J A King who also appears in *Getting Better* (1876) [Fig.21]. In a letter from Effie Millais to Macdonald (20 September 1875) she expresses the reality of childhood illness: 'Your little Lady is with one of my girls. She is very lovely and the picture was the admiration of everyone who came into the studio – the Mother

¹²² DD391/13/1 Aberdeen City Archives (information provided by Aberdeen Art Gallery).

¹²³ Aberdeen City Archives – The Alexander Macdonald of Kepplestone Collection.

is a Mrs King...They are very respectable people but the child is very delicate and had a dreadful cold all winter.'¹²⁴

This sickly girl is sat tucked up in bed with a basket of grapes and a pale beige shawl and blanket. The grapes, which could be read as the blood of Christ, and the vine leaves which spill on to the bed indicate the patient's renewal in strength. A tonic is placed to the right on the side table. The angles of the two visiting children are placed side-on to the bed.¹²⁵ The reason for this might be so that the invalid remains the subject of our attention. We cannot fail to notice the sophistication of the girl's dress which is perhaps a sign to the sufferer that she will soon be able to dress this way again. This girl plays mother in her attendance at the bed-side with her basket of provision. M.H. Spielmann remarked on this painting in 1898: 'In the invalid herself will be recognised a wonderfully truthful rendering – not only the appearance of slow recovery, but also the observation that has caught that timidity with which a young convalescent usually receives visitors.'¹²⁶ The nervousness that Spielmann refers to provides another insight in to the application of such sentiment with childhood. Delicate handling was believed necessary when raising children of such breeding as the girl learns to *receive visitors*.

The paintings I have discussed in the childhood genre are from the mid-Victorian period. In observing convalescence in girlhood, I have drawn out parallels with convalescent womanhood as seen in Chapter 1. From delicate beginning's, a girl's existence in a protective atmosphere continued to adulthood. There are convalescent children that appear at the end of the century in a rather more sentimental vein in the paintings of the Cranbrook Colony, for example. The explanation for the interest in the subject of convalescence in the 1870s can be put down to the threat of the move away from dependent women with the arrival of the Married Woman's Property Act in 1870. Such a threat manifested itself in ensuring the children would learn to maintain delicacy for a life of being

¹²⁴ DD391/13/8/9 – Aberdeen City Archives (information provided by Aberdeen Art Gallery).

¹²⁵ This canvas was originally intended to form right corner of Millais's *The North West Passage* (1874). It was to show a boy and girl turning a globe which may in part explain the positioning of these children.

¹²⁶ M.H.Spielmann, *Millais and His Works* (Edinburgh: W.Blackwood, 1898), p.129. NAL.39.D.125.

supported by the dominant male in society. There was a belief that children will save the adults, yet in the Edwardian period children too broke away from the strict environment forced upon them to conform.

Concluding Sentences



Fun: Out of Date, (April 15, 1891) in British Periodicals Online

[Fig.22]

By 1891, women were beginning to emerge defiant of the delicately feminine household role they had been assigned for much of the century. [Fig.22] shows precisely this situation where a doctor is advising the woman to indulge in the profession of domesticity for the sake of her husband. The woman replies: "But it's so awfully feminine!"

I have demonstrated a picture of women and their connection with convalescence on the route to freedom from a male dominated society. The vote was indeed some way off, but it has been revealing to look at how men represented women in the paintings of the mid-Victorian period. Men

have been relatively absent from this genre and children are seen from the perspective of the girl anticipating her role as mother and future invalid.

The plentiful existence of these 'Convalescents' has gone some way to suggesting that it could be placed in a category of its own within the canon. In order to make a full case for this category one would need to examine all the relevant examples across the decades and beyond Britain to gauge external influences of France, for example, on the art market.

In the space of this dissertation I have found that examples centre on the 1870s. This is indeed a marker that the rise of modernity brought the invalid to the fore in this increasingly fatigued world and a period of rest and convalescence was being cried out for. A future project to chart how these representations change over the course of the century could be undertaken. Paintings such as Sir Frank Dicksee's *The Crisis* (1891) are testament to women being represented at a critical stage of life towards the end of the century. As women threatened the power of men and began to be competition for jobs in professions such as medicine, more images of dying or dead women appeared to remind them of their inherent delicacy and lack of power.

The *Invalids Magazine Album* was part of the final chapter in the history of the cult of the invalid. It poignantly ends at the start of the First World War when women were displacing men out of necessity. Emancipation is a slow process but it began with our invalid women enduring a society sick with inequality until they could bear it no more. Convalescence can be seen as a metaphor for these women biding their time to escape from the bind of marriage and forging an independent future if they desired. It is through these representations that this image of dependence lived on and is reflective too of how women perhaps saw themselves for a time. The journey from the romantic notion of the frail and beautiful convalescent culminated in her death on the canvas later in the century, as a further demonstration of male control and as a warning against her liberation.

Whilst we try to break away from the stereotype, the Convalescent is yet another. I have viewed this as a defiant or silent protest and at the same time tried to keep in mind that a period of convalescence was a necessary part of nineteenth-century life. 'The Convalescents' are a product of modernity and the increasing demands made upon man who anticipates his fall under the weight of change: '...the fear we have of our own collapse does not remain internalized. Rather we project this fear onto the world in order to localize it and, indeed to domesticate it...Then it is not we who totter on the brink of collapse, but rather the Other.'¹²⁷

To be modern is to be fatigued as we struggle to cope with everyday pressures. In our age of drugs we might see the benefits of some rest and recuperation and learn the art of getting better, whilst remembering that the cult of invalidism was the long rest to empowerment.

¹²⁷ Sander L. Gilman, 'Depicting Disease: A Theory of Representing Illness', in *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp.1-17 (p.1).

Illustrations

Chapter 1

Fig.1 (LMA/4292/01/001) *Invalid's Magazine Album* (courtesy of City of London, London Metropolitan Archives).

Fig.2 James Tissot, *The Warrior's Daughter or A Convalescent* (courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery/The Bridgeman Art Library).

Fig.3 James Tissot, *A Convalescent* (courtesy of **Krystyne Matyjaszkiewicz (ed), James Tissot**, Oxford: Phaidon and Barbican Gallery, 1984) pl.87.

Fig.4 James Tissot, *The Convalescent* (courtesy of **Krystyne Matyjaszkiewicz (ed), James Tissot**, Oxford: Phaidon and Barbican Gallery, 1984) pl.88.

Fig.5 James Tissot, *Girl in an Armchair: The Convalescent* (courtesy of Art Gallery of Ontario/The Bridgeman Art Library).

Fig.6 James Tissot, *A Morning Ride* (courtesy of Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) pl.100.

Fig.7 Ford Madox Brown, *The Convalescent (Emma)* (courtesy of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery).

Fig.8 James Tissot, *A Convalescent* (courtesy of Sheffield Galleries and Museum Trust/The Bridgeman Art Library).

Fig.9 James Tissot, *Jeune Femme souffrante* (courtesy of Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) pl.171.

Fig.10 James Tissot, *Soiree d'Ete (Summer Evening)*, (courtesy of **Krystyne Matyjaszkiewicz (ed), James Tissot**, Oxford: Phaidon and Barbican Gallery, 1984) pl.136.

Chapter 2

Fig.11 William Powell Frith, *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)* (courtesy of The Royal Collection).

Fig.12 Abraham Solomon, *Brighton Front* (courtesy of Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery).

Fig.13 *Punch: Amusements for the Sea-side* (courtesy of City of London, London Metropolitan Archives).

Fig.14 Abraham Solomon, *A Contrast* (courtesy of Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery).

Fig.15 William Gale, *The Convalescent* (courtesy of The Makins Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library).

Fig.16 Thomas Falcon Marshall, *Returning Health* (courtesy of Worthing Museum & Art Gallery).

Fig.17 William Mulready, *The Convalescent from Waterloo* (courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum/The Bridgeman Art Library).

Chapter 3

Fig.18 Frank Holl, *Convalescent* (courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library).

Fig.19 Frank Holl, *The Daughter of the House* (courtesy of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne).

Fig.20 John Everett Millais, *The Convalescent* (courtesy of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museum).

Fig.21 John Everett Millais, *Getting Better* (courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library).

Fig.22 *Fun: Out of Date*, Issue 53:1353 (courtesy of <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>).

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