

Out of Obscurity: The Artist Jane Maria Bowkett (1837-1891)

by

Kathleen Mary Laycock
B.A., University of Victoria, 2001

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Abstract

This thesis assembles a biographical portrait of the understudied Victorian figure painter Jane Maria Bowkett. I place Bowkett in the context of her family and London's nineteenth-century art world, a milieu in which professional identity and commercial success was determined by gender and class. As a professional artist, working for money, Bowkett contravened socially constructed ideals of feminine dependency. Through this study, I establish that little-known artists and commonplace pictures can contribute substantially to the historical record. Bowkett's paintings provide an untapped source of market-dependant work practices as well as a record of the middle classes' preference for particularly British scenes. Women form the subject of Bowkett's narrative genre pictures, which affirm and fracture class distinctions, index social progress, and subvert ideologically coded feminine norms.

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Exhibition Venues – Abbreviations

B	Birmingham, The Royal Society of Artists.
BI	British Institution, (1805-1867), London.
CP	Crystal Palace, London.
GI	Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts.
IPO	Institute of Painters in Oil Colours, London.
L	Liverpool (from 1877, The Walker Art Gallery).
M	Manchester Royal Institution (from 1883, Manchester City Art Gallery).
RA	Royal Academy, London.
RHA	Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin.
RSA	Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh.
SBA	Society of British Artists (Suffolk Street), London.
SFA	Society of Female Artists (from 1877, The Society of Lady Artists), London.

Introduction

Writings about women artists who have been or are under-represented in the canon are still a priority, and a focus on the monographic or biographic has meant neither the neglect of sophisticated questions about visual representation, complex social history, nor indeed the analysis of the cultural formations of gender.

Deborah Cherry, *Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies*

Jane Maria Bowkett is a little known and understudied Victorian figure painter. She was the eldest of thirteen children and her formative years were spent in the East End of London where her politically minded father, Thomas Bowkett, worked as a medical practitioner, participated in the Chartist movement, and initiated a co-operative scheme that gave working-class families the resources to own property. After training at one of London's government-run schools of design, Bowkett embarked upon a career as a professional artist. Throughout her prolific and remarkably long career, she worked in oils, mainly painting pictures of women and children. Even though she married into an artist family, Bowkett retained her professional autonomy by exhibiting under her maiden name. In spite of the birth of six children (of which only three survived), she steadfastly continued to paint and exhibit. Bowkett's narrative paintings were exhibited at various London venues and at provincial exhibition sites throughout Britain. By the 1880s, Bowkett and her artist husband, Charles Stuart, owned an impressive London studio-house where she lived and worked until her death in 1891.

Literature Review

Bowkett left no personal written record of her life and she was virtually ignored by nineteenth-century critics; the *Art Journal* gave her a mere two lines of praise in 1872.¹ To date, Bowkett has been the subject of three short articles. The first was part of a biographical series published in 1889 by *Queen, The Lady's Newspaper* in which the anonymous writer followed nineteenth-century biographical tropes by focusing on Bowkett's natural talent, self-determination, and self-education.² The other two articles are biographical sketches published in the 1980s by Dr. John Foley-Fisher; my research is indebted to Dr. Foley-Fisher's assiduous gathering of material facts.³ However, since these articles are not written from an art-historical perspective, they do not provide a

critical assessment of Bowkett's work. Deborah Cherry briefly outlined Bowkett's personal circumstances in *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (1993) and she remains the only art historian to address any aspect of Bowkett's social background or biography. For this background she draws upon Foley-Fisher's work and the *Queen* article.⁴

We do have some direct evidence concerning Bowkett's family background: in 1980, her father was the subject of an article by Stan Newens in the *History Workshop Journal*, "Thomas Edward Bowkett: Nineteenth Century Pioneer of the Working-Class Movement in East London."⁵ Newens' article chronicles Bowkett's father's political activities and lists T. E. Bowkett's publications, *Alchemy or the Art of Converting the Baser Metals into Gold, familiarly explained* (1844), *Freehold Property for Mechanics: Notes on Lectures* (1843), *The Bane and the Antidote or Bad and Good Associations* (1850), *Prospectus of the Poplar Freehold Provident Societies* (1851), and *An Address on Co-operation delivered to members of Poplar's Freeholders' Institute Co-operative Society* (1869). These texts, which were directed towards a working-class reader, contained practical information and advocated that workers combine their resources to achieve economic emancipation. Such radical documents are pertinent to an understanding of Bowkett's familial and social background.

As for Bowkett's work itself, although it has been included in some surveys of Victorian art, as well as in feminist texts and articles, her oeuvre has not been studied in depth. The first art historian to take account of Bowkett's work was Graham Reynolds in *Painters of the Victorian Scene* (1953). Reynolds deemed Bowkett's *Preparing Tea* (1860s)[fig. 1] amateurish and described it as exemplifying "the sense of security and intimacy felt to be given by the family."⁶ In 1971, Christopher Wood published the first edition of his *Dictionary of Victorian Painters*. In this initial major survey, *Preparing Tea* represents Bowkett's work.⁷ In a minor survey, *Victorian Panorama* (1976), Wood includes *Preparing Tea* as well as Bowkett's seaside scene, *Folkstone Beach* (1875); here, *Preparing Tea* is again described as depicting domestic femininity. Wood regards Bowkett's domestic interior as a welcoming image for the male family member whose day has been spent in the competitive commercial world.⁸ In the third edition of Wood's major survey, *Victorian Painters* (1995), *Folkstone Beach* represents Bowkett's work.⁹ In

Wood's latest compendium, *Victorian Painting* (1999), he includes Bowkett's undated *A Beach Scene* in the chapter on women artists and notes that Bowkett mainly painted "pictures of women and children, either interiors, or often beach scenes" in a slightly naïve, charming and delightful style.¹⁰

In 2002, the Anderson Galleries in Beverly Hills reproduced *Folkstone Beach* in colour in their exhibition catalogue, *Human and Divine: Four Centuries of European Painting, 1500-1900* [fig. 2]. The accompanying catalogue entry states that Bowkett "was a Victorian artist who specialized in domestic genre paintings. Her favourite setting was the seaside; particularly the beautiful resorts of the English south coast." It notes that Bowkett "exhibited extensively in London at the Royal Academy" and that she had "works accepted to many prestigious provincial exhibitions."¹¹

In her 1982 Ph.D. thesis, *The Mid-Victorian Woman Artist, 1850-1879*, Pamela Gerrish Nunn included Bowkett's paintings in her 443 illustrations of women's artwork; however, she did not single them out for enquiry. Nonetheless, Nunn's thesis does provide a valuable fund of information on numerous other women artists and their work.¹² Most importantly, an undated and unpublished nineteenth-century photograph album, "Pictures by Charles Stuart and J. M. Bowkett", includes 83 of Bowkett's paintings. Even though the reproductions are not of the highest quality, they constitute a key visual record of Bowkett's work.¹³

A paradigm shift in the interpretation of Bowkett's domestic scenes took place in 1982 with Deborah Cherry's pivotal article, "Picturing the Private Sphere." Cherry assessed *Preparing Tea* from a Marxist-feminist viewpoint and called attention to the tension and conflict embedded within the image. In interpreting Bowkett's *An Afternoon in the Nursery* (1860s),¹⁴ which depicts a woman absorbed in a book and ignoring her children, Cherry states that "Bowkett refused to accept that women had to be models of propriety and domestic virtue."¹⁵ Cherry revisits *Preparing Tea's* subversive potential in *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (1993) in which she argues that the picture articulates "sexual difference through the visual contrast of interior and exterior" and cites other examples of Bowkett's work that fit this pattern. In restating her premise that *An Afternoon in the Nursery* challenges hegemonic forms of femininity, Cherry contends that the picture "countered contemporary recommendations voiced by Ruskin that a

woman should be ‘wise not for self-development but for self-renunciation.’”¹⁶ Similarly, in *Gender and Art* (1999), Lynda Nead draws on Cherry’s scholarship when she uses *An Afternoon in the Nursery* to illustrate the transgression of bourgeois ideals.¹⁷

Despite such feminist reinterpretation, Bowkett’s work still receives scant critical attention and when references do occur they are usually cursory. In her 1986 article, “Women’s Mission: Theme of Woman as Comforter in Victorian Painting,” Elaine Shefer disregards any signage of conflict when she includes *Preparing Tea* with other visual portrayals of women in caregiver roles.¹⁸ In *Problem Pictures: Women and Men in Victorian Paintings* (1995), Nunn briefly references *Preparing Tea* in relationship to the enforcement of “female obeisance to the patriarchal timetable.”¹⁹ In the section reviewing women painters’ contribution to romance as a subject, Nunn suggests women were drawn towards this genre because of its saleability and cites Bowkett’s *A Tiff* (1886) as an example.²⁰ In an article published in 1992, “The Necessity of a Name: Portrayals and Betrayals of Victorian Women Artists”, Susan Casteras identifies Bowkett’s *A Budding Artist* (undated) as a rare depiction of a female figure paying serious attention to art study.²¹ The picture shows a young girl contemplating her drawing crayon and Casteras describes such artistic undertaking as “feisty and independent.”

In Nunn’s 1995 article, “Between Strong-Mindedness and Sentimentality: Women’s Literary Painting”, she describes Bowkett’s *Lucy Ashton at the Mermaidens’ Fountain* (1884) as “accomplished” and pertinently notes that Bowkett engaged in genres and themes that were popular with mainstream buyers.²² Most recently, in *Victorian Figurative Painting: Domestic Life and the Contemporary Social Scene* (2000), Mary Cowling categorises Bowkett’s *Young Lady in a Conservatory* (c.1873) as an uncontroversial pretty scene.²³ In sum, then, although scholars have shown a cursory interest in Bowkett, there has yet to be any sustained study of this little-known painter. Considering that her work was aimed at the contemporary market, yet carried seeds of criticism and resistance to contemporary definitions of femininity, Bowkett is worthy of serious and sustained study.

This thesis is designed to provide a comprehensive picture of the under-considered Bowkett and to elucidate her determined and committed engagement with Britain’s nineteenth-century art scene. In particular, Bowkett is of interest as a working

woman artist—one who, unlike others, did not have access to either a fine-art education or connections to the high art world. Although, like all women artists, Bowkett was middle class, her upbringing in the East End, her father's working-class medical practice and social activism, and her functionary training at a design school set her apart from her peers. Recognition and career opportunities for other better-known women artists such as Henrietta Ward, Elizabeth Thompson Butler, and Louise Jopling were promulgated by wealth and important contacts in art circles and high society. Even though Bowkett was accomplished and competent, she lacked the advantages of those women who were trained at one of London's private art schools, studied abroad or with renowned male artists, and whose prestigious education allowed them to distinguish themselves. Other women's privileges highlight Bowkett's anomalous standing and because she is clearly atypical, a study of Bowkett will fill a crucial gap in our knowledge of the career paths and possibilities for Victorian women of her socio-economic status.

Bowkett is also interesting as a middle-class woman who worked within an economy of production and consumption. Her work was displayed for sale in public venues, and because her pictures were designed as commercial undertakings, they had to appeal to the popular taste for anecdotal images. However, since art historians and critics traditionally allocate little value to commonplace narrative subjects, the significance of such market-orientated pictures often fails to be addressed. By analysing such pictures, this thesis challenges the tenuous distinction between high and low art.

Thus Bowkett is important in both a macro and a micro art-historical context. In the macro-framework, she represents all the professional women painters who have been elided from the history of Victorian culture, whereas, in the micro-view, she is an idiosyncratic social agent with a degree of autonomy. Analysing Bowkett and her art produces a different hierarchy of artists who are worth studying. Not only does Bowkett represent a certain aspect of women's experience, but it is clear she questioned what Victorian women could or should be. I will argue that Bowkett took advantage of popular taste and that her pictures reflect, construct, and, most importantly, question Victorian issues of class and gender.

Methodology

In the last twenty years, several studies have revealed the sheer number of Victorian professional women artists, and feminist art historians have selected some lesser-known artists such as the figure painters Emily Mary Osborn, Rebecca Solomon, and Emma Brownlow as subjects for enquiry. These artists often merit attention on the basis of an exceptional painting or an unusual theme, but their recovery is only made possible by extant paintings and nineteenth-century textual material, both biographical and critical. In Bowkett's case, the sheer paucity of information makes study problematic. For biographical information, there is only the *Queen* article, Foley-Fisher's research and an outline of the Bowkett/Stuart family tree, provided by Eckhard Stuart. Many of her paintings have not survived into the twenty-first century and are only known through photographs. This paucity of paintings and documents makes studying this artist difficult—though not, I will suggest, insurmountable. Although many paintings are lost, Bowkett's work is visually accessible by means of a nineteenth-century collection of photographs of her paintings (undated but with their original titles), recent auction catalogues, internet sites, and private collections. Moreover, compilations of nineteenth-century exhibition catalogue entries provide dates, titles, and sometimes the original price of Bowkett's paintings.

The scarcity of information on Bowkett presents, then, particular challenges to my chosen thesis. Neither is such scarcity unfamiliar to art historians working on women's careers in the Victorian period. Indeed, such difficulties have prompted scholars to rethink the traditional methodologies of art historical study. As Lisa Tickner argues, for women artists to be included in the history of art, scholars need to challenge the established protocols of the discipline and develop new methodologies. We need to include human relationships and insert art production in the processes of history. As Tickner writes, "we need an understanding of the visual articulation and production of ideological components (works of art are neither ideologically saturated nor ideologically pure)."²⁴ By selecting the little-known Bowkett as the topic for my research, I have been forced to place her in terms of social relationships and, of necessity, to extrapolate and construct these premises. Instead of extracting her from society, I have chosen perforce to embed her within society.

My study of Bowkett is guided methodologically by Deborah Cherry, whose seminal study *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* was not only indispensable as a starting point but also as an ongoing reference guide. Cherry applies feminist political theory to an investigation of the lives of women painters and their work. To determine their power and agency, she exposes patriarchal power systems, analyses historical conditions, maps social structures, and scrutinises women artists' heterogeneity. She identifies four themes central to the investigation of the Victorian women artist: "production, representation, spectatorship and signification."²⁵ I am also indebted to Pamela Gerrish Nunn's feminist scholarship and her exhaustive assemblage of primary material on Victorian women artists, newspaper and journal articles, exhibition reviews and records, relevant to the endeavours of women artists. Nunn's archival information provided a solid background that enabled me to compare Bowkett's work and social situation with that of her peers.

Julie Codell's critical interrogation of nineteenth-century biographical writing and the promotion of the male artist provided the critical apparatus for understanding the codes of Victorian biography. Biographical writings from the period offer the possibility of seeing and understanding the construction of social patterns and class and gender biases that were basic to the culture and to the art world in particular. For example, power differentials of gender and class are articulated in nineteenth-century women artists' autobiographies such as *Mrs. E. M. Ward's Reminiscences* (1911) and Louise Jopling's *Twenty Years of my Life, 1867- 1887* (1925). In their writings, the women construct their social and artistic identities through referencing familiarity with members of the aristocracy or renowned male artists.²⁶

For the commercial aspects of the nineteenth-century art market, Diane Sachko Macleod's documentation of the dynamics and shifts in British art-collecting habits was valuable in elucidating the circumstances and the status of contemporary British art. Powerful mercantile men from the provinces amassed the work of living British artists for a number of reasons including refinement and investment; these buyers were instrumental in shaping nineteenth-century culture. Although Macleod's theories pertain to extremely wealthy middle-class art purchasers, they provide a basis for understanding and

investigating ownership and spectatorship issues across a wider middle-class economic spectrum.

Mieke Bal's semiotic theories directed my understanding and interpreting of visual signs. For Bal, signs are essentially arbitrary but they accrue meaning in particular social contexts and communities. The processing of pictorial sign systems can thus create conflicts of interest between groups with opposing ideological interests. Bal argues that we should remember the unseen and unheard viewer who leaves no record, "notice the absences in the record as much as what survives; and shift the terms of analysis from the actually documented viewers to the way the latter's discourses create their own exclusivity."²⁷ I will expand upon the pluralistic nature of reception and interpretation and stress that viewers, pictures, and meanings are social products.

For terminology, I derive my categories from Julia Thomas. Art history tends to place a low value on art that is categorized as "genre"; the term carries the pejorative connotation of low art. Given its omnipresence in descriptions of Victorian art, the term "genre" will be unavoidable; however, I will use Thomas' useful definition of 'narrative painting' as an "umbrella term for what the Victorians called 'scenes from everyday life,' 'literary,' 'genre,' 'historical genre,' 'anecdotal,' 'domestic,' or 'subject' pictures."²⁸ The construction of stories from pictures contributed to a shared ideology that, while never static, was recognised at the time as a distinctively British form of viewing art.²⁹

This thesis is designed to expand and challenge the current picture of middle-class women's professional art practices in Victorian Britain. I open my thesis with a biographical account of Bowkett's life and chronicle those influences, namely her father's political views and her family home in the East End of London, which were important formative elements in her positioning in society and the art world.

In chapter 2, I examine the status of women both in Victorian society and in the Victorian art world. Although it is impossible to gain a full understanding of all women artists, certain parallels existed in their situations that brought them together in a collective "otherness" in the male-dominated art world. By elaborating a framework for a critical understanding of the historical construction of the middle-class woman, I explain the difficulties that these women encountered in attempting life as professional women artists. These difficulties encompassed a range of societal and commercial factors, such

as the power of the domestic ideal, the disadvantages of a feminine art education, patriarchal exhibiting practices and critics, and the special challenges in acquiring patrons and friends influential in the art world. Comparison between Bowkett and other artists determines in which ways her experiences both differed and conformed to the Victorian norm.

In chapter 3, I position artists in terms of social status and I argue for the significance of the Victorian studio-house in the establishment and metamorphosis of artistic identity. I give particular attention to the area around South Kensington and the extraordinary size, design, and renown of the Holland Park studio-houses. By recreating the London spaces inhabited by Bowkett, I consider the complex rules of production and consumption that governed the Victorian art world. Here, my primary concern is how the Victorian public was exposed to works of art. Apart from attending exhibitions and reading reviews, how did prospective buyers become informed of works of artistic merit? Relating this enquiry to codes of women's propriety, I will expose the bias within biographical journalism and other print media and illustrate that female artists were treated differently from their male counterparts.

In chapters 4 and 5, I discuss Bowkett's paintings. I argue that, despite being rooted in everyday subject matter, Bowkett's pictures contain signs of resistance to female subordination that disrupt their apparently prosaic representations. As well as being competently executed and affordable, her images are readable as either a confirmation or a contradiction of central principles of Victorian ideology such as female submission and domesticity. Given the absence of contemporary criticism regarding Bowkett's paintings, my line of reasoning will be supported by material drawn from the greater Victorian art world and will intersect with nineteenth-century socio-political gender issues. Since few of Bowkett's paintings are dated, it is not possible to consider her work in a linear sequence. Instead, I will group them by subject matter.

In chapter 4, I examine Bowkett's paintings of literary and historical figures as well as those depicting rural lives and expose the socio-political purpose that such pictures might have served. The prominence of Shakespearian characters in figural painting, I suggest, signalled a nationalistic pride in Britain's artistic heritage³⁰ and nostalgic pictures of rural life supplied a salve for modern urban angst.

In chapter 5, I turn to pictures of contemporary life and show why images of women at leisure, of seaside resorts, of childhood, and of the domestic interior exercised so much appeal to contemporary audiences. Despite their realist technique, the pictures do not necessarily reflect lived reality, but were structured around powerful ideological positions that shaped gender and class identity.³¹ In Bowkett's images, class and gender are marked and coded, and I will argue for a slippage in meaning that undermines the feminine ideal.

When researching Bowkett's work, I increasingly recognised that her art was conditioned by societal expectations as well as market forces. In order to succeed financially, women artists who sought to sell their work had to conform to existing market constraints. Ultimately, Bowkett's understanding of these market forces gave direction to her art production. As I explore the relationship between art and commerce, I reformulate the art-historical field of enquiry to argue that popular taste and "ordinary" paintings are not as simplistic as often assumed. If we set aside traditional value judgments on high and low art, women artists' work in these areas can be a key site for a cultural understanding of Victorian society and its ideological constructs.

Notes: Introduction

¹ "Royal Scottish Academy, Exhibition, 1872," *Art-Journal* 12 (1872): 110-1.

² "Our Portraits: Mrs J. M. Stuart," *Queen, The Lady's Newspaper*, 2 November 1889, 615.

³ John Foley-Fisher, "The World of Jane Maria Bowkett," *The Lady* (December 1986): 1102-3; "Jane Maria Bowkett, 1837-1891," *Women Artists Slide Library Journal* 20 (December/January 1988): 14-15. Dr. Foley-Fisher is an independent scholar living in Berkshire, England whose interest in Bowkett began in the mid-1970s. I am grateful to him for generously sharing his work.

⁴ Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993), 34-5.

⁵ Stan Newens, "Thomas Edward Bowkett: Nineteenth Century Pioneer of the Working-Class Movement in East London," *History Workshop Journal* 9 (Spring 1980): 143-8. Newens also quotes from a letter, preserved in the Place Collection in the British Library.

⁶ Graham Reynolds, *Painters of the Victorian Scene* (London: Batsford, 1953), 21. Modifications to *Preparing Tea's* nomenclature and date exemplify the difficulties of studying a little-known artist. On the basis of the tea preparations, depicted in the painting, Reynolds pointed out that the painting should not be confused with Bowkett's untraced *Preparing for Dinner*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1861. Reynolds, 85. While scholars occasionally refer to the painting as *Preparing for Dinner*, to avoid confusion, I will use the title *Preparing Tea* throughout this thesis. At the time of Reynolds' survey, a Robert Frank, Esq. owned the painting. However, sometime between 1953 and 1971 the painting was destroyed and by 1976 is known from a photograph taken by the late Mrs. Charlotte Frank, as reproduced in Christopher Wood, *Victorian Panorama: Paintings of Victorian Life* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976), fig. 52. Bowkett did not always date her canvases and *Preparing Tea* remained undated in the literature until 1982, at which point Cherry assigned a date of the 1860s, based on the picture's style. Deborah Cherry, "Picturing the Private Sphere," *Feminist Art News* 5 (1982): 8.

- ⁷ Christopher Wood, *Victorian Painters*, 1971, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ⁸ Wood, *Victorian Panorama*, 52; figure 204.
- ⁹ Wood, *Victorian Painters*, 3rd edition, 1995, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ¹⁰ Christopher Wood, *Victorian Painting* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1999), 326.
- ¹¹ *Human and Divine: Four Centuries of European Painting: Four Centuries of European Figure Painting 1500-1900*, (Anderson Galleries, Beverly Hills, California, 2002), 42-3.
- ¹² Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *The Mid-Victorian Woman Artist, 1850-1879* (Ph.D. diss., University College, London, 1982).
- ¹³ "Pictures by Charles Stuart and J. M. Bowkett," n.d. Stuart Family Papers, Jackson, Mississippi. I am deeply indebted to Colonel Eckhard Stuart, Bowkett's great grandson, for generously providing photocopies, pictures, photographs, and other information concerning his family history.
- ¹⁴ *Afternoon in a Nursery* is untraced and is reproduced from a photograph by A.C. Cooper. The 1860s date is assigned by Cherry.
- ¹⁵ Cherry, "Picturing the Private Sphere," 8-9.
- ¹⁶ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 134-7.
- ¹⁷ Lynda Nead, "Class and Sexuality in Victorian Art," in *Gender and Art*, ed. G. Perry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 163.
- ¹⁸ Elaine Shefer, "Women's Mission: Theme of Woman as Comforter in Victorian Painting," *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no.1 (March 1986): 8.
- ¹⁹ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Problem Pictures: Women and Men in Victorian Painting* (Hampshire: Scholar Press, 1995), 54. Nunn names the painting incorrectly as *Preparing for Dinner* 1860s. This was the title of Bowkett's 1861 RA painting, which remains untraced.
- ²⁰ Nunn, *Problem Pictures*, 66. Frustratingly, because Nunn does not provide an illustration, a description or a footnote to elucidate her choice, I have been unable to trace the painting.
- ²¹ Susan Casteras, "The Necessity of a Name: Portrayals and Betrayals of Victorian Women Artists," in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 217. *A Budding Artist* is held in a private collection. Dr. Casteras no longer has information regarding the whereabouts of the reproduction, and I have been unable to trace the picture. Personal communication with Dr Casteras, February 2006.
- ²² Pamela Gerrish Nunn, "Between Strong-Mindedness and Sentimentality: Women's Literary Painting," *Victorian Poetry* 33 (Aut/Winter 1995): 434.
- ²³ Mary Cowling, *Victorian Figurative Painting: Domestic Life and the Contemporary Social Scene* (London: Andreas Papadakis, 2000), 37. Cowling incorrectly names the painting as *Young Woman in a Conservatory*.
- ²⁴ Lisa Tickner, "Modernist Art History: The Challenge of Feminism," in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 251.
- ²⁵ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 15.
- ²⁶ Elliot O'Donnell, ed. *Mrs. E. M. Ward's Reminiscences* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd, 1911); Louise Jopling, *Twenty Years of my Life, 1867- 1887* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Limited, 1925).
- ²⁷ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (June 1991): 186.
- ²⁸ Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 4.
- ²⁹ Henry James, *The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), 150.
- ³⁰ Marcia Werner, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Nineteenth-Century Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 72.
- ³¹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 121.

Chapter 1

Biography: Jane Maria Bowkett, 1837-91

Jane Maria Bowkett came into the world in the same year that Queen Victoria ascended the British throne. She was born on 17 September 1837 in the East London parish of Poplar and was the first of Jane and Thomas Bowkett's fifteen children.¹ Little is known about Bowkett's² mother born Jane Watkinson of Stepney, except that she was born in January 1818 and married at the age of sixteen in May 1834.³ More is known about Jane Maria's father, Thomas Edward Bowkett (1805-1874),⁴ who was a medical practitioner, radical anti-capitalist, and a champion of the co-operative ideal for working-class families. An unsigned set of watercolour miniatures provides a visual image of the Bowkett family circa 1855 [fig. 3]. The three-quarter-length portraits in profile are mounted as a group with Thomas Bowkett at the top left and his wife, Jane, at the top right. She holds a young baby in her arms. Another nine children are arranged sequentially according to age. If all the children are present, the baby must be the tenth child, Julia Deborah, born on 24 May 1855.⁵

Since Jane Maria Bowkett spent the first twenty-four years of her relatively short life living in the family home at the Folkstone Terrace, it is important to construct her family's class background through Thomas Bowkett's work and politics. Although practically all nineteenth-century professional women artists were members of the middle class, the "middle class" was not a single entity; it was made up of all sorts of people with different social and financial circumstances. Upon examination, we can see that Bowkett's background differed significantly from the majority of women artists who attained a modicum of critical recognition. For them, family rank improved their chance of recognition and success, whereas Bowkett's relatively lower social status hindered her access to powerful people within the art world. At the same time, however, this outsider status may have given Bowkett a position from which to critique the dominant ideals of middle-class society.

Thomas Bowkett was born in 1805; he studied medicine and qualified as a licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries. Around 1830, he entered into general practice in Poplar and for much of his career practiced at 2 Folkstone Terrace, East India Dock Road."⁶ As a medical practitioner Thomas Bowkett was a member of a rising

professional class; however, the nature of the medical profession was such that the apothecary-surgeons occupied a much lower social position than physicians.⁷ The inferior status of Victorian surgeons can be partly attributed to the physical component of the surgeon's work and to the commercial associations of the apothecary's practice. While not a licensed member of the Royal College of Surgeons, Thomas Bowkett probably carried out minor surgical procedures and certainly would have prescribed and dispensed drugs. Hence, in the hierarchy of Victorian medicine, Thomas Bowkett would have occupied the lowest rank.⁸ Although we have no clear statistics on the income of a mid-century general practitioner, average gross earnings of between £300 and £500 have been suggested.⁹ That figure, however, would not take into account either Bowkett's business expenses or losses incurred by bad debts. Establishing a practice, as well as setting up a household and supporting children, was expensive, and financial insecurity may have led to Thomas Bowkett's late marriage at age thirty.

Thomas Bowkett established his practice close to the Docklands, an overcrowded working-class London district marred by industrial pollution and noise [fig. 4]. Describing the poverty of the neighbourhood in 1861, Charles Dickens wrote:

Down by the Docks, is a region I would choose as my point of embarkation aboard a ship if I were an emigrant. It would present my intention to me in such a sensible light: it would show me so many things to be run away from.¹⁰

Despite the East India Dock Road's function as a major service route for London's commercial life, it was considered one of the more desirable addresses within this undesirable area and middle-class families occupied large houses along the road.¹¹ A doctor's house usually had a double front with a separate surgery entrance for patients.¹² Unlike wealthier patients, who were seen by their physicians at home, poor patients were expected to attend at the practitioner's address; hence patients would have been seen in rooms, which had been set aside for a clinic (or doctor's surgery) within the Bowkett family dwelling.

Since strong political convictions might offend potential patients, Victorian medical men tended not to become involved in political activities.¹³ Despite this, as a social reformer and a member of the Chartist movement, Thomas Bowkett openly

declared his concern for “the degraded condition of the working men of England.”¹⁴ He supported trade unions¹⁵ and freedom of the press and served on committees for the Metropolitan Parliamentary Reform Association and the Association for the Repeal of Taxes on Knowledge.¹⁶ He attached great importance to working people’s ability to own a home, urging workers to “emancipate each other from the Landlord’s clutches”,¹⁷ and provided them with a scheme for so doing. Bowkett proposed a new form of building society, one that the workers (as subscribers) would own and control. His ideas, published by the Chartist bookseller John Cleave under the title *Freehold Property for Mechanics: Notes of Lectures* (1843), attracted considerable attention and over the next thirty to forty years his scheme was adopted by numerous societies all over Britain.¹⁸ Bowkett’s medical contact with working people who laboured hard for low wages would almost certainly have strengthened his desire for their financial betterment.

Bowkett also published *The Bane and Antidote or Bad and Good Associations* (1850), a compilation of his six-penny pamphlets in which he explained his theories of co-operative property ownership, provided compound interest tables, and demonstrated the advantages of collective savings. Bowkett argued:

If it be right for Bishops, Priest, and Deacons to receive interest, that is to say, to get money without working for it, if it be right for those who seldom or never work, to get money without working for it, it cannot be wrong for the man who has laboured hard for many years to get money in that way too.¹⁹

Although his provocative observations were addressed to men, women were not excluded from joining the Freehold (building) Society. In one instance, when a husband refused to take a share in the scheme, his wife made the subscription and shortly afterwards the society provided the funds for her to purchase the couple’s own home.²⁰

Considering Thomas Bowkett’s high regard for Friendly Societies, it is possible that he supplemented his income by serving as a medical practitioner to one. To obtain sickness benefits, workingmen contributed money to societies and clubs. The practice was a contentious issue for many medical practitioners, as they disliked consumers using their collective muscle to keep rates of professional remuneration low.²¹ The majority of general practitioners therefore held club appointments in low esteem. Furthermore, as fees-for-service were based upon the socio-economic status of the patient, practices in

working-class districts implied lower medical incomes and were less desirable places to practice.²² We thus see Thomas Bowkett was a radical lower-middle-class professional, one who was deeply concerned with the social welfare and rights of the working poor, and who seems to have been relatively unconcerned with personal social advancement.

According to *Queen* magazine (1889), unlike the majority of “artists who have arrived at eminence in their profession,” Jane Maria Bowkett had a complete lack of artistic training in any branch of her family. Moreover, she grew up in a family home “wholly devoid of pictures”.²³ Given the Victorian penchant for ornament this might seem surprising, but not if we consider her father’s socio-political beliefs. The bourgeois desire for material acquisitions would probably have held little attraction for a man committed to improving the lives of working families. The home contained a library and, as a lecturer, a writer, and a founder of the Poplar Literary Institution, her father obviously held the educative value of the literary arts in higher esteem than the visual. He strongly believed in financial independence and, by providing his daughter with vocational training, he contributed to her later economic independence.

In recognition of Bowkett’s early aptitude for drawing, her parents enrolled her in one of the London schools of design after she had finished her schooling.²⁴ In contrast to the fine art training offered by private art schools, the tuition provided by the state was directed towards the applied arts and industry. The governing boards assumed that women possessed gender-specific skills. Originality and creativity were considered to be specifically masculine characteristics and the creative area of art was thought to be beyond the reach of women. As a result, they were trained to copy and instructed in the drawing of ornamentation with a view to them being employed in the field of design (in the following chapter, I will discuss copying and art education for women in detail).²⁵

Art and design training was one of the few further education options open to women and, even though they were not as productive as their older sibling, three of Jane Bowkett’s sisters followed in her footsteps. Eliza Martha (b.1839) attended the same training school as Jane Maria and they formed a close working relationship that was to last for several years.²⁶ Though it is not known if they received formal training, two other sisters, Leila Matilda (b.1852) and Jessie Undine (b.1857), were also painters and briefly

exhibited in London at the Society of British Artists and the Society of Female Artists as well as in Glasgow and Dublin.²⁷

According to the *Queen* magazine, when Bowkett was very young, she repeatedly copied a picture that decorated the washing basin in the bedroom until satisfied with her reproduction. She also “discovered in her father’s library some old books of beauties of the Georgian period, and those beautiful faces she was never tired of copying.”²⁸ From an early age Bowkett was recognised as the artist in her family, all the time she could spare from school hours was spent drawing or copying prints onto her slate or other available drawing material. At this point in her life, Bowkett’s activities conform to a specifically feminine approach to art. Later, while a student at the School of Design, Bowkett won the principal medals and prizes:

Thinking, however, that the system under which she was working was more adapted for designing and manufacturing purposes than for learning to paint pictures, she left there and went to the Old British Institution and the National Gallery, where she occupied her time copying in watercolours.²⁹

This action provides us with an indication of Bowkett’s independent and determined character. Since she had ambitions to become a figure painter, her self-education also included studies of the antique models in the British Museum.

As Bowkett attended almost every picture exhibition opening in London,³⁰ she would have become familiar with innovations and trends in the art world. Her own exhibition record began in 1858 when her untraced *Copy—Angels Heads, after Joshua Reynolds* was included in the newly formed Society of Female Artists’ second annual exhibition.³¹ In 1860, she made her debut at the British Institution with the untraced *Put Your Finger in the Foxhole*; the price was three guineas.³² In 1861, her domestic genre painting, *Preparing for Dinner* was exhibited and sold at the Royal Academy.³³ Also in 1861, she sent an additional three paintings, *A Young Recruit*, *A Morning’s Misery*, and *Portrait of a Lady*, to the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts’ first annual exhibition; it is not known if they sold.³⁴

In 1860 Jane Maria Bowkett’s name became linked with that of her future husband, Charles Stuart, a painter one year younger than herself. That year, Charles Stuart exhibited a picture at the Society of British Artists’ venue in Suffolk Street entitled

Fair and Fruitful Italy (and J. M. Bowkett).³⁵ The couple became lovers, and by the end of the summer of 1861, Bowkett had become pregnant. On 5 February 1862, Charles Stuart obtained a special licence and forty-eight hours later they were married in West Ham Parish Church.³⁶ Although there is ample evidence that many Victorian working-class couples married once a pregnancy was underway,³⁷ little is written on the topic as it pertains to the middle class.³⁸ There was a brief period of sexual permissiveness in the 1860s with discussions on “free love” and with groups such as the secularist movement encouraging sexual liberation and sexual reform.³⁹ Nonetheless, middle-class social mores continued to dictate that children should be conceived within wedlock.

On 5 June 1862, four months after her marriage, Bowkett’s daughter Leila Imogene was born. Her first son, Charles Edward Gordon, was born in 1865. In total, Bowkett gave birth to six children, only three of whom survived beyond their first year. Although infant mortality rates slowly improved throughout the Victorian era, a lack of understanding regarding disease transmission contributed to the high death rate.⁴⁰ In December 1866, she delivered twin boys who both contracted whooping cough and died in succession in March 1867. A further tragedy occurred following her next son’s birth: he died of convulsions at the age of seven weeks. Bowkett’s final child, William Arthur, was born in 1869. Bowkett’s childbirth record of seven years was, by Victorian standards, relatively short and possibly represents her participation in one phase of Victorian women’s emancipation. By the late 1860s both the pessary and the sheath were sold in Britain and forward-thinking Victorian women benefited from these methods of birth control.⁴¹ The birthrate in the middle class dropped in the 1870s and sociologist Patricia Branca has convincingly argued that the defining factor was women’s agency.⁴²

Sometime following their marriage, Bowkett went to live with her husband’s extended artist-family. Charles was the youngest son of Charles and Amelia Stuart, both artists. Although they worked and lived on Stepney Causeway, in a working-class area, their “Manor House” address suggests that they occupied a large residence. Several members of the Stuart household were known to be painters: Miss G.E. Stewart (exh.1848-55), painter of fruit pictures; William Stuart (exh.1848-60) marine painter; Mrs William Stuart (exh.1863), genre painter; W.E.D Stuart (exh.1846-58), painter of still-life and marine scenes; Charles Stuart senior (exh.1855-60s), painter of fruit pictures; Amelia

Stuart (b.1802-? exh.1850s), figure painter; and Charles senior and Amelia's daughter, Teresa Fanny Stuart (1829-1913), a still-life painter.⁴³ Though the Stuarts must have contributed to the nineteenth-century artistic scene, today their work is virtually unknown.

Where and when Jane Maria Bowkett and Charles Stuart met is not recorded. The families lived relatively close together in London (the East India Road is located slightly east of Stepney Causeway with the district of Limehouse in between) and they may have met by chance. Notably, in 1854, W. E. D. Stuart exhibited *The Thames off Limehouse - a storm coming on at sunset* at the Royal Academy.⁴⁴ Perhaps he was in the habit of making sketches at the local waterside and the Bowkett family came to know the artist while they walked along the river. It is also possible that Bowkett met members of the Stuart family while attending exhibition openings. Both Bowkett's and Mrs. L. Stuart's work was shown at the 1858 Society of Female Artist's exhibition.⁴⁵ After an introduction to the Stuart family, Bowkett perhaps acted as a model for her future mother-in-law, Amelia Stuart, who was a figure painter.⁴⁶ The date and title of Charles Stuart's untraced *Fair and Fruitful Italy (and J. M. Bowkett)* (1860) suggests that by 1860 Bowkett was modelling at the Stuart family studio, and it was common practice for women painters to use family and friends as models.⁴⁷

In 1866, Jane Maria Bowkett, Charles Stuart, their children, his parents, and his sister Theresa moved from Stepney further down the Thames to Gravesend.⁴⁸ Their elegant new home was situated close to the popular leisure venue of Rosherville pleasure gardens. Gravesend lies close to the Thames Estuary and the open ocean. Sea, sand, boats, and fishing pots are familiar motifs in Bowkett's work and Christopher Wood describes her as a painter of seaside scenes.⁴⁹ As early as 1862, she exhibited *The Seaside* and *A Seaside Amusement* at the British Institution.⁵⁰ In the *Wonders of the Prawn Net* (1864)[fig. 5], a picture showing a little girl peering into a working boy's prawn basket, she sentimentalized childhood and poverty. For the middle class, the seaside was a playground for children and in *Britannia Rules the Waves* [fig. 6] and *Captain* [fig. 7] girls are shown in commanding poses and powerful roles. Although both paintings are undated, the clothing suggests a period during the 1880s, and these young figures surely

endorse and signal the changing status of women and their increasingly bold presence in public life.

Bowkett's art also displays her knowledge of Brighton and Folkstone. Since Brighton was an important early centre of the co-operative movement,⁵¹ Thomas Bowkett may well have had connections with the Brighton reformers and may have taken his family to the coast when he attended meetings. It is also likely that she spent time on the south coast with her sister Eliza Martha.⁵² Throughout her career Bowkett produced a number of seaside images and in this respect she was distinct from most women artists. Victorian social mores made sketching in public places problematic for women and few professional women portrayed the crowd at seaside resorts. To expose one's working self to the public eye contravened middle-class respectability: Barbara Bodichon's outdoor painting was considered too bold for a lady,⁵³ while Sophie Beale recalled being "disturbed by a shower of pebbles and mud" as she painted in Dorset,⁵⁴ and Louise Jopling found herself stared at and spied upon.⁵⁵ Although Bowkett's depictions of the urban crowd at the seaside represent places of leisure that were accessible to middle-class women, these places were usually pictured by men.

At Gravesend, during what must have been a physically and emotionally difficult period (including five pregnancies, the deaths of three babies, and also the death of her eighteen-year-old brother), Bowkett continued to paint and to contribute a significant number of paintings for exhibition. Her output dropped in 1871 when family responsibilities of another kind may have prevented her from painting and exhibiting.⁵⁶ Bowkett's youngest brother Albert James (b. 26 May 1862) was only nine years old when their mother, Jane, became unwell. As the eldest daughter, Bowkett would naturally have been expected to assume the difficult task of caring for her ailing parents and any dependant siblings. In 1872, her mother died from a brain tumour and epilepsy.⁵⁷ Eighteen months later, at age seventy, her father died in the Grove Hall Lunatic Asylum in Bow. Although the date of Thomas Bowkett's committal to the mental institution remains unknown, it seems to have been relatively recent, as he had published a further text on his co-operative scheme in 1869 and had continued his public activity in political causes until at least March 1871.⁵⁸

Sometime after her father's death in 1874, Bowkett and Stuart and their three children returned to central London and made their home in South Kensington. It is noteworthy that during her exhibition years (1858-1891), Bowkett changed her address eight times. Though frequent relocation was not unusual for the period, Bowkett's repositioning exemplifies the upward mobility of the mid-Victorian artist (the geographical and social significance of her various surroundings will be covered in chapter 3). In 1875, she and her husband rented a studio-flat in a fashionable building on the Fulham Road. In 1880, they relocated to Melbury Road, which was within the prestigious Holland Park enclave [fig. 8]. This location had gained its reputation for the grandiose construction of house-studios by well-known Royal Academy members such as Sir Frederic Leighton, Luke Fildes, and Marcus Stone.

Several female members of the Bowkett family became painters, including Jane Maria's daughter Leila. In the 1880s, Bowkett's youngest sisters, Leila and Jessie, lived and worked together in Acton, West London.⁵⁹ Though Elisa Martha continued to keep her family's home address at Folkstone Terrace, in 1863 and 1864, she exhibited scenes of Heidelberg and Cologne, which suggests that she spent time in Germany. Later in the 1860s, when Eliza Martha exhibited views of the south coast, she lived at another address on East India Road, as did a Kate Bowkett, who was possibly a cousin and, for a time, Eliza Martha and Kate worked and lived together in Barking.⁶⁰ Also living on the East India Road was George Bowkett, who printed Thomas Bowkett's previously mentioned book, *The Bane and the Antidote*. Kate may have been one of his daughters. At the end of the century, Jane Maria's niece Norah also exhibited for a brief time.⁶¹ This is a significant exhibition record for a family whose public relationship with the visual arts began with Jane Maria Bowkett in 1858.

Throughout her exhibition years, Bowkett produced paintings in oil, which, although they often featured children and sometimes included male figures, took as their primary subject the female figure. Bowkett's pictorial themes included contemporary women positioned within the home environment and at the seaside; women dressed in the costume of the last century, whose images evoked romantic narratives and incidents from history or literature; and rural women, standing, sitting, and working in the English countryside. Unfortunately, we do not know whether Bowkett employed professional

female models; we only know that the family cook and her sisters acted as models for some of her early works.⁶² In most middle-class households, boundary lines were drawn between the family's quarters and those of the servants,⁶³ thus by using the family cook Bowkett breached this social divide. Bowkett's figures are pictured in a variety of poses and perhaps models sat for more formal works such as her undated picture of romantic indecision, *Yes or No* [fig. 9], whereas female servants may have posed for some of the figures in paintings such as *Father's Dinner* (1881)[fig. 10]. Although it is most likely that Bowkett used mainly family members, as did the majority of women artists, she may have continued to use servants as models and in the following chapters, I will pursue further the question of servants and models.⁶⁴

At the beginning of her career, Bowkett's pictures predominantly represented domestic scenes, but by mid-career she included literary themes. This variety was in keeping with the majority of Victorian painters. Exhibition catalogues record numerous examples of artists who did not confine themselves to a single theme or genre. A single artist might send a mixture of genre, still life and historical pieces to the Royal Academy and other exhibition venues. For example, in 1854, W.E.D. Stuart exhibited a dramatic marine scene together with "A fruit piece" at the Royal Academy.⁶⁵ Portraiture, the most reliable source of income for a number of men and women painters, was not highly regarded by the critics. While artists such as Sophie Anderson (1823-c.1898), Henrietta Ward (1832-1924), Emily Osborn (1834-after 1913), and Louise Jopling (1843-1933) gained a modicum of critical recognition for their history, literary or landscape work, their income came from portraiture. Bowkett, however, did not inhabit the social realm necessary to gain portrait commissions and she probably relied upon paintings with narrative themes to provide her with a limited but steady income.

We know that Bowkett exhibited her work in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dublin, and she probably sent work to minor exhibitions in towns such as Brighton. In the early 1880s, three of her pictures were exhibited at the Royal Academy, and in the years 1884 and 1885, Bowkett reached the pinnacle of her career; during these two years, she exhibited 18 paintings. Surprisingly, after a subsequent move to West Hampstead in 1884 and the purchase of a grand house with a large studio addition, although she continued to paint, Bowkett's

contributions to public exhibitions decreased. There is no record of Bowkett's sisters or her daughter working at the Hampstead address, however, both her husband and their elder son, Charles Edward Gordon, were also active in the Hampstead studio.⁶⁶ Dinner invitations were sent out to well-known artists, and Charles Stuart was nominated for membership into the prestigious Savage Club, whose members included Charles Dickens and the academician Luke Fildes.⁶⁷ Bowkett and Stuart also entertained people from the theatrical world, and the famous Victorian illusionist and anti-spiritualist John Maskelyne was a frequent visitor to the house.⁶⁸ Because the Stuarts entertained theatrical people, we can assume they held a relatively liberal attitude to social ranking. Although the theatre played an important part in London social life and artists knew and admired actors and actresses, for the most part, theatrical people were not received in conservative middle-class homes.⁶⁹

Jane Maria Bowkett died unexpectedly on 1 June 1891, after a brief nine days' illness; she was 53. During this year, the mortality attached to influenza in England and Wales was estimated to be 16,686, and it was thought that the epidemic had peaked in London during January. Following a reduction in outbreaks, it resurfaced in April 1891⁷⁰ and Bowkett contracted the disease in May and soon became seriously ill. She rapidly deteriorated with the development of an influenza-pneumonia and did not recover. Her eldest brother Thomas, who had assumed his father's medical practice, attended her, but her life could not be saved. Bowkett was interred in Kensal Green Cemetery and, following his death in 1907, Charles Stuart was interred alongside his wife.⁷¹

Obviously proud of her father's name, Bowkett demonstrated her independence by signing and exhibiting her paintings under her maiden name. And yet even though she continued this habit throughout her marriage, on her death certificate, her principal occupation was entered as "wife of Charles Stuart" with "artist (painter)" added below. On her gravestone she is remembered by the words "JANE MARIA THE BELOVED WIFE OF CHARLES STUART." The fact that Bowkett's career is mentioned in the death certificate only as a supplement to her domestic role reveals the rarity of Victorian women's cultural production being fully acknowledged and further suggests that the role of wife and mother conflicted with the aspirations of the Victorian career woman.

Bowkett is compelling for a number of reasons; she both represents an understudied phenomenon – the Victorian middle-class-working woman – and she is a striking anomaly within this cultural group. In the following chapter, I will take a close look at the way Bowkett and other professional women painters transgressed contemporary notions of Victorian gender roles; they partook in what was conventionally considered a male occupation, they confronted barriers to such employment, and they narrowed the gap between gendered working spheres of the middle class.

Notes: Chapter 1

¹ Eckhard D. Stuart, “The Bowkett Family History,” 1996; Foley-Fisher, “Jane Maria Bowkett, 1837-1891,” 14. Twins born in 1860 died in infancy.

² For the most part, I will refer to Jane Maria Bowkett as Bowkett in the body of this thesis.

³ Jane Watkinson was “born in January 1818 at Stepney Green, Stepney and was christened 21 January 1818 Anglican at St. Mary Whitechapel Church, Stepney.” E. Stuart.

⁴ Thomas Edward Bowkett was born on January 29 “at Jacob Street in Bermondsey, London and christened Anglican on 17 Mar 1805 at Saint Mary Magdalene in Bermondsey.” E. Stuart.

⁵ It is very possible that Bowkett painted the images. Foley-Fisher attributes the paintings to Bowkett, whereas Eckhard Stuart believes, based on a note, that they are the work of her mother. The writing on the note is too indistinct for me to comment. Because the *Queen* article states there was no artistic background on either side of the family, I am inclined to agree with Foley-Fisher. However, it is possible that Bowkett’s mother was an amateur artist. The miniatures were passed down the family to Eckhard Stuart, who had them framed together in 1981.

⁶ Newens, 143. The address on Jane Maria Bowkett’s birth certificate is 1 East India Road, Poplar

⁷ Anne Digby, *Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 108.

⁸ Jeanne M. Peterson, *The Medical Profession in Mid-Victorian London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 213. See table 13. The 1880 fee schedule based upon practitioners’ qualifications places the licentiate at level four—the lowest grade on the scale.

⁹ Digby, 138.

¹⁰ Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861; reprint, London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), 229.

¹¹ Rosemary Taylor, 1996 Chair, East London History Society.

<<http://www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com>> Adjacent streets were filled with factories and workshops. Poplar was heavily bombed during the Second World War and Folkstone Terrace no longer exists.

¹² Digby, 28.

¹³ Peterson, 128.

¹⁴ Bowkett, *The Bane and Antidote or Bad and Good Associations*, 1850, preface.

¹⁵ Trade unions were legalized in 1824. Sally Mitchell, ed. *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Trade Unions”.

¹⁶ Mitchell, s.v. “Taxes on Knowledge”. The pressure group, the Association for the repeal of Taxes on Knowledge, were concerned with lowering the duty on advertising. The advertising duty was repealed in 1853 and was one reason for “the rise of a mass press.”

¹⁷ Bowkett, 21.

¹⁸ Newens, 144-5.

¹⁹ Bowkett, 26.

²⁰ Bowkett, 343.

²¹ Digby, 50.

- ²² Peterson, 210.
- ²³ *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615. Presumably, Bowkett supplied *Queen* with this information.
- ²⁴ It is not known which school Bowkett attended.
- ²⁵ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press Ltd., 1987), 18-50.
- ²⁶ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 35-36.
- ²⁷ Christopher Wood, *Victorian Painters*, 3rd edition, s.v. "Bowkett"; Charles Baile de Laperriere, ed, *The Society of Women Artists Exhibitors, 1855-1996: A Dictionary of Artists and their Works in the Annual Exhibitions of the Society of Women Artists*, s.v. "Bowkett."; Roger Billcliffe, comp, *The Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, 1861-1989: A Dictionary of Exhibitors at the Annual Exhibitions of the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts*, s.v. "Bowkett"; Ann Stuart, comp. *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts: Index of Exhibitors and their Work, 1826-1979*, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ²⁸ *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615. This might be a sign of the paucity of her models. Because self-determination and hard work were considered admiral qualities, this rhetoric is common in Victorian biographical writing.
- ²⁹ *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615.
- ³⁰ *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615. Visits to the National Gallery may have inspired Bowkett's *Copy—Angel Heads, after Joshua Reynolds* (1858).
- ³¹ Baile de Laperriere, *The Society of Women Artists Exhibitors*, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ³² Algernon Graves, F.S.A. *The British Institution, 1806-1867: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from the Foundation of The Institution*, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ³³ Algernon Graves, F.S.A. *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, s.v. "Bowkett." The painting is untraced.
- ³⁴ Billcliffe, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ³⁵ Jane Johnson, comp. *Royal Society of British Artists, 1824-93 and The New English Art Club 1888-1917*, s.v. "Stuart." The painting is untraced. Given the Victorian propensity for naming children after their parents, it is extremely difficult to separate Charles junior's paintings from those of Charles senior. It is not known if the artist was Bowkett's future husband or her future father-in-law.
- ³⁶ Since the ceremony took place in a country church, outside both of their home parishes, and with no family members present, we may conclude that the marriage did not meet with parental approval. The Archbishop of Canterbury granted the special licence and the witnesses were John Abbott and Rick Golleedge about whom nothing is known.
- ³⁷ Jan Marsh, "Votes for Women and Chastity for Men," in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John M. Mackenzie (London: V & A Publication, 2001), 118.
- ³⁸ Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House* (London: Harper Perennial, 2003), 14. Statistics indicate that twelve in one thousand babies arrived seven and a half months after marriage in upper and middle-class families.
- ³⁹ Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 170.
- ⁴⁰ Flanders, 40.
- ⁴¹ Mason, 176-8. As a contrast, Bowkett's mother gave birth to fifteen children over a twenty-five year period. Despite the decrease in middle-class families, after 1850, the fertility statistics for Poplar, one of the poorer London boroughs remained high. See Ellen Ross, "Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's Working-Class Mothers, 1870-1918," in *Labour and Love: Woman's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, ed. Jane Lewis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), 76.
- ⁴² Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 114-41.
- ⁴³ Wood, *Victorian Painters*, vol. 2, 508-9. Missing from Wood's list is Mrs. L. Stuart who exhibited at the SFA.
- ⁴⁴ Denys Brook-Hart, *British Nineteenth Century Marine Painting*, s.v. "Stuart."
- ⁴⁵ Baile de Laperriere, *The Society of Women Artists Exhibitors*, s.v. "Bowkett" and "Stuart."
- ⁴⁶ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 220.
- ⁴⁷ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 51-2; 126.
- ⁴⁸ Foley-Fisher, "The World of Jane Maria Bowkett": 1103.
- ⁴⁹ Wood, *Victorian Painting*, 326.
- ⁵⁰ Graves, *The British Institution*, s.v. "Bowkett." The paintings are untraced.
- ⁵¹ Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 161.

⁵² Cherry, *Painting Women*, 34. Cherry does not cite a source for this information.

⁵³ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 170.

⁵⁴ S. Sophia Beale, *Recollections of a Spinster Aunt* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), 123. On this occasion, the local village boys' aggression made it impossible for Beale to continue with her sketching.

⁵⁵ Jopling, 53.

⁵⁶ In 1871, Bowkett exhibited one painting in Edinburgh and one in Dublin. Baile de Laperriere, *The Royal Scottish Academy Exhibitors*, s.v. "Bowkett"; Stuart, *Royal Hibernian Academy of Art*, s.v. "Bowkett".

⁵⁷ "She died 5 Dec, 1872 at 243 East India Road (their home) of 'Disease of Brain 18 months and Epilepsy Servus apoplexy 2 hours' at the age of 55." E. Stuart.

⁵⁸ Newens, 146. The *Essex Weekly News*, 29 September 1867 noted Thomas Bowkett's presence at the Beaumont Institute, Mile End as part of a working-class demonstration against the further enclosure of Epping Forrest. On 31 March 1871, he gave evidence to the Friendly Societies Commission. Although it is possible that Thomas Bowkett died while acting in a medical role at Grove Hall, the cause of death "pneumonia and diarrhoea" suggests he was an inmate. He died June 13, 1874 and if he left a will, it has not been traced.

⁵⁹ Close ties existed between family members and the Bowkett family's predilection for repeatedly using the same Christian names makes exact identification tricky.

⁶⁰ See Billcliffe, Graves, *The British Institution*, and Wood, *Victorian Painters*, s.v. "Bowkett."

⁶¹ Norah Bowkett was Thomas Bowkett junior's daughter, and after Jane Maria Bowkett's death in 1891, Norah kept house for Charles Stuart.

⁶² *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615.

⁶³ Flanders, 93-102.

⁶⁴ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 146.

⁶⁵ Brook-Hart, 58.

⁶⁶ Huish, *The Years Art* (1886), s.v. "Bowkett" and "Stuart." In 1886, Bowkett's three pictures were exhibited in Dublin, Glasgow and in Birmingham. Charles Stuart exhibited five paintings: RA 1, RHA 2, L 2, GI 1. C. E. G. Stuart (their son) exhibited two paintings: RHA 1, B 1. After 1879, *The Years Art* became an annual publication. The "Directory of Artists" section gives each artist's address and the number of works they sent to particular venues during that year.

⁶⁷ Huish, *The Years Art* (1886), 164. Listed under clubs connected with art, the Savage Club on the Strand elected its members by committee. Instituted for the association of gentlemen connected professionally with literature, art, the drama or science, membership was restricted to 350 town members and 50 country members.

⁶⁸ Foley-Fisher, "The World of Jane Maria Bowkett," 1103. "John Nevil Maskelyne," <http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/MASKELYNE_BIO.html> Known as a great escape artist, Maskelyne "perfected apparent levitation" to expose the artifice of spiritualist mediums.

⁶⁹ Shirley Nicholson, *A Victorian Household*: based on the diaries of Marion Sambourne (London: Barrie and Jenkins Ltd., 1988), 63.

⁷⁰ "Influenza History," <<http://1911encyclopedia.org/I%5CIN%5CINFLUENZA.htm>>

⁷¹ In 1900, Bowkett's brother Thomas died and he was buried in a grave next to his sister's.

Chapter 2

Locating Bowkett within the Gendered Framework of Victorian Art and Society

It is a curious anomaly in the structure of modern society, that gentlemen may employ their hours of business in almost any degrading occupation, and, if they have but the means of supporting a respectable establishment at home, may be gentlemen still; while, if a lady does but touch any article, no matter how delicate, in the way of trade, she loses caste, and ceases to be a lady.

Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England*

The above observation, made in 1839, continued to hold true throughout Bowkett's working life. To succeed in their profession, Victorian women painters had to overcome society's bias against middle-class women working for a living, and they had to work in a male-orientated profession. Despite disparities in upbringing, education, and personalities, in one way or another every Victorian woman who attempted to be a professional painter met with gender-based assumptions and prejudices impeding her success. That some did overcome these numerous societal prejudices and obstacles is evident by the sheer number of professional women artists.¹ In order to set the scene in which to place Bowkett's professional career, this chapter will investigate the various means by which women artists received their art education and practiced their profession, as well as the avenues through which they were able to sell their work. Interwoven into this discussion is a consideration of the larger cultural milieu that surrounded the Victorian British art world. In particular, I will address why there was such a stigma attached to middle-class women being involved in commerce. Thus, although we know few details of Bowkett's life, we can nevertheless broadly reconstruct the highly gendered art world in which she built her professional life.

Bowkett's career occurred at a historical turning point for women artists and for women in general. During the 1860s, the first women students were admitted to the prestigious Royal Academy Schools. At the same time, the "woman question" was hotly debated, with numerous opinions printed in newspapers and journals. In 1867, John Stuart Mill's proposed amendment of Second Reform Bill advanced the issue of women's suffrage and he published *The Subjection of Women* in 1869.² And, by their strident negotiation for equality, the protesting voices of Barbara Bodichon, Eliza Fox, Anna Mary Howitt, Bessie Rayner Parkes, and many others disrupted the political and social

status quo. These Victorian feminists were questioning fundamental gender inequities that excluded them from power within the public realm. One of the major sources of gender inequity was the ideology of “separate spheres,” which defined women as naturally suited to domesticity.

Domesticity and the Middle-Class Working Woman

Although men and women have occupied dissimilar social positions throughout much of British history, it was during the Victorian period that the middle-class ideology of separate spheres became entrenched. With their roots entwined in the eighteenth-century expansion of manufacture and trade, the religious and moral ideologies of the day endorsed the gendered separation of work and domesticity,³ and the respectable middle-class home came to be seen as the symbol of an ordered British nation.⁴ Central to this vision was the virtuous middle-class wife and mother, whose respectability was seen to uphold the family’s moral order in a competitive external world.⁵ To this end, she was required to remain within the domestic environment, where she was seen to be untainted by the world of trade.

Catherine Hall explains that, in the earlier agrarian feudal society, women’s work had formed an essential component of productive trade. Though most responsibilities were separated by gender, flexibility and mutual reliance (rather than a formal division of labour) fashioned the family unit of the village dweller. Even in the urban environment, where business was usually conducted from the home, women tended to be involved in commercial matters. In contrast, aristocratic women from landowning families were afforded considerably less freedom. Valued for wealth and expansion of familial property that could be gained via marriage, upper-class women were often perceived as decorative pawns.⁶

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with increased urban settlement, overseas trade, manufactured goods, and male education, the feudal self-sufficient economic family unit declined and the middle-class family rose to prominence. Since women in these newly wealthy families were encouraged to adopt the role of leisured ladies, they lost much of the autonomy that had previously come from labour. Woman from the middle classes became valued for their household management, whereas women

from the lower classes increasingly worked outside the home in factories and mills. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Evangelicals' position of moral and social responsibility regarding issues of reform had become dominant. According to Hall, "the Evangelical emphasis on the creation of a new life-style and ethic provided the framework for the emergence of the Victorian bourgeoisie" and the separate spheres ideology.⁷

With a deeply held religious belief that humans had to strive constantly against evil and sin,⁸ Evangelicals idealized the home presided over by a virtuous woman as a safe haven from the outer hostile world. According to the highly influential writer and art critic John Ruskin, whose stance in these matters was developed from that of his Evangelical parents, "the man's work for his own home is, as has been said, to secure its maintenance, progress, and defence; the woman's to secure its order, comfort and loveliness."⁹ While men were deemed suited for commerce, politics and public life, women's "natural" attributes were seen to suit them to the domestic sphere, where duties included the organization and welfare of servants and the moral guidance of children. Such beliefs encouraged societal censure of those middle-class women who chose to work for a living. By engaging in the commercial production of art and displaying their work in public, women artists transgressed this widely cherished ideal of the separate spheres.

Gender division played an important role in the way the rising middle classes defined themselves against the lower classes. Ideally, in middle-class families women and children would depend upon the support of men, whereas in the working-class family, the woman often contributed to the family income.¹⁰ Moreover, women's dependence and conduct signalled gradations in middle-class family status. In 1883, commenting on the fractured nature of the middle classes in *The National Review*, T. C. Keble contended that they:

do not constitute an order, or a class by themselves, bound together by any recognised ties, or consciousness of a continuous past; there is no circulation of sympathy to keep them warm in times of trouble; ...the whole class is an agglomeration of individuals, with no common interest or combining element of any kind.¹¹

Internal divisions within the middle class produced multiple social levels within the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie, and Kebble's view of the "individual clinging to [his] own position and property" was evident in several situations.¹² For tradesmen, the division between public business and private domesticity provided the upwardly mobile with respectability. As they became successful, a shopkeeper or a merchant's practice of living on or above the business premises gradually changed, and after they moved the family home from the commercial area into the more desirable suburb, they entered more fully into middle-class society.¹³ In turn, each of these changes moved the women of the family further from the locus of work and commerce.

The newly leisured state which defined the Victorian middle-class woman (in the ideal if not always in reality) presented difficulties for the aspiring woman artist. A popular advice book from early in the Victorian period gives insight into how the woman artist was viewed. In *The Women of England* (1839), an etiquette manual aimed at middle-class women, Sarah Stickney Ellis—whose prodigious literary output rather ironically fuelled the view that genteel women did not work for a living—conceded that, in some circumstances, women had to work. She advised that in common with teaching, arts such as engraving, the drawing of patterns and needlework were fields that women could enter without considering "themselves degraded by working for their own subsistence." In Ellis's opinion, "there surely can be no reason why the second class of females should not be so trained."¹⁴ There are two important points to note. Firstly, Ellis categorized working women as lower-middle class, and secondly, her suggested artistic activities comprise decoration and copying rather than active production.¹⁵ Because Ellis reserved creativity for men and implied that earning a living should only be undertaken out of necessity, her work both undermined women's abilities and discouraged middle-class women from entering the professional art world.

By entering into the commercial aspects of painting, women artists thus fractured boundaries of sexual and social order and risked a loss of femininity for themselves and loss of status for themselves and their families. In 1850, the popular weekly octavo sheet *Eliza Cook's Journal* attempted to legitimize the suitability of a career in art for women, opining that "art offers a pleasant and remunerative field. Landscape and portrait painting may be practiced agreeably and profitably. Society has no conventional prejudice against

it. A woman may be an artist and a 'lady',"¹⁶ Unfortunately, this tended not to be true. Cook, a professional writer and the daughter of a Southwark tradesman,¹⁷ chose to ignore the range of cultural values attached to the term "lady". By contrast, in her biographies of *English Female Artists* (1876) Ellen Clayton noted entrenched prejudices. In describing the problems encountered by Mary S. Tovey (exh.1872- 1877), the daughter of a Bristol merchant, Clayton explained:

she became rather diverted from her natural inclination to art by the study of music, having opportunity for receiving advantageous instruction in that science. In truth, her anxiety to become an artist was opposed at home, where the usual prejudice against ladies doing any kind of paid professional work was strongly existent.¹⁸

Parental disapproval was not confined to the rising mercantile elite. When Evelyn de Morgan, a lawyer's daughter connected on her mother's side to the aristocracy expressed her desire to become a painter in the early 1870s, her mother contended that "paid work for women was not only unfeminine but petit bourgeoisie".¹⁹ Judgements and apprehensions were often expressed by reference to class, and, in the above case, trades people were considered socially inferior persons.

This context of class and gender gives us some insight into the forces with which Bowkett may have contended with as she started her career in art. It should be noted that even women from socially progressive families had to counter parental opposition to their earning a living. Here, a comparison between the Bowkett family and the family of William J. Fox may be instructive. Despite sharing similar political stances, William J. Fox and Thomas E. Bowkett held opposing views on their daughters' desire to paint professionally. While Bowkett supported his daughters' endeavours to become artists, Fox gave his permission less readily. Unlike Jane Bowkett, then, Eliza Fox (1824-1904) had to fight for permission to become an artist. Even though Eliza Fox's Unitarian politician father campaigned for national education, supported the suffrage movement,²⁰ and provided the liberal education that enabled his daughter to become a vigorous force in feminist politics, he opposed her wish to become a professional artist.

As I have stated, issues of class were entrenched in attitudes towards paid work for women, and I believe Fox's social rank provides a clue as to why a radical reformist

would resist his daughter's entry into the work force. I contend that the disparate way Bowkett and Fox addressed their working-class audience while promoting the co-operative ideal suggests the men's divergent backgrounds and why they might have held differences of opinion. Bowkett declared "employers grow rich, although workmen grow poor" and he encouraged the men to "emancipate each other from the Landlords clutches."²¹ Fox articulated his attitude by lecturing:

Strangely enough, you who have the most need of co-operation leave it to the aristocratic and middle classes, and look listlessly or enviously at the splendour of club-houses and the convenience of railways, without asking how they were created, or heeding the lesson which they present to your eyes and ears.²²

In encouraging workers to improve their social condition, Fox reprimanded and denigrated his listeners, whereas Bowkett denigrated their superiors, and it would seem that the rhetoric signals the men's social positions. Fox's wealth and rank clearly distanced him from the workers and may have contributed to his stance regarding the impropriety of a vocation for the women in his family. In contrast, Bowkett's daily interaction with working people may have rendered him less removed from them and his modest income perhaps made him conscious that his daughters might require financial independence. Nonetheless, Fox did at last agree to his daughter's choice of career. And after he gave the necessary permission, Eliza Fox attended Sass's art school, established life-drawing classes for women artists, and became a strong advocate of professional work for women.²³

Charles Dickens provides another example of a middle-class Victorian parent whose daughter trained as an artist. Dickens allowed his daughter Kate to attend the London Female School of Design and she later became an accomplished painter.²⁴ Dickens had even closer ties to the working class than Bowkett. When he was a child, Dickens' family became destitute and at an early age Dickens experienced severe hardship and had to labour for a living in a blacking warehouse, an experience he later viewed with abhorrence. However, Dickens' forward-thinking views on self-sufficient working women did not always extend to the characters in his novels. Dickens' heroines contributed to the mid-nineteenth century image of women as moral and spiritual

protectors of the home. For example, in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) the selfless heroine Lucie is defined by her devotion to her father, her husband and her daughter. Such real and imagined family scenarios illustrate fractured and unstable middle-class positions as regards daughters working for a living. Even though Bowkett's art education was basic, it would seem she benefited from her father's rigorous belief in financial independence for both sexes.

As I have already mentioned, throughout the nineteenth century, a plethora of domestic advice books such as those by Ellis addressed a rapidly increasing middle-class audience, celebrating the status and satisfaction that women could gain by becoming the moral gatekeeper for the family. In a society more and more involved in both image making and image reading, the power of visual representation became increasingly important, and images of domesticity were disseminated to a large and diverse audience. Around the mid-nineteenth century, such illustrations appeared in unprecedented numbers in books, journals and newspapers.²⁵ Moreover, visual images of women's domestic role were not confined to illustrations in books and popular, cheap journals; they transcended this lowly genre and were hung upon the walls of the prestigious Royal Academy. Paradoxically, then, Bowkett thus launched her career as a working woman artist at a moment when images of women's domesticity were popular and prevalent.

One example of how the Royal Academy participated in gender role formation is George Elgar Hicks' triptych *Woman's Mission* (exh. 1863). The three consecutive pictures in the triptych showed woman in her role as relative creature: *Guide to Childhood*, *Companion to Manhood* [pl. 1],²⁶ and *Comfort of Old Age*. In a detailed analysis, Lynda Nead has shown that Hicks' three images communicated women's respectability and endorsed their supportive position.²⁷ Interestingly, the triptych drew mixed reviews: the *Art Journal* observed, "the painting of these works is first-class; the sentiment refined, not over profound— goes just skin deep, and carries a surface of exquisite polish,"²⁸ whereas the *Times* thought the sentiment was vulgar and would be "the kind to please uninformed taste".²⁹ As Nead notes, the critical response exposed the contentious role of genre within high art, the instability surrounding the role of contemporary women, and the heterogeneous nature of the art interested public.³⁰ All of

these were important issues for the professional woman painter and they indicate just some of the cultural forces at play in Bowkett's career.

Although this period saw middle-class women questioning their limited domestic role, this did not alter the popularity of *Woman's Mission* with Academy audiences. Moreover, the eventual circulation of copies further promulgated Hick's interpretation of feminine virtue. The original paintings were purchased by the astute dealer Flatow and eventually sold to the Manchester cotton-spinning industrialist, William Cottrill.³¹ Apart from the obvious aesthetic pleasure that may have been derived from the bright jewelled colours, the industrial-minded patron probably valued the moral subject matter and the highly detailed, painstaking workmanship. His fashionable suburban Manchester home in Higher Broughton³² seems to have been a wholly appropriate setting for the picturing of bourgeois domestic duty. Furthermore, because an unscrupulous dealer forged several copies of the paintings, the dissemination of the encoded messages continued.³³

What happened when Victorians saw these images? Were women viewers inspired to emulate the actions of the young middle-class woman portrayed? Or did they reject the images as having no bearing on their lived reality? Unfortunately, it is largely impossible to reconstruct individual reception, but we know that audiences are not simply passive consumers, no matter how didactic the message. Consequently, a fixed interpretation cannot be presumed; as Janet Wolff observes, cultural codes "are complex and dense systems of meaning, permeated by innumerable sets of connotations and significations."³⁴ Nonetheless, through repetition, the pictures became cultural messengers that pervaded the fabric of society. Hick's images and others like them became active agents in the propagation of ideological discourse³⁵ and assisted in legitimizing domestic virtue principles that co-existed uneasily in Victorian society with an increasingly vocal women's movement and the existence of working women, including professional painters such as Bowkett.

Political Presence and the Woman Question

The middle of the nineteenth century saw a remarkable growth of women's movements, with women's grievances, needs and aspirations widely voiced. As a powerful campaigner for women's rights, the Honourable Caroline Norton (1808-1877)

wrote influential pamphlets and letters to expose the legal inequities of child custody, divorce, and property rights.³⁶ Women from Unitarian and Quaker families were key figures in the campaign for women's education and employment.³⁷ The feminist writer Harriett Martineau (1802-1876), for example, exposed the injustices of a system that kept women out of the general workforce and she insisted that women should be given new training opportunities to counter their supposed redundancy.³⁸ In an 1859 article, Martineau pointed out that women artists demonstrated their serious intent and industriousness by using the National Gallery as an independent locus of study and that it was wrong for them to be excluded from the prestigious Royal Academy schools.³⁹ We should note that Bowkett was one of the many Victorian women who were excluded from the nation's premier art school.

Although some readings of Bowkett's pictures suggest feminist sympathies, Bowkett's political position remains undocumented. Evidence from other artists suggests, moreover, that those who endorsed feminist politics did not necessarily do so in their paintings. For example, when many women artists became active campaigners in the suffrage movement at the end of the nineteenth century, the art they produced did not reflect their political stance—market forces and the prevailing patriarchal ideology largely determined the subjects that women could paint.⁴⁰ Even Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891), a leading advocate of social reform, did not reference political issues in her art. Educated by her progressive-thinking Unitarian father, the independently wealthy Bodichon nevertheless considered her professional work as a landscape watercolourist as one aspect of her “emerging egalitarian feminist politics.”⁴¹

Though we have no way of knowing if Bowkett sympathised with the feminist movement, we can consider how marriage law and the doctrine of coverture affected the lives of women artists. Until the first Married Woman's Property Act was passed in 1870, women were not legally allowed to keep their own earnings. The middle-class married woman was the one most affected by the law.⁴² We should bear in mind, then, that married women who worked as artists did not legally own the money earned by their works. Moreover, the doctrine of marital coverture, whereby a woman's legal identities was merged in that of her husband, had a material effect on artists, who either gave up painting or restricted their practice when they married, and for those whom the critics

consistently referenced by their married names even though they signed their work with their maiden names. When Henrietta Ward (1832-1924), arguably one of the most respected Victorian women painters, married the well-established artist Edward Matthew Ward, she was fortunate to marry a man with the same surname and thus retained her maiden name; she was, however, usually referred to as Mrs. E. M. Ward. The struggles of Victorian feminists to reform educational opportunities, property law, and marriage law thus had direct relevance to the women painters amongst whom Bowkett worked.

Family Connections

While marriage and coverture could have deleterious effects on women's careers, family structures were extremely important in fostering women's art careers. It was common practice for artist-families to form valuable support systems and we should note that this support served women well: the majority of women entering the painting profession belonged to artistic families. Family connections enabled the exchange of ideas as well as the sharing of studio and exhibit space (which in turn gave women much-needed access to a wider audience). For example, Henrietta Ward's extensive artist-family consisted of a mother accomplished in miniatures, plus, and more importantly for recognition, a father, grandfather, and several uncles who were well-respected painters. Other women painters in the artist-family category include Rosa Brett (1829-1881), Joanna Boyce (1831-1861), Mary Severn (1832-1866), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Emma Sandys (1834-1877), Mary Ellen Edwards (1839-1908), Frances Redgrave (exh.1864-1882), and the young Helen Allingham (1848-1926), who possessed artist-family links that contributed to her success as an illustrator and watercolourist.⁴³

It is noteworthy that women artists tended also to be the daughters of clergymen and doctors. In an 1860 article written in support of the Female School of Art, F. D. Maurice made special mention of this fact:

Since 1852 six hundred and ninety Students have entered themselves at the School, and the number at present time is one hundred and eighteen, of whom seventy-seven are studying with the view of ultimately maintaining themselves. Some of them, daughters of Clergymen and Medical Men, unexpectedly compelled, by a variety of causes, to gain their own livelihood, and even to support others besides themselves, have, though the instruction and assistance received here, obtained good appointments.⁴⁴

The explanation for this may have been due to the nature of the medical practice and the ministry. Both professions tended to be practiced from home. Visits by patients and parishioners would have exposed the family to the outside world and extended it beyond the narrow confines of the middle-class home. With the continual merging of private and public in their daily lives, such fathers may have more easily granted their daughters the necessary parental permission to study art. It may be significant that the artist Emily Osborn (1834-1908) was a clergyman's daughter, and that the artists Jane Bowkett, Laura Epps (1852-1909), Sophie Beale (exh.1863-88), Sophie Warren (exh.1869-1878), and Helen Angell (exh.1875-1878) were daughters of medical men.⁴⁵

At times, marriage beyond the artistic community could require a woman painter to rearrange or relinquish activities that had taken her outside the domestic sphere.⁴⁶ By contrast, Helen Allingham's art practice flourished after she married the writer William Allingham, and the extremely successful Elizabeth Thompson Butler (1846-1933) continued to paint while accompanying her high-ranking military husband on his postings.⁴⁷ Sometimes marriages to other artists entailed the sacrifice of a promising career. In 1881, the *Magazine of Art* published an article entitled "Artist and Wife" in which John Oldcastle stated the generally held view that "women are, as a rule, to be complementary figures."⁴⁸ For example, before she married Luke Fildes, Fanny Woods (the sister of Henry Woods RA) "had a natural gift for drawing and painting, like her brother. In after years her art became subordinated to her husband's and her children's welfare."⁴⁹ Although other artists, such as Laura Epps who married Lawrence Alma Tadema, did continue to paint and exhibit, after marriage, they were considered first and foremost to be wives and mothers.

With marriage came the expectation that Victorian women would modify their sense of self and organize their lives for the benefit of their husbands.⁵⁰ Since we have no intimate record of the Bowkett/Stuart partnership, a context within which to situate this artist couple's working relationship has to be sought elsewhere. We may compare their life to that of the working partnership of Henrietta and Edward Ward. Though both Wards worked at home in separate studios, Edward delegated the task of domestic ordering to his wife and the duties of caring for the house and children were considered

solely Henrietta's responsibility. Each morning in the hour after breakfast, Edward Ward read the newspaper and obtained news of the outside world. While he was thus occupied, Henrietta Ward attended to the children, the servants, and organized their family life.⁵¹

The Ward's domestic arrangements were commonplace, and the problems were recognised by the *Art Journal*. In 1872, a three-part series, which supported vocational training for women, attributed women's inferior status to their subordinate domestic position:

It may be that woman cannot at once rise to the level on which men stand after ages of culture and conscious freedom; or, more likely, it may be that no woman is, or ought to be, able to free herself from domestic duties and associations, which, in their inevitable interruption, render almost impossible the concentration of purpose and leisure of mind essential to high success. We have here a really strong reason against the success of any continuous avocation, especially if followed in the home. On the master, or on the son, of the house, the library or studio door may be closed until opened by himself. But the very nature of her duties makes this difficult for the mistress who manages her own house.⁵²

In her autobiography, Henrietta Ward stated, "although my husband was so fond of having the children sit for him, he would not have them in his studio for any other purpose whilst he was at work, as he found it most essential to be quiet."⁵³ In contrast, the children romped in Henrietta's studio, learned to paint upon corners of her canvases, and on occasion ruined all her morning's work. Henrietta Ward was careful to relegate her painting practice as secondary to her husband's requirements and, by accepting that freedom from domestic responsibility was a male prerogative, she maintained hierarchical household boundaries and marital power relationships.⁵⁴

Painting partnerships varied. *Queen* magazine thought the young ambitious Henrietta Rae somewhat naive when she remarked that she would not like to see her husband, Ernest Normand, progress too far beyond her in art.⁵⁵ Laura and Laurence Alma Tadema's situation was more customary: her studio was rudimentary while his was vast and well appointed, she exhibited fewer works and her small-scale Dutch-like interiors sold for far less than his vast neo-classical works.⁵⁶ By contrast, Bowkett and Stuart maintained independent art practices while being active partners in the generation of a joint family income.

It was also possible for an artist-marriage to expand artistic prospects and Bowkett's experience illustrates this. When she married Charles Stuart, she joined a large family of painters. It has to be supposed that the Stuart family empowered the young wife and mother and helped her overcome the countless obstacles that faced women artists of the period. Though artist-family links could expand gender roles beyond the narrow parameters acceptable, the female artist could lose her identity to a male relative, and it was remarkable that Bowkett retained her maiden name throughout her career.⁵⁷ Records show that the vast majority of married women painters were either unable or unwilling to promote their artistic autonomy in this way. By signing her paintings J. M. Bowkett and with the monogram JMB, Bowkett left traces of her invisible self and her signature allows a reading of her independence.⁵⁸ In a profession fraught with competing gender values, the gender neutrality of initials permitted Bowkett to obscure her female identity and this tactic can be interpreted as an act of self-defence against prevailing double standards.

An undated photograph provides insight into how Bowkett and her husband Charles Stuart represented their joint artistic endeavours for public consumption. The photograph, which depicts Bowkett and Stuart together in their studio, shows both artists gazing towards the photographer [fig. 11]. Stuart stands in front of one of his landscapes with ovoid palette and brush in hand. Bowkett, seated for comfort by the heater, holds two brushes and a rectangular palette. Two of her pictures are displayed upon easels: on the left, the Shakespearean heroine *Juliet* and, on the right, a picture entitled *Darlings*.⁵⁹ Such sizable paintings and their ornate heavy frames authenticate both artists' professional status. This photograph seems staged to publicize both Bowkett and Stuart and the products of their work. Significantly, the photograph elides any suggestion of physical labour or trade. Art making is not shown taking place—the frames verify that the paintings are not works in progress. In order to distinguish themselves as authors rather than owners of such fine art, Bowkett and Stuart attach their professional tools to their persons and the image connotes respectable middle-class entrepreneurship.

The photograph is unusual in that it depicts husband and wife together as professional artists. For example, *The Victorian Art World in Photographs* contains 425 photographs of numerous artists and people associated with the art world—none of which

capture a husband and wife in a working relationship.⁶⁰ The striking equality seen in the photograph represents the equality of their career pattern for much of their marriage: for the first twenty-two years of their marriage, Bowkett and Stuart exhibited a comparable number of pictures that commanded similar prices. However, by the mid-1880s after the Royal Academy had consistently accepted Stuart's landscapes, Bowkett's pictures appear less often in the exhibition catalogues. Either Bowkett's career took second place to her husband's, or she was able to sell her pictures to private buyers. Since large-scale landscapes (such as those by Stuart) fetched higher prices than narrative scenes (such as those by Bowkett),⁶¹ the income Bowkett generated from such venues may have been no longer as important to the couple.

Art Education and Victorian Institutions

Acceptance by the Royal Academy was crucial to artistic recognition, and if we are to situate women within the Victorian art world, we must consider the Royal Academy's attitude towards women. As Deborah Cherry notes, Victorian women artists were educated in sexual difference and deprived of positions of power.⁶² The Royal Academy, founded by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1768, both encouraged the highest appreciation of the visual arts and also provided the most esteemed education. Although Angelica Kaufmann and Mary Moser were among the founding members of the British Royal Academy, no other women became members until 1922, and no woman achieved the status of an elected Academician until 1936.⁶³ Therefore, throughout the nineteenth-century, women such as Bowkett were denied the material and social benefits conferred by the respected "RA" designation, and were unable to participate in decisions regarding exhibition hangings and the educational curriculum.

In 1859, a group of thirty-eight women artists formally challenged their exclusion from the RA schools by signing a petition to the Royal Academy of Arts. A copy of the petition was sent to each of the forty Academicians and published in the *Athenaeum*.⁶⁴ In order to become productive and more independent members of society, the women wished to receive an equal education. In the following year, women finally gained access to the Academy schools. In 1860, the exclusion that denied women access to the prestigious Academy education was breached. Consternation among officials was

generated when 29 year-old Laura Herford was discovered to be one of the probationers admitted to the Academy school. Whether by intent or otherwise, she had used her initials rather than her full name when she submitted her drawings, and therefore the judges had not realised that she was a woman. Even the most unbending Academicians had to concede that practice rather than talent had denied women access to the schools and, at the time, they were also under considerable feminist pressure vis-à-vis the 1859 public petition for women's admission to the RA schools.⁶⁵ Despite the minimal number of places granted to women students, once admitted, it was possible for them to compete. Louisa Starr gained the silver medal in 1865 and overpowered the men in 1869 by capturing the coveted gold medal for painting.⁶⁶

A narrow defeat of Elizabeth Thompson Butler's nominations for membership in the Royal Academy in 1879, 1880 and 1881, again raised the question of membership for women.⁶⁷ The Council, however, pronounced that the legal description, "men of fair and moral characters" did not provide for the election of women members, thus making it clear that the men were not prepared to relinquish total power.⁶⁸ The irony of this situation is that Elizabeth Butler was, and continued to be, a respected and successful painter of military scenes, a subject usually reserved for the male artist.

To discuss the various routes and means by which women negotiated a path to art education, a brief history of Victorian art institutions needs to be reviewed. That the number of single middle-class women was growing was evident by the early Victorian period. It was also clear that many of these women would have to become self-supporting.⁶⁹ In recognition of this need, a government-funded Female School of Design was established in London in 1842.⁷⁰ The first superintendent, the respected painter Fanny McIan, was supposed to instruct women in copying and the drawing of ornamentation with a view to the students eventually being employed by manufacturers. However, after a number of students exhibited paintings in major exhibitions, it became clear that the some women intended to engage in the fine-art world, instead of confining themselves to decorative design work.⁷¹ After finally losing its government grant in 1859, the institution evolved into the independent Female School of Art: thereafter, because it was no longer directed to provide free education, the management capitalized on middle-class women's desire for art training. Accomplishment in the arts was extremely desirable

for young middle-class women, and sketching and drawing were generally taught as a genteel accomplishment rather than as a prelude to embarking upon an art career. Sketching, like embroidery, was considered a suitable way for a respectable woman to fill her time.⁷²

For fee-paying pupils there were a number of private establishments in London. Cary's, which was the most expensive, prepared students for admission to the Royal Academy; thus the majority of the students were male. For women, Leigh's was particularly popular and "probably provided separate life-drawing classes for women in the 1850s."⁷³ If women of the next generation wished to become serious painters, they were advised to attend the Slade rather than one of the National Art Training Schools. In 1871, the newly established Slade School of Art offered women greater equality with the men students, and they were given access to the study of the life model.⁷⁴ For figure painters the study of the human figure was paramount. However, for reasons of propriety, the study of a nude model was considered out of the question at the government run design schools. Early students at the Female School of Art had to work from plaster casts, in 1863 the study of the costumed or draped model was introduced, and it was not until 1886 that women pupils were offered anatomy classes.⁷⁵ Given that Bowkett attended a government school during the 1850s, she would not have had access to a nude model.

Since fine art education was expensive and extremely difficult to come by, artist-relatives taught many women artists, and it is likely that the Stuart family contributed to Bowkett's further art education. Yet, compared to the majority of other women painters who either attained success or maintained a long and full exhibition record, Bowkett's art education differed in significant ways. Although several successful women artists began their studies at the government schools, the vast majority continued their education by studying abroad, attending one of the fee-paying schools or receiving personal tuition.⁷⁶ This was considered necessary if one was to succeed as a figure painter. Out of the thirty-three women listed under "figure painters" in Clayton's *English Woman Painters*, Mary Ellen Edwards and Helen Miles were the only ones who did not supplement their government education and they both became illustrators. Admittedly, Clayton's list is far from complete, but it does indicate that government-sanctioned art education made it particularly difficult for a figure painter to sustain a career. That Bowkett was one of the

few women figure painters without formal fine-art training indicates her single-minded determination to compete in an area where women were at a distinct disadvantage.

Towards the end of the century, an increase in art schools ensured women had a far greater opportunity to receive an art education. To provide themselves with a more reliable income after they were widowed, the well-established Henrietta Ward and Louise Jopling both set up independent teaching schools, in 1879 and 1887 respectively. Their differing stance in regards to artistic training exemplifies the multiplicity of middle-class artists' social positions and principles. At several times during her career Jopling had experienced financial difficulties, and she believed "every girl should have a vocation, either artistic or otherwise, by which, if the necessity arose, she could earn her own bread and be independent."⁷⁷ Ward, who had been financially secure until her husband's death, tended to cater to wealthy young ladies who wished to polish their artistic accomplishments; Ward was proud to count Queen Victoria's daughter and other members of the aristocracy among her pupils.⁷⁸ By 1895, there were at least 56 London art schools offering a diverse plethora of curricula, pedagogical approaches, and standards. But, as Paula Gillett points out, these advantages were to a considerable extent offset by the phenomenal growth of women dilettantes, whose sizeable presence damaged the aspiring professional's prospects of being taken seriously.⁷⁹

Seeing that Bowkett's early self-education had included making watercolour copies of pictures in the British Institution and the National Gallery, I wondered whether she might have had fewer barriers to surmount if she had continued in watercolours. Yet the watercolour societies also demarcated a lower status for women artists. Watercolour was highly promoted as a suitable medium for the upper-class leisured amateur, and from the beginning of the century materials were readily available. For the woman artist, watercolour was thought to be a more suitable medium than oil; just as a "lady" did not partake of strong cheeses, the smell of oil paints was thought of as offensive and indelicate.⁸⁰ It is also possible that the odour of oil suggested a distasteful closeness to machinery and factories. By 1832, as demand increased, Reeves and Ackerman, the popular early suppliers of art materials, shared the expanding market with Windsor and Newton. The frontispiece to Ackerman's *Manual of Colours used in the Different Branches of Watercolour Painting* (1844)⁸¹ depicts Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and

two of their children in an idealistic happy family scene. The children sit on the carpeted floor and are eagerly examining the contents of a watercolour paint box, meanwhile their mother stands in front of a table-easel holding a brush in her hand, while her husband hands her paper. The royal endorsement of the pleasure and suitability of watercolour painting for elite ladies may have both undermined its professional stature and contributed to its “feminine” status.⁸² For men water colourists, the close association between watercolour and woman amateur must have seemed particularly threatening. Bowkett’s choice of oils thus aligns her with the masculine professional world of art as opposed to the medium of ladies and amateurs. Since oil paintings typically sold for markedly higher prices than watercolours, Bowkett’s decision to work in oils may have been based on the expectation of a more lucrative income.

The Art Market: The Art Dealers

Bowkett’s career coincided with a huge expansion of the middle class, and the moment at which middle-class taste came to dominate the British art market. Although this British art market had gained momentum in the eighteenth century, commensurate with the initial expansion of the British middle class, it has recently been shown that London’s middle class were purchasing pictures as early as the seventeenth century. Auction catalogues from this period clearly demonstrate that a demand existed for pictures that sold for a modest amount.⁸³ This was also the period when the greatest number of the wealthy elite partook in the “grand tour”. The subsequent taste for Italian and French art, and a demand for the Old Masters, contributed to London becoming an important European centre for the arts. By the end of the eighteenth century, to keep up with supply and demand, British dealers and collectors were frequenting major auction houses such as Christies.⁸⁴

Due to the further expansion of middle-class wealth, the Victorian period saw a dramatic expansion in London’s art market. Nonetheless, despite the increase in London art dealers, reported to number one hundred in 1865,⁸⁵ hardly any of these entrepreneurial gentlemen represented British women artists. In 1844, by trading in British and Continental engravings, Ernest Gambart had established a thriving business and subsequently become an important figure in the London art scene.⁸⁶ From the mid-1850s,

Gambart promoted the work of the French artist Rosa Bonheur; he introduced her to London society and she became the most admired woman painter in England.⁸⁷ Bonheur's masculine clothing and strong personality were seen as proof that she disowned her sex and her exceptional achievement was partly attributed to her lack of feminine characteristics. Even though Gambart gave the socially elite Eliza Bridell-Fox and Barbara Bodichon one-women shows, over the years, like the other dealers, he assigned to British women artists a merely token appearance in his exhibitions and dealings.⁸⁸

In the provinces, the taste of the dealers Thomas Agnew and Sons was partially responsible for the uniformity of the Manchester collections. The firm occupied a gallery on Exchange Street in Manchester, and an 1840 print [fig. 12] depicts an elegant display of paintings, engravings, sculpture and *objets d'art* in the interior's shop-like setting.⁸⁹ In this print, women customers outnumber those of the men, and it is interesting to ponder the reasons for this. Although it may be that women's figures were considered more decorative and thereby enhanced the surroundings, it is also possible that leisured middle-class women were involved in the purchase of art. The lack of concrete evidence of this practice may reflect the fact that women had little legal control over money, their own included, and therefore financial transactions would be recorded in their husband's names.

In 1860, Agnew's opened a branch in London. An 1877 architectural rendering of the Bond Street interior illustrates a change in consumer practice [fig. 13]. Instead of being a shop-like space with sales counters, the showroom trappings evoke the private interior of a gracious home. As Diane Sachko Macleod suggests, this setting "allowed regular customers more ease in imaging the transition of art objects from showroom to home. The elegant décor also projected the illusion that the Agnews were not merchants but gentlemen."⁹⁰ To stock its showrooms, Agnew's purchased works from the RA exhibitions and visited studios to buy directly from the artists. Dealers' visits could be either disappointing or lucrative: shortly after Agnew's left Louise Jopling's studio in March 1876 without making any purchases, it bought all the pictures in Fred Morgan's studio.⁹¹ The trend in selling art from a more personalized environment was adopted by other art dealers and by many artists.⁹² As I will show in the following chapter, Bowkett

and Stuart located their studio in artistically significant areas of London where dealers made the rounds. Although art dealers did not generally champion women artists, it is possible that small firms purchased Bowkett's work. Bowkett and Stuart's studio photograph indicates that both artists were actively promoting their careers and that their work was available for public viewing.

Patrons and Purchasers

Bowkett catered to the art market and in this section I will examine who drove the art market and the type of pictures that appealed to their sensibilities. Newly wealthy industrialists had fuelled the taste for contemporary British art and from the 1830s the pictures that were in most demand were those which showed a widely familiar scene or whose subjects were drawn from British literary works.⁹³ As collectors, they amassed large collections of paintings by living British artists, the subjects of which, coincidentally or by design, contributed to the dissemination of Protestant principles.⁹⁴ By not accepting or emulating aristocratic taste, the middle classes forged a cultural territory of their own. They restructured the cultural milieu by shaping Victorian art and literature to their own vision.⁹⁵ As a part of this metamorphosis, the patronage in these areas was frequently defined by commercial, social, and religious beliefs. The middle classes esteemed art for both its material and aesthetic worth, and bought paintings for exchange value and for the prestige and refinement conferred by art collecting and art ownership.⁹⁶

A further shift in art consumerism, which extended patronage to the middle-class masses, occurred under the Art Union's lottery scheme. Formed in 1837, the Art Union's original committee was made up of an interesting "amalgam of middle and upper class elites bent on reforming their social inferiors."⁹⁷ By way of the lottery scheme they provided extensive access to inexpensive prints and original works of British art, and thereby stimulated the lower-priced section of the contemporary art market.⁹⁸ In return for an annual one-guinea subscription, members' names would be entered into a lottery. The prizes consisted of monetary tokens that could be used in the purchase of a picture selected from any of the London galleries or exhibitions. Given the Art Union's dedication to individual self-education, it was hoped that during the process of choosing a painting, each winner of a lottery ticket would develop artistic judgement. Art historian

Duncan Forbes suggests that the commitment to self-instruction eroded the reverence for connoisseurship as well as the long-standing cultural values associated with genres such as history painting, and it is without doubt that lesser-known artists who were excluded from the high-art arena benefited from this philanthropic scheme.⁹⁹ Over a thirty-year period (1849-1879), Art-Union prizewinners patronised 105 women artists, with Bowkett being seventh in order of popularity. Four of her paintings were selected between 1873 and 1878; they were exhibited at the Crystal Palace Gallery and sold for £10 to £25.¹⁰⁰ These prices are consistent with those charged by the majority of women artists, however men exhibiting at the same venues placed a considerably higher price on their paintings. Pamela Nunn and Janice Helland have both ascertained that even though women artists were incurring similar production expenses, they typically occupied a subordinate position on the income scale.¹⁰¹

The Art-Union lists make it apparent that those women artists whose work had been selected from the Royal Academy exhibitions commanded higher prices. Another way to achieve higher prices was to sell to an illustrious patron. Following Queen Victoria's acquisition of Emily Osborn's *My Cottage Door* (1855, RA), Osborn attracted the critics' notice.¹⁰² The Queen later purchased Osborn's *The Governess* (1860, RA), she also gave Henrietta Ward a commission to paint the Royal children, and Elizabeth Thomson's *The Roll Call* was added to the Royal collection in 1874.¹⁰³ Other women who supported women artists included the wealthy Angela Burdett-Coutts and, to a lesser extent, Lady Chetwynd and Eliza Lynn Linton.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately we only have information on two of the original owners of Bowkett's artwork. *Girl at the Well* was exhibited at the Aberdeen Artist's Society in 1886, and was donated to the Aberdeen Art Gallery by a Mrs Leslie of Nethermuir in 1902.¹⁰⁵ The original owner of *A Beach Scene* lived in Manchester, a city in which Bowkett regularly exhibited her work (both pictures will be discussed in chapter 4).¹⁰⁶ Women's contribution to English provincial exhibitions remains an under-researched area, and one which would give us more insight into the very venues of which Bowkett made use.

Exhibition Venues

Exhibitions were the vital mechanism to achieve any public exposure and the Royal Academy was central to this system. Although each year the RA exhibition displayed an enormous number of pictures (1,400 or more), the number of women artists selected were numerically few. For example, between 1850-1879, the annual number of women artists whose works were chosen ranged from 48 to 108 and in 1861, when Bowkett's *Preparing for Dinner* was selected, the number was only 49.¹⁰⁷ While these figures give a good reflection of the general under-representation of women artists in the exhibiting system, there were other ways in which they were disenfranchised. Firstly, "placing" was a key component for potential sales and, since men administrators governed space allocation, patriarchal policies might have affected the sale of women's work by excluding their pictures from key viewing areas. When Louise Jopling discovered the poor positioning of her pictures in the 1876 RA show, she wrote to the secretary and gave instruction that her prices were to be reduced.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, the vastness of the RA exhibitions meant that the majority of the pictures were passed over by the critics without comment and it would seem likely that the relatively few by women would fall into the unnoticed category. In comparison to these limits on market accessibility for women, the all-male membership of the RA was assured of both annual selection and a preferred placing "on the line".¹⁰⁹

To counter the male hegemonic control of the principal London exhibition spaces, the Society of Female Artists provided a public outlet for women artists to display and sell their paintings. Founded in 1857 and supported by progressive-thinking women such as Margaret Gilles, Eliza Fox, and Barbara Bodichon, the society offered those embarking upon a career an opportunity to partake in the commercial sphere of the art world. Their first exhibition opened on 1 June 1857 and contained 358 works, submitted by 149 artists.¹¹⁰ From the start, the critics were mixed in their reviews. While the *Art Journal* invariably provided a positive response, others commended the "ladies" for providing affordable art that was suitable for decorating a drawing room. A supporter of the SFA, the *Englishwoman's Review*, claimed that the object of the exhibitions was "to assist and encourage youthful talent to develop itself."¹¹¹ As we have seen, in 1858 the SFA gave the young Bowkett her first opportunity to display her work in public and,

despite the various criticisms, the presence of the society brought much needed attention to women painters and resulted in the formation of support networks and individual friendships among the women. It was also reported that the better-known women artists only showed at the SFA if their work had not sold at more prestigious venues, and in 1861, the *Spectator* noted the absence of ambitious artists, such as Henrietta Ward, Emily Osborn, and Elizabeth Thompson, who perceived that their success could be compromised by exhibiting in a segregated space with little known-artists.¹¹² Bowkett may have shared this notion for she contributed only seven more pictures to the SFA, and all were sent early in her career during the 1860s.¹¹³

Other mid-century London exhibition venues open to women artists included the British Institution (1806-1867), the Society of British Artists (1823-1893), the Water Colour Societies, and the lesser-known Crystal Palace exhibitions, established in 1856. All were subservient to the Royal Academy and each patriarchal art institution discriminated against women in one way or another. Since they were barred from full membership in the societies, women were denied access to privileged hanging space and selection committee decisions. In 1860, *Put Your Finger in the Foxhole* was for sale at the British Institution and Bowkett continued to exhibit there until its lease ran out in 1867. To put this into context, the BI annually accepted the work of about 500 men artists and 29 women artists; these figures suggest Bowkett's early competence and the appeal of her work. From 1861-1885 Bowkett regularly contributed to the Society of British Artists' exhibitions, which showed a higher proportion of women artists (14%). Even though the SBA often received poor press, Bonheur, Ward, and Osborn showed there. Following the establishment of the Institute of Painters in Oil Colours in 1883, Bowkett showed her work at its Pall Mall venue.¹¹⁴

In common with other London artists, Bowkett regularly took part in a number of provincial exhibitions. An efficient rail service allowed artists to transport their pictures to various out-of-town venues and gave them access to consumers situated in industrial areas. In Manchester, civic-minded men believed in the ameliorating effect of art and, in 1857, they held the largest fine-arts exhibition ever seen in England, with workers attending from all over the North and the Midlands. Visitors would have observed that narrative pictures dominated the section devoted to modern British artists.¹¹⁵ This official

endorsement no doubt increased the genre's popularity and guided people in their choice of decoration for their suburban homes. After the Manchester Royal Institution expanded in 1883, it was formally opened as the City Art Gallery. In 1885, its busiest year, 1,166 pictures hung upon the gallery walls. In more conservative Birmingham an annual autumn exhibition had been held since 1827, and a spring exhibition was added in 1866. In 1877, the newly built Walker Art Gallery opened in Liverpool, where attendance peaked in 1881 with over 2,000 visitors per day. Smaller cities also ran regular exhibition programs: for example, each August "Modern Pictures in Oils" were on show at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton. Because art works had to be delivered to the show rooms and unpacked "free of expense to the society", agents were generally employed to transport the pictures, and firms, such as Bourlet of London, advertised their receiving days for deliveries to the provincial, Scottish and Irish venues.¹¹⁶

While Bowkett sent pictures to all the above venues and a significant number to the Royal Hibernian Society in Dublin, her participation in the Scottish exhibitions is of particular interest. For a London-based women artist, Bowkett appears to have been a particularly strong presence in Scotland. Only Emily Osborn commands more catalogue entries, and she possessed a second studio in Glasgow.¹¹⁷ Formed in 1861, the Royal Glasgow Institute was intended to support and promote Scottish artists.¹¹⁸ Its first exhibition catalogue listed three figure pictures by Bowkett, and three fruit and one flower picture by Charles Stuart.¹¹⁹ (Frustratingly, because father and son shared the same name and address, their work cannot be distinguished in catalogue entries and there is confusion in the subsequent compendiums, it is thus unclear which particular Stuart shared Bowkett's enthusiastic endorsement of the new venue.) Bowkett exhibited a total of twenty works in Glasgow and a further twenty-three at the long-established Royal Scottish Academy exhibitions in Edinburgh. Since Bowkett and Stuart's exhibition contribution dates coincide, the sharing of transport arrangements probably influenced Bowkett's choice of venues.

In the hope of finding a buyer, artists often sent works unsold in London to other venues. Commenting on the 1879 Birmingham exhibition, the *London Illustrated News* found that "the collection which numbers 826 items, consists, as usual, in large proportion of works which had been previously exhibited at the Royal Academy or other

London exhibitions.”¹²⁰ With the constantly changing nomenclature of pictures, it is difficult to track Bowkett’s participation in this practice; nevertheless, an untraced painting entitled *Very Busy* was exhibited at the Society of British Artists in 1865, the same title reappeared the following year in both Glasgow and Dublin, and again at the Society of Female Artists in 1867— an indication that Bowkett either “recycled” or capitalized on a popular theme. In fact, there must have been at least two paintings entitled *Very Busy*. Given that both Edinburgh and Glasgow held their annual exhibitions from February to April/May, it would have been impossible for a single picture to have circulated between the venues. Throughout the following chapters, I demonstrate Bowkett’s practice of reworking themes. Although critical attention focused upon figures known to the art-establishment, regular contributions to art exhibitions were essential for recognition, and it is to be expected that, even though the critics largely ignored Bowkett, there would have been followers and admirers of her work.

Ruskin and the Art Critics

Gender bias permeated the critical appraisal of Victorian women’s artwork. Women were not seen as interpreters of art and women writers seldom reviewed exhibitions.¹²¹ Writers repeatedly drew attention to the notion that women were females first and artists second. Women’s pictures were described as fair, gentle, pretty and natural, and deemed unworthy of serious critical attention. For example, in a review of the 1872 RSA exhibition in Edinburgh, the *Art Journal* devoted four columns to figurative works. At the close of this lengthy section, two women painters were acknowledged, one of them Bowkett herself: “‘Waiting’ and ‘Disappointed’ are two pretty little episodes of maiden experience by Miss J. M. Bowkett. ‘Hesitation,’ by Mrs. Charretie, a girl weighing the contents of a letter, is rich in natural sentiment.”¹²² These brief observations on Bowkett and her fellow woman painter follow numerous critiques of male artists’ work. Instead of remarks on content, the men receive constructive comments on their technique: “perhaps the objects are just a trifle too minutely defined, inducing a sharpness which nature ignores”, “power and individuality in his pencil”, and “two figures carefully composed and excellently coloured.”¹²³ Critical reception

presumed that painters of note and the audience for paintings were generally men, and by so doing they perpetuated the silence surrounding the woman exhibiter.

As the pre-eminent art-scholar and critic, John Ruskin's moral authority and influence unquestionably affected both Victorian art criticism and the English art market. In advocating separate and unequal roles for men and women, Ruskin promoted women's dependant status. As a powerful cultural manager, he kept up a copious correspondence with a great number of women who requested his guidance. Although generous with his advice, he always expected deference in return.¹²⁴ The extremely successful illustrator Kate Greenaway frequently sought Ruskin's opinion and, in the thousands of emotional letters that passed between them, it is evident that Greenaway relied heavily upon Ruskin's critical judgment.¹²⁵

Modern feminist historians have been passionate in their critique of Ruskin. In *Sexual Politics* (1968), Kate Millet scrutinized and condemned the various ways Ruskin promulgated patriarchal ideals. More recently, Dinah Birch, while acknowledging Ruskin as a powerful source of patriarchy, has attempted to redress the scholarship regarding his attitude towards woman. Birch contends that Ruskin did promote women artists.¹²⁶ In 1883, during Ruskin's final term as Slade professor at Oxford, he conceded that women could paint and draw.¹²⁷ In *Fairy Land*, his fourth lecture in *The Art of England* series, he commended Kate Greenaway and Helen Allingham for their charming images of happy rural children.¹²⁸ According to Birch, Ruskin's recognition of Greenaway and Allingham's talent is a positive action for women. It should be noted, however, that the artists he legitimatised depicted subjects that were considered feminine. The artists, moreover, were watercolourists and illustrators. Ruskin rarely conceded that women were suited for working in oils.¹²⁹

Ruskin abhorred the industrialization of the English landscape. During the *Fairy-Land* lecture, he showed one of Greenaway's pictures and enthusiastically exclaimed:

There are no railroads in it, to carry the children away with, are there? No tunnel or pit mouths to swallow them up, no league long viaducts— no blinkered iron bridges? There are only winding brooks, wooden footbridges, and grassy hills without any holes cut into them!¹³⁰

As a pivotal figure in the formation and promotion of a national identity for English art, Ruskin unquestionably regenerated interest and pride in the English countryside. Bowkett almost certainly would have been familiar with his ideas. Ruskin urged artists to record and be true to nature: “Look much at the morning and evening sky, and much at simple flowers— dog-roses, wood hyacinths, violets, poppies, thistles, heather and the like, -as Nature arranges them in the woods and fields.”¹³¹ Since a number of Bowkett’s figures are set amidst untamed natural-looking scenery, she may have heeded Ruskin’s advice on this.

Despite the importance of art criticism, however, I would argue that an appreciation of Bowkett’s paintings did not necessarily depend upon official critical approval or interpretation. Whether the critics approved or not, the parameters of art had changed. Victorian art exhibitions were a form of popular entertainment and the purchasers of inexpensive pictures by little-known artists might be members of the art-public that high-minded critics deplored. In a review of Hick’s *Woman’s Mission* the *Times* stated, “the result is excruciatingly painful to well-regulated minds...all the more because the crowds round his pictures show how attractive they are.”¹³² Even though the popular reception of contemporary genre scenes disappointed some critics, the general delight in such images indicates that audiences judged these pictures by their own criteria.

Art as a status symbol was a necessary element in empowering the bourgeoisie homeowner, and upward social mobility permeated all sections of the middle class. Among the viewers, crowding the exhibition halls, were people looking for inexpensive pictures to enhance the appearance of their modest homes.¹³³ Bowkett’s work, then, was intricately linked to the changing patterns of art producer and art purchaser. I suggest that the interdependence of middle-class leisure and money created a paradox between the bourgeoisie’s moral stance that women ought not to be professional artists and the market reality which was that the bourgeoisie created such a demand for pictures that it became possible for women to sell their work.

Notes: Chapter 2

- ¹ Nunn, *The Mid-Victorian Woman Artist*, 2. Census figures for women artists (1861: 853); (1871: 1069).
- ² Mitchell, 769. The Second Reform Bill doubled the male electorate in England and Wales. Mill famously proposed the substitution of the word "person" for "man" in the description of those entitled to the franchise. Although his amendment was defeated, the motion highlighted women's disenfranchisement.
- ³ Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1973), 53.
- ⁴ Nead, "Class and sexuality in Victorian Art," 159.
- ⁵ Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 53.
- ⁶ Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 44-6.
- ⁷ Hall, 76.
- ⁸ Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*, 166.
- ⁹ John Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive and Sesame and Lilies* (1865; New York: Merrill & Baker, n.d.), 86. As Ruskin conceived it, the home was a secular temple with woman as the protective angel. He both sanctified the home and upheld the tenet that a woman was more suited to the domestic sphere. Feminist scholarship has shown that Ruskin's ideas were more of a romantic myth than reality. Scholars such as Lynda Nead and Lynne Walker have demonstrated that the spheres were not as separate as they might have seemed on paper.
- ¹⁰ Hall, 145. According to Hall, for the lower-class "wife to manage the family finances seems to have been a very widespread pattern in both town and countryside, a distinctive difference from their middle-class counterparts with their exclusion from money matters."
- ¹¹ T. C. Keble, "Conservative Instincts in the English People: The Middle Classes," *The National Review* 1 (March-August 1883): 690.
- ¹² Keble, 693.
- ¹³ Hall, 101.
- ¹⁴ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1839), 331-4. Ellis went on to write: *The Mothers of England* (1843), *The Daughters of England* (1843), and *The Wives of England* (1846). The titles clearly define women's domestic mission. It is interesting to note that Ellis herself was financially dependent upon the income from her writing.
- ¹⁵ F. Graeme Chalmers, *Women in the Nineteenth-Century Art World: Schools of Art and Design for Women in London and Philadelphia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 16. Mrs Ellis's opinion was in line with the Female School of Art's mandate, which was clearly directed towards preparing women for ornamental work.
- ¹⁶ "The Vocations of Women," *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 25 May 1850, 61.
- ¹⁷ "Our Portraits: The Late Eliza Cook," *Queen*, 5 October 1889, 465.
- ¹⁸ Ellen Clayton, *English Female Artists*, vol.2, (London: Tinsley, 1876), 145.
- ¹⁹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 32.
- ²⁰ Clayton, 81.
- ²¹ Bowkett, 21.
- ²² W. J. Fox, "Prefatory Address – Lectures to the Working Classes," vol. iv, quoted in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 22 September 1849, 283.
- ²³ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 55.
- ²⁴ Chalmers, 23.
- ²⁵ Chalmers, 104.
- ²⁶ George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm.; (30 x 25 in.), Tate Gallery, London, as reproduced in Rosamond Allwood, *George Elgar Hicks: Painter of Victorian Life* (London: Geffrye Museum, 1982), fig. 6.
- ²⁷ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 12-14.
- ²⁸ *Art Journal* (June 1863): 111; quoted in Allwood, 33.
- ²⁹ *The Times* (London), 27 May 1863, 6; quoted in Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 15.
- ³⁰ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 16-17.
- ³¹ Allwood, 32.

- ³² Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217.
- ³³ Allwood, 33.
- ³⁴ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981), 101.
- ³⁵ Lynne Pearce, *Woman Image Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 6.
- ³⁶ Caroline Norton, *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855).
- ³⁷ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 26.
- ³⁸ The term "redundancy" refers to the excess of women— i.e. the fact that not all middle-class women could marry. Also see footnote 67.
- ³⁹ Harriet Martineau, "Female Industry," *Edinburgh Review* (April 1859) in Hamilton, 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors' 67.
- ⁴⁰ Deborah Cherry, "Women Artists and Feminism," in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 51-60. See also Cherry, *Painting Women*, 92-3.
- ⁴¹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 28.
- ⁴² Working classes ignored the law and aristocracy circumvented it through marriage contracts filed in the court of equity.
- ⁴³ Helen Allingham's aunt, Laura Herford, was the first woman student to be accepted by the Royal Academy. Allingham also had important Unitarian links.
- ⁴⁴ F. D. Maurice, "Female School of Art; Mrs Jamison," *Macmillan's Magazine* 2 (1960): 227.
- ⁴⁵ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 31- 4.
- ⁴⁶ Nunn, *The Mid-Victorian Woman Artist*, 30-45. In the 1860s, some of the artists who limited their careers after marriage were Kate Dickens (married to Charles Collins), Mary Severn (married to Charles Newton), and Florence Claxton (married to Mr. Farrington).
- ⁴⁷ Paul Usherwood, "Elizabeth Butler Thompson: The Consequences of Marriage," *Women's Art Journal* (March 1986): 30-34. According to Usherwood, Thompson's paintings no longer sold as well after her marriage.
- ⁴⁸ John Oldcastle, "Artist and Wife," *The Magazine of Art* 4 (1881): 478.
- ⁴⁹ L. V. Fildes, *A Victorian Painter* (London: Michael Joseph, 1968), 28.
- ⁵⁰ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 38-40.
- ⁵¹ O'Donnell, 129.
- ⁵² "Art -Work For Women," *The Art-Journal* 34 (1872): 102.
- ⁵³ O' Donnell, 263.
- ⁵⁴ Lenore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 76.
- ⁵⁵ "Mrs. Ernest Normand," *Queen*, 4 May 1890, 614.
- ⁵⁶ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 37.
- ⁵⁷ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 213.
- ⁵⁸ Bal and Bryson, 190.
- ⁵⁹ The paintings, *Juliet* and *Darlings*, are identifiable in "Pictures by Charles Stuart and J. M. Bowkett." Stuart's landscape remains untraced.
- ⁶⁰ Jeremy Maas, *The Victorian Art World in Photographs* (London: Barrie and Jenkins Ltd., 1984). It should be noted that other unpublished photographs of partnerships may exist.
- ⁶¹ Wood, *Victorian Painting*, 76.
- ⁶² Cherry, *Painting Women*, 58.
- ⁶³ Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, 103.
- ⁶⁴ "The Royal Academy," *Athenaeum*, 30 April 1859, 581.
- ⁶⁵ Paula Gillett, *Worlds of Art: The Victorian Painter's World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 159. Herford had studied at Leigh's academy,
- ⁶⁶ Sidney C. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1968* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1968), 50. Proceeds from exhibitions and trust funds paid the running expenses, thus the much sought after tuition was free. Hutchinson suggests the fact that the Academy had contributed to the Female School of Art's upkeep may have been used to justify the unofficial limiting of women into the Academy schools. 118-9.

⁶⁷ Hutchinson, 65.

⁶⁸ Hutchison, 138. They did condescend to pass a resolution making women eligible but the women had extremely limited privileges.

⁶⁹ Acutely aware of the shortage of employment for women, the art historian and activist writer Anna Jameson most famously pointed out that there were 800,000 more women than men in the country. Interestingly, but beyond the scope of this thesis, Patricia Branca refutes the claim that the percentage of unmarried women increased dramatically between 1851-1901. Branca, 3.

⁷⁰ The Female School was an early component of the National Art Training School at South Kensington and its affiliated London and provincial network of schools. The schools were mainly for working-class men and the emphasis was on the vocational aspect of training. Students were prepared for a variety of employment situations. Apart from working in the manufacturing industry, they were also equipped for a career in teaching.

⁷¹ Chalmers, 24. Since the patriarchal administration body did not intend artists to emerge from the institution, the school suffered from a variety of organisational problems.

⁷² Sarah M. Dodd, "Art Education for Women in the 1860's: a Decade of Debate," in Campbell Orr, *Women in the Victorian Art World*, 193. Satisfying the patriarchal governors continued to be problematic. The new superintendent, Louisa Gann, was both applauded for breaking down the barrier between design and fine art and criticized for not concentrating upon vocational training.

⁷³ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 59. Leigh's (later known as Heatherly's) operated relatively like a French atelier and was thought of as rather bohemian.

⁷⁴ Susan P. Casteras and Linda H. Peterson, *A Struggle for Fame: Victorian Women Artists and Authors* (Connecticut: Yale Center for British Art, 1994), 13. "Women were not permitted to study the nude at the Royal Academy until 1903 and then only in a separate class."

⁷⁵ Dodd, 188-9. See also Shannon Hunter Hurtado, "The Promotion of the Visual Arts in Britain, 1835-1860," *Canadian Journal of History* 28 (April 1993): 67. Drawing the human form also had class-based implications. Hurtado documents that during the 1830s, directors of the design schools banned the study of the human figure to ensure that working-class male students did not aspire to careers above their station.

⁷⁶ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 40-52.

⁷⁷ Jopling, 266.

⁷⁸ O'Donnell, 249.

⁷⁹ Gillett, 170-2.

⁸⁰ Francina Irwin, "Amusement or Instruction? Watercolour Manuals and the Woman Amateur," in Campbell Orr, *Women in the Victorian Art World*, 151.

⁸¹ Irwin, 156, plate 21.

⁸² I am not suggesting that all women watercolourists were amateurs. Helen Allingham, for example, was extremely successful. Pertinently though, her biographer Huish, thought "the practice of water-colour art would appeal especially to womankind." Marcus B. Huish, *Happy England: Helen Allingham* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1909), 20.

⁸³ Carol Gibson-Wood, "Picture Consumption in London at the End of the Seventeenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 84, no. 3 (Sept 2002): 491-500.

⁸⁴ Robert Lacy, *Sotheby's: Bidding for Class* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 36. In 1829, Sotheby's, which had previously confined its family trade to bookselling, entered into the field of visual art.

⁸⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 236.

⁸⁶ Mass, *Gambart*, 35.

⁸⁷ Mass, *Gambart*, 79-88. In 1856, Gambart invited Bonheur to Britain, and during a tour of England and Scotland, he both introduced her to important people and cultivated her legendary masculine distinctiveness.

⁸⁸ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 109.

⁸⁹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 99-101, plate 15.

⁹⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 234, plate 43. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to the earlier saleroom, in this space the men customers outnumber the women. Was this to suggest they were engaged in fine art rather than commerce?

⁹¹ Jopling, 92. Alice Havers (1850-1890) was married to Fred Morgan and her work would have been included in Agnew's purchase.

⁹² Artists and their homes environments will be the subject of the next chapter.

- ⁹³ Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 3. Issues of civic pride and moral propriety were often coded into the pictorial rhetoric of narrative paintings favoured by affluent manufacturers.
- ⁹⁴ The Unitarians were one group that were involved in the control and use of Art as a cultural tool that could elevate the public's social conscience and behaviour.
- ⁹⁵ Hurtado, 71.
- ⁹⁶ R. Folkstone Williams, *Belgravia*, 2 (1867): 290.
- ⁹⁷ Hurtado, 74. The politically astute radical organizers recognised the significance of aristocratic patrons.
- ⁹⁸ Lyndel Saunders King, *The Industrialization of Taste* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Research Press, 1985).
- ⁹⁹ Duncan Forbes, "The Advantages of Combination," in *Governing Cultures*, ed Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 131. See Forbes for the critical response to the Art Union's endeavour.
- ¹⁰⁰ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 114-8. *Venus! Looking Glass* (1873), *What's O'clock?* (1876), *Rustle Vanity* (1877), *A Shepherdess* (1878).
- ¹⁰¹ Janice Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth Century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 42; Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 42.
- ¹⁰² "The Royal Academy. The Eighty-Seventh Exhibition, 1855," *Art-Journal* 1 (June 1855): 169-183.
- ¹⁰³ Paul Usherwood and Jenny Spencer-Smith, *Lady Bulwer: Battle Artist 1846-1933* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1987), 29. Charles Galloway had commissioned *The Role Call*; however, after protracted negotiations, he ceded the picture to Queen Victoria.
- ¹⁰⁴ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 102-3. Queen Victoria was a leading supporter of women artists. From 1862 she took a personal interest in Female School of Art and granted it royal protection.
- ¹⁰⁵ I am indebted to Ann Steed of Aberdeen Art Gallery for this information. The Gallery opened in 1885.
- ¹⁰⁶ The painting remains in the family's private collection.
- ¹⁰⁷ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 113.
- ¹⁰⁸ Jopling, 96.
- ¹⁰⁹ Lesser-known men artists were likewise penalized, and the RA selection and hanging practices that gave priority to the forty Academicians were highly criticized. See Helene E. Roberts, "Exhibition and Review: the Periodical Press and the Victorian Art Exhibition System," in Shattock and Wolff, *The Victorian Periodical Press*, 90-9.
- ¹¹⁰ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 68-88. The formation of the Society was mainly due to the efforts of Harriet Grote. Nunn's meticulous research provides the most comprehensive account of the SFA.
- ¹¹¹ *Englishwoman's Review* 7 (April, 1868): 467; quoted in Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 80.
- ¹¹² *Spectator*, 16 February 186, 165; cited in Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 79. Prominent artists did continue to support the enterprise but they often sent in minor works.
- ¹¹³ Baile de Laperriere, *The Society of Women Artists Exhibitors*, s.v. "Bowkett."
- ¹¹⁴ Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 68-107. I used the tables Nunn provided (113-118) to arrive at the percentages. By the late 1860s additional gallery spaces provided more opportunities. The Dudley Gallery's liberal equality policy gave some prominence to younger woman artists, while the Grosvenor Gallery gave opportunities to artists working in an aesthetic or classical idiom.
- ¹¹⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 100-8. The exhibition drew visitors from all classes.
- ¹¹⁶ Huish, *The Years Art* (1886), 95.
- ¹¹⁷ Billcliffe, s.v. "Osborn."
- ¹¹⁸ Helland, 38.
- ¹¹⁹ Billcliffe, s.v. "Bowkett" (see chapter 1 for titles); "Stuart". For example, in 1863, two of the Stuart pictures, *A Bunch of Light Grapes and Fruit*, *Wild Flowers etc*, were watercolours. Charles Stuart junior's work cannot be distinguished from his father's work until his landscapes appear in the catalogues— (1871, GI), (1872, RSA), (1872, RHA), (1873, BSA).
- ¹²⁰ *Illustrated London News*, 30 Aug 1879, 203.
- ¹²¹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 72. Some women writers on art did achieve success; however, despite being involved in feminist causes, women such as Anna Jamison and later Emilia Dilke did not promote the work of modern women artists. They also worked in a male-defined area and to appear professional they had to discuss men's artwork.
- ¹²² "Royal Scottish Academy, Exhibition, 1872," *Art-Journal* 34 (1872): 110-1.
- ¹²³ *Art-Journal* 34 (1872): 110-1.

¹²⁴ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 169-70. Ruskin's patriarchal attitude extended to Lady Pauline Trevelyan and Ellen Heaton. Although they were strong-minded women of elite station, they submitted to Ruskin's cultural authority with regard to their art collections. Artists dependent upon Ruskin's critical judgement included Lady Waterford, Anna Blundon, Francesca Alexander, and Anna Howitt. For a concise account of Ruskin's relationship with such women see Casteras and Peterson, 17-19.

¹²⁵ See Rodney Engen, *Kate Greenaway: A Biography* (London: Macdonald, 1981).

¹²⁶ Dinah Birch, "What Teachers do you give your Girls?" Ruskin and Women's Education," in *Ruskin and Gender*, ed. Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 108. Despite proposing a limit to women's education, late in his life, Ruskin subsidized women's philanthropic endeavours and gave endowments to the first women's colleges in Oxford.

¹²⁷ Birch, 132.

¹²⁸ John Ruskin, *The Art of England*, 117-157.

¹²⁹ The exceptions were Rosa Bonheur and Elizabeth Thompson. In 1875, Ruskin described Elizabeth Thompson's battle picture, *Quatre Bras*, as "Amazon's work," John Oldcastle, "Our Living Artists: Elizabeth Butler (née Thompson)," *Magazine of Art* 2 (1879): 261.

¹³⁰ Ruskin, *The Art of England*, 152.

¹³¹ John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing; in Three Letters to Beginners* (London: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1857), 234.

¹³² *The Times*, (London) 27 May 1863, 6.

¹³³ Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 79. In his account of the art market, Altick judges it "scarcely possible to exaggerate the degree to which Victorian art was affected by the spread of middle-class housing." The enormous increase in middle-class wall space drove the Victorian art market.

Chapter 3

Mapping Bowkett within the Metropolis: Art, Artists and Studio-Houses

By 1885, Bowkett and Stuart owned an elegant studio-house in a prime London location. An undated photograph of their studio interior reveals the trappings that were central to nineteenth-century artistic identity [fig. 14]. Light floods in through multiple clerestory windows and through the attached glasshouse. Huge beaten platters propped upon the mantelpiece draw attention to the elegant fireplace. Above, a larger circular metal platter, surrounded by exotic looking feathers, catches the light. Pictures are displayed on easels; a stag's head, birdcage, china cabinet, and Islamic carpets decorate the space. In the foreground, a hexagonal eastern occasional table anchors the scene.¹ As the following chapter will show, this studio space indicated Bowkett's and her husband's successful ascent of the hierarchies of London geographical art hierarchies. This ownership of a fashionable studio not only suggested a substantial income, it also confirmed artistic success.

At a time when artists' reputations were inextricably bound up with geographic locations, Bowkett's trajectory through London took her from the margins of the art world towards its centre. Her journey commenced in the lowly East End and culminated in highly desirable Hampstead. In between, Bowkett spent a significant period in Kensington, the artistic epicentre of London, where her addresses included Fulham Road and Holland Park. Each move redefined her place within the art world and improved her social position. As Julie Codell has shown, reputation was crucial in a society obsessed with celebrity. In addition to opening their studios to the public on "Show Sundays", artists gained key public exposure as press articles created urban cultural maps of cultural authority. By focussing on how residential spaces carried symbolic meaning for a Victorian artist's self-image and public image, I will explore Bowkett's participation in a nineteenth-century historical process that saw many artists increase their social and professional positions.

Class origins and urban geography played a significant role in Bowkett's life and I will argue that she acquired cultural and symbolic capital by living and working in particular London locations. While describing the London spaces inhabited by Bowkett, I

will explore the evolution of Kensington's artistic associations and the publicity surrounding Victorian studio-houses. I will also try to use geography to locate Bowkett in a nexus of artistic influences and relationships, by suggesting possible relationships with artists such as Elizabeth Thompson and Marcus Stone who occupied the same neighbourhoods at the same time.

As urbanites in a rapidly growing metropolis, where the bricks and mortar of urban spaces assumed ever-changing social meanings,² Victorian artists knew that "space" worked as an active agent in art promotion. For the purposes of this chapter, I use Rick Allen's definition of "space" as combining "physical denotations with cultural-political connotations."³ As Pierre Bourdieu suggests, any cultural producer is situated in a certain space of production and their productions—in this case, art-making—always owe something to their position within that space.⁴ When the studio-houses of high-ranking artists were linked with particular geographical areas, the areas acquired a culturally symbolic meaning.⁵ Accordingly, anyone living and working in one of these highly regarded sites achieved an outward sign of prestige and success.

During the nineteenth century, the demographics of artists' living and working spaces were in a state of flux. At the beginning of the period, the majority of Royal Academy members (who constituted the powerful artist elite) resided in London's West End; however, by the 1860s only six members remained in the city centre.⁶ Young artists migrated from central London to form artistic enclaves in Kensington, Chelsea, St John's Wood, and Hampstead.⁷ In these areas, new and renovated buildings catered to the huge increase in professional artists. The British census of 1865 records 5,297 men and 1,652 women as painters and sculptors, the majority of whom would have wished to enhance their artistic identity and their social position by living and working in specific areas of London.⁸

Most artists lived in rented accommodation, as did the vast majority of London's population.⁹ However, a number of affluent and successful male artists distinguished themselves by buying land and erecting grand house-studios. Through their collaboration with architect peers, these artists realised striking building projects. Elaborate brick exteriors enhanced a miscellany of Gothic, Queen Anne, and Classical building styles,

each unique design contributing to an outward show of the artist's individual personality and professional status.¹⁰

Although Bowkett and Stuart would ultimately become owners of a large studio-house, their route to artistically prominent areas was more circuitous than that of affluent, socially elite artists. In 1866, the immediate Stuart family moved from Stepney Causeway to an elegant regency-style house on Constitution Crescent, Gravesend.¹¹ It can be surmised that, during the years she spent sharing the Stuarts' studio space, Bowkett gained access to a wider range of material supplies and received technical guidance from the more experienced painters in the family. Such advantages almost certainly encouraged Bowkett to increase her pictorial scope, expand her career horizons, and produce a significant number of paintings for exhibition. Along with contemporary domestic scenes, her repertoire now included such literary and historical themes as *The Last Parting of the Earl of Leicester and his wife, Amy Robsart, Countess of Leicester, at Cumnor Place* (1870, RHA), *Romeo and Juliet* (1872, RSA), and *Ophelia* (1873, SBA).¹² Her prices also increased. During this period, relatives and servants probably helped with the care of Bowkett's young children, which would have been a significant factor in permitting her the time to be artistically productive.¹³

The Stuarts' residence, which overlooked the town and the Thames, was close to Windmill Hill and Rosherville Gardens. Windmill Hill was a popular picnic site and Rosherville's fête-like gardens attracted day-trippers from London with steamers carrying hundreds of families down the Thames to Gravesend's shoreline.¹⁴ While these open airy spaces were a great improvement on the crowded, polluted atmosphere of Poplar or Stepney, by the second half of the nineteenth century, Gravesend was thought of as rather "low" and was not frequented by artists or high society.¹⁵ Since the association with celebrated artists was essential for recognition, in 1875, Bowkett, her husband, and their three children moved from the Stuart family home to relocate in the artistically stimulating district of South Kensington where eminent artists lived and worked.

South Kensington: Studio-Houses and Celebrated Artists

By the 1870s, South Kensington had evolved into a national centre for the arts. Encompassing a museum complex, a network of artist's studios and grand studio-houses,

South Kensington furnished artists with distinguished neighbours and an impressive address. Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler) painted the celebrated *Roll Call* (1874) in a studio on the Fulham Road. Marcus Stone, Luke Fildes, and other artists built spacious studio-houses in Holland Park, the most striking example of which was Frederic Leighton's "palace of art".¹⁶ Despite her modest background, I will show that Bowkett penetrated these spaces and it is possible that the work of Kensington artists informed her pictorial themes and market-related decisions.

Early in the nineteenth century, Kensington had been regarded as a rural retreat for health and holidays.¹⁷ By the mid-century, the area was chosen as the future site of the country's cultural centre. The impressive Great Exhibition of 1851, held in the Crystal Palace, is now generally regarded as a landmark in British design. Yet, paradoxically, the exhibition was both a financial success and an aesthetic failure. When it became apparent that British designs did not compare well with those from the continent, Prince Albert, in his role as the Chief Commissioner of the Great Exhibition, designated the exhibition's net surplus of £170,000 to the improvement of British design. Farsighted commissioners persuaded the government to contribute a further £130,000 to purchase the vast Kensington Gore estate, twelve acres of which were reserved for a National Science and Art education complex. On 22 June 1857, Queen Victoria opened the South Kensington Museum. Over time, the spacious exhibition halls housed the works of leading British artists and designers along with vast collections of European and colonial art-related objects, all of which contributed to the development of British aesthetic taste.¹⁸ Tim Barringer suggests that the museum had much in common with the new department stores and "the experience of walking past the shops of Brompton Road, in the nineteenth century as today, involves an analogous regime of looking and desire to that experienced within the museums of South Kensington."¹⁹ To satisfy the Victorian craving for cultural capital, the material excess of the museum was reproduced within British homes and artist's studios.

In the museum's vicinity, developers erected gracious terraces that included units built expressly for artists.²⁰ Thus, the evolving cultural value of the public spaces of South Kensington's museums intersected with artists' domestic spaces and personal histories. When the painter Louise Jopling moved into the area in 1872, she considered

that she was in the “midst of the fashionable world”.²¹ By the mid-1870s, when Bowkett and Stuart occupied number 233, Brompton Road, artistic associations were firmly attached to the Kensington area. Spatial prerequisites were undoubtedly one of the factors that affected the Stuart’s choice of habitat. Without a sizeable studio to accommodate large canvases, artists were restricted in the categories of work they produced. It seems probable that 233 Brompton Road contained either a studio or a painting-room, because after Bowkett moved from there in 1875, entries in exhibition catalogues indicate that a different artist, a Miss L.A. Sharland, used the same Brompton address.²²

The Avenue, Fulham Road: Elizabeth Thompson’s “Military” Triumph

In 1875, Bowkett produced *Folkstone Beach* [fig. 2], her most ambitious painting known to date. The six-foot-wide canvas depicts thirty-nine figures engaged in seaside activities. We can only surmise as to why at this particular juncture Bowkett produced such a complex picture of contemporary leisure. Perhaps she had more time and more studio space, or perhaps the recent success of another woman artist, Elizabeth Thompson, impacted upon Jane Bowkett’s work-related decisions.

Elizabeth Thompson depicted military events upon large canvases and in 1874 rose to instant fame with her painting, *Calling the roll after an engagement, Crimea* (commonly referred to as *The Roll Call*) [pl. 2].²³ At the time, she tenanted one of the studio-flats in *The Avenue*, 76 Fulham Road. Interestingly, by 1877 Bowkett and Stuart had become residents of *The Avenue*, 76 Fulham Road.²⁴ Given the close proximity of the Brompton and Fulham Roads, *The Avenue* studios would have been known to the Stuarts, and it is very probable that Bowkett visited the premises prior to becoming a tenant, either to call upon artists or for the openings on Show Sunday. Since Thompson is described as having been vivacious and exceptionally personable, it is not unreasonable to presume that Bowkett came into contact with the distinguished younger painter.²⁵

The newly established complex known as *The Avenue* exemplified the structural changes taking place within the city. Since only a minority of artists could afford to purchase property and design their own studio-houses, from the 1860s onwards, speculative builders, who recognised the increasing demand for artist-studios, began to convert small terraces into studio units. This was the case with *The Avenue*. Hoping to

increase the rental income from his property at 76 Fulham Road, Charles Freake, a local developer, converted his little-used estate workshops into this enclave of sculptors' and painters' studios. By 1871, twenty units with the advantage of northern light were complete and available for rent [pl. 3].²⁶

The whole block was named *The Avenue*, and Giles Walkley suggests that, of all London's studio groups, *The Avenue* might well possess the greatest number of illustrious alumni. Of these, Elizabeth Thompson is of particular interest. She became an overnight success with her highly acclaimed *The Roll Call*, a scene depicting the aftermath of war, which she painted in her Fulham Road studio.²⁷ When it was exhibited at the Royal Academy, *The Roll Call* captured the public's imagination to such an extent that guardrails were necessary to protect it from the enthusiastic crowds. The triumphant reception of Thompson's six-foot canvas possibly inspired other women painters to produce larger canvases.²⁸ By the 1870s, women who wanted professional status exhibited large-scale oils, even though size was still regarded as a mark of ambition and thus generally regarded as unfeminine.²⁹ In 1875, Thompson enjoyed further accolades and financial rewards when she exhibited another large military scene, *The 28th Regiment at Quatre Bras*.³⁰ And in this same year, Bowkett chose to work upon a large canvas that was identical in size to Thompson's pictures.³¹

Though most Victorian women artists were drawn from the middle classes, as I have noted, their backgrounds differed in significant ways. Elizabeth Thompson's wealthy parents not only provided her with the opportunity to travel and study abroad but also provided the means by which she could rent her own studio-flat.³² Nevertheless, despite Thompson's and Bowkett's disparate social and educational backgrounds, for a period in the mid-1870s the two women worked within a common environment. Although it is open to question as to whether Thompson influenced Bowkett's artistic choices, it is evident that the move to the modern studio environment was reflected in Bowkett's art production.³³ Moreover, exhibition records indicate that the asking price of Bowkett's pictures was consistently higher following the move to the South Kensington environs.³⁴ Evidently aware that specific urban spaces had assumed art-related socio-commercial dimensions, Bowkett and Stuart made a subsequent move to Holland Park, Kensington's most prestigious residential area.

The Elevated Environs of Holland Park and Melbury Road

By 1880, Holland Park formed the nucleus of Kensington's "artistically" important residential spaces. Its intimacy shaped activity and influence. Described in the *Builder* magazine as housing a "nest of cognoscenti,"³⁵ the studio-houses of highly regarded Academy members clustered with properties belonging to old and new moneyed patrons. At this juncture Bowkett and Stuart both received academy recognition. Why? What prompted Bowkett to paint *Only Four Miles More* (1881), a picture with an overtly social realist theme?³⁶ And did Marcus Stone's financially successful romantic scenes influence her work? The search for answers to these questions opens a window onto cultural privilege and space.

Holland Park's artistic associations began in 1865 when Valentine Prinsep, an artist with strong aristocratic family ties, acquired land and built the first redbrick studio-house in the vicinity.³⁷ Shortly afterwards, Frederic Leighton followed suit, and his exquisitely designed studio-house in Holland Park Road became the best known of all nineteenth-century studio-houses and provided the major catalyst for the shifting identity of the area. The first stage of Leighton's studio was completed in 1866; by 1880 the building had been expanded to include six public areas and had come to represent as much a showplace as a working studio. The walls of the centrepiece, the Arab Hall, displayed Leighton's magnificent collection of Syrio-Isnik tiles [fig. 15]. Throughout the house, exotic references to the East harmonized with classical elements, and artists such as Walter Crane and William Morris executed rich, innovative decorative elements that included carved Corinthian-style alabaster columns, gilt mosaic friezes, and ebonised woodwork [fig. 16].

In 1878, Leighton was elected President of the Royal Academy and knighted. Due in part to his friendship with the Prince of Wales, he became the leading official representative of art in Britain.³⁸ Leighton moved comfortably in high society and entertained royalty. As a distinguished member of the artistic establishment, he advanced the social credibility of all artists, and helped erase their "former associations with Bohemianism and degeneracy".³⁹ Leighton was pivotal in providing the public profile

and the materiality that defined Holland Park as a site of high artistic production and consumption.

Since Leighton's presence established the desirability and the exclusiveness of the area, when the nearby Melbury Road was developed in 1875 it likewise became a prestigious address, an address that attracted Bowkett and Stuart in 1880-1881.⁴⁰ Once land became available, an impressive list of well-known painters acquired property nearby: George Frederic Watts, Marcus Stone [fig. 17], Luke Fildes, Colin Hunter, and Albert Moore were among the many artists who built extravagant and unorthodox homes.⁴¹ As Caroline Dakers has noted, the artists that moved into the area were anxious to become part of the establishment, and Academy recognition frequently followed the building of a grand studio-house within the Holland Park enclave.⁴² The locale became heavily populated with artists, yet the *Magazine of Art* described it as an "intimate space", which was comprised of "just two roads, Holland Park Road, and Melbury Road."⁴³ Speculative builders also constructed large houses and studio-dwellings to satisfy the demand created by younger artists, who were determined to acquire any sort of studio space that was close to the President of the Royal Academy.⁴⁴ These were erected with the intention of tenanting them as revenue property, thereby allowing less wealthy artists to penetrate the powerful space of class and privilege.

In 1880, Bowkett and Stuart became tenants of 18a Melbury Road, an Elizabethan-style semidetached mansion [pl. 4],⁴⁵ which was splendid enough to be described as "the most costly building on the estate." Along with other details, *The Building News* noted the elaborate four-storied façade, articulated by a three-storied bay and a square oriel, and that "a series of gabled windows [relieved] the roof above a stone bracketed cornice."⁴⁶ To run the large house, the Stuarts employed three servants.⁴⁷ By comparison, when they lived in Gravesend, two women serviced the Stuart household of eight whereas, in Melbury Road, three women served Bowkett, Stuart and their two sons. The high ratio of servants to family members, then, confirms Bowkett's social advancement.⁴⁸

Holland Park's relatively pastoral setting further enhanced their new lifestyle. Despite the new development, the surrounding spaces remained remarkably rural. A country lane beside the Fildes property led up to the stables of the original Jacobean

mansion, Holland House. Luke Fildes' son recalled the county-like atmosphere: many of the original trees such as elms, oaks, acacias, sycamores, and flowering hawthorns remained, and in both spring and summer masses of wild flowers bloomed along the banks of the lanes, and "every day at milking time, with mooings and tinkling of bells, cows came along the lane and into Melbury Road."⁴⁹ Fildes' recollection of visual and sensory pleasure demarcates his home environment from the industrialized and polluted areas of the city and his descriptive reminiscences suggest the class-based divisiveness of urban spaces (the shaded areas on nineteenth-century maps illustrate the striking difference between Poplar and Kensington's urban density (figs. 4, 8).

To more fully appreciate the spatial transitions marking Bowkett's career, the olfactory and auditory sensory components of Holland Park's environment should be juxtaposed with those of the East End. The clamorous and foul smelling surroundings of Bowkett's youth as opposed to the peaceful and unpolluted suburb, twenty years later, epitomize the multiplicity of middle-class experiences. Even though she resided in a middle-class home in London's East End, she would have experienced the foul odour and harsh sounds of manufacture and poverty, whereas in Kensington the emission of offensive odour was strictly controlled. For example, when the artist Louisa Starr and her family leased property in the vicinity of Kensington Palace, they were strictly forbidden to boil tripe or make soap.⁵⁰ During the Victorian period, the bourgeois abhorrence of foul smells produced its own form of stratification and social power. Purulent air appeared to threaten the social order, whereas fragrant and uncontaminated air promised to support its stability.⁵¹

Although it is tempting to imagine Holland Park's idyllic location as harbouring an artist community that transcended class barriers, this would be unrealistic. The artists shared both a common geographical space and a set of differentiated social networks. Viewed from the outside, Holland Park's artists constituted an elite urban group; seen from within, however, the space was made up of various subcultures. For example, after attending one of Leighton's celebrated musical evenings, one guest commented on the division between the ordinary guests and the fashionable elite, he observed: "the court never mixed for a moment with those who had not the entrée."⁵² Thus, as in the larger

social arena, social divisions of space in Holland Park were closely regulated and culturally determined.⁵³

Apart from her work as an artist, Bowkett had few characteristics in common with Holland Park's inner circle.⁵⁴ She lacked prestige due to her father's professional rank, and his practice among the working classes would have further lessened the family status.⁵⁵ Social distances and distinctions were written into bodies:⁵⁶ dress, deportment and speech signalled upbringing. In a society obsessed with each minute detail of a person's background, class distinctions and status symbols were taken very seriously.⁵⁷ Furthermore, as Deborah Cherry suggests, "the vast studios in palatial residences indexed not only status, wealth and success but came to signify artistic masculinity."⁵⁸ Given these cultural and gender barriers, was Bowkett excluded from this sphere or was she able to negotiate a position for herself within it?

The subject matter tackled by Bowkett in this period suggests that it was possible to participate to some extent in this elitist realm of artistic production, albeit within the technical limits of her training. History painting was a male-dominated field and, because it retained its pre-eminent position in the discipline, pictures containing some historical component commanded higher prices. As early as 1870, Bowkett depicted events and figures from British history such as the untraced *An Incident of the Year 1649*, which was exhibited at the Society of British Artists.⁵⁹ Since the confrontation between Charles I and Oliver Cromwell and the civil war between Cavalier and Roundhead held a central position in the Victorian imagination,⁶⁰ Bowkett presumably chose the subject for its market potential. Though Bowkett continued to paint and exhibit domestic scenes, from 1870 onwards, her output contained a higher proportion of pictures depicting historical or literary characters.⁶¹

During her Melbury Road period Bowkett also produced work with an overt social realist theme, thus challenging the contemporary preconception that women were only capable of working within a narrow subject range.⁶² In the latter part of the nineteenth century, after it became more common for middle-class women to tour the countryside, women artists increasingly turned to the theme of rural poverty and the displaced homeless.⁶³ In 1881, Bowkett's untraced portrayal of arduous travelling entitled *Four Miles More* was exhibited at the Royal Academy. According to *Queen*, the picture

told a story of poverty and pathos.⁶⁴ Since social realist pictures were difficult to sell, why would Bowkett have selected this type of subject?

Several possibilities suggest themselves. Firstly, we should consider Bowkett's social conscience, which could have been shaped by her father's socialist ardour and his use of the family home as a site of political activity. After 1870, poverty was a constant presence in the lives of the disadvantaged inhabitants of the countryside. A series of losses in the British grain market resulting from cheap foreign imports and cycles of cold wet weather were just two of the reasons for agricultural depression and a decline in rural employment.⁶⁵ Although there is no written record of Bowkett taking part in any particular socio-political activities, her artwork indicates an awareness of the problems of the time.

A second consideration is Bowkett's Melbury Road proximity to Luke Fildes, Colin Hunter, and Marcus Stone, all of whom had produced engravings for the *Graphic*, a weekly magazine established in December 1869. The *Graphic's* pages presented their audience with a large number of engraved illustrations, many of which depicted social evils. This artwork was significant for English art and artists, and during the 1870s several young painters produced sympathetic renderings of the condition of the poor. According to the social realist painter Hubert Herkomer (1849-1914), "there was a visible change in the selection of subjects by painters in England after the event of the *Graphic*."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it remained difficult to obtain critical acclaim for pictures of poverty. When Herkomer showed two paintings at the Royal Academy in 1885, the critics mainly passed over *Hard Times* [pl. 5],⁶⁷ his depiction of the plight of labouring families; instead, they lavished praise on *Lady in White*, his portrait of an attractive young woman.⁶⁸ *Hard Times* is noteworthy because in content it is probably similar to *Only Four Miles More*, Bowkett's now lost rendition of the rural homeless.

Fildes sometimes reworked the illustrations he had produced for the *Graphic* into oil paintings. One particular adaptation received a complex critical reception and exposed the problems that all artists could encounter when attempting to transfer social realist subject matter, though laudable in visual reportage, into the realm of high art. Fildes initially came to the public's attention in 1874 when his huge sombre image of the homeless and the hungry in *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward* caused a

sensation at the RA [pl. 6].⁶⁹ The critical reviews were mixed: the *Art Journal* found “it horrible and weird”,⁷⁰ and the *Saturday Review* thought Fildes had gone too far in his depiction of “revolting reality.”⁷¹ According to Fildes’ son, one foreign critic credited Fildes with opening a new path in art in a manner similar to that of the French realist painter, Gustave Courbet. Other critics such as Francis Palgrave condemned the painting for its lack of finish and beauty, and George Augustus Sala offered cautionary advice. Writing in a private letter to Fildes, Sala recommended that he “not cultivate exclusively this class of subjects....the real bent of your genius will be to cultivate the beautiful in form and spirit.”⁷² Even though social realist pictures received a great deal of attention within the gallery setting, they often remained unsold. Admiration for innovation gave way to questions of taste; if poverty was to be hung upon a dining-room wall, people generally preferred that it be charming and sentimental. Fildes continued to portray social problems as well as other subjects until the mid-1880s, after which he restricted his art to more saleable themes.⁷³

Although pictures with disturbing social themes sold poorly, their public appeal made them appropriate material for academy exhibition, which suggests that Bowkett may have explored this theme to enhance her reputation. Unlike Fildes, Stone and others, who became associates and then full members of the Royal Academy after they bought property on Melbury Road, Bowkett was excluded from Academy membership. Nevertheless, even being a tenant in such a location provided a certain prestige. For two consecutive years, in 1881 and 1882, Bowkett’s work was included in the annual Royal Academy exhibition.⁷⁴ Why after a hiatus of twenty years (*Preparing for Dinner* had been shown in 1861) was her work accepted for Academy exhibition? Since Melbury Road would appear to have been a contributing factor in the creation of art status, one obvious answer is that her address or some artistic association or friends influenced the selection committee. Moreover, 1880 marked the year that Charles Stuart first had a picture accepted by the Academy, and from this year onwards his landscape pictures were included in its exhibitions on an annual basis.⁷⁵ The implication is that personal space raised the Stuarts’ perceived artistic worth and facilitated a point of entry into the public space of Academy exhibitions.

Romantic Liaisons: The Pictures of Bowkett, Stone, and Rae

Melbury Road also provides the starting point for drawing parallels between the works of Bowkett and Marcus Stone, and those of Henrietta Rae (Mrs. Normand), another Holland Park resident. Stone was among the first of the well-connected artists to build on Melbury Road. Originally a painter of historical scenes, from 1876 onwards Stone increasingly catered to the Victorian vogue for Regency subjects and was best known for picturing romantic liaisons in garden-like settings, “which united the ever fascinating psychology of lover’s meetings with the grace and elegance of old world fashions.”⁷⁶ Interestingly, this description of Stone’s work could very well be applied to Bowkett’s undated romantic genre painting, *Love’s Young Dream*, which is preserved as an engraving [fig. 18]. The scene depicts two graceful figures dressed in Regency costume in a park-like setting. The elegant but rather supercilious-looking suitor perches on the back of a bench, while the seated, demure-looking young woman gazes off into the distance. In the foreground, an overturned basket of flowers signals the couple’s discord. Bowkett’s charming picture of courtship bears a striking resemblance to Stone’s romantic costume pieces. *There is Always Another* [fig. 19], for example, is typical of Stone’s oeuvre. According to his biographer, Stone had many followers:

He has already to some extent set a fashion, and many artists now pay him the compliment of that imitation that is proverbially the sincerest form of flattery. Some adapt his subjects, some follow his manner, and others even go as far as to appropriate bodily groups and figures from his pictures.⁷⁷

Conceivably, Bowkett recognised both the popularity and the marketability of Stone’s images and proceeded to capitalize upon his success.⁷⁸

One reason for Stone’s success was that his sentimental love scenes allowed spectators to read the pictures and create emotional narratives. On a visit to the Royal Academy exhibition in 1877, Henry James noted that the typical English picture contained an easily accessible narrative component and that the viewer’s response to the pictures was particularly English:

I was struck with the fact that when these [observers] were in groups or couples, they either, by way of comment, said nothing at all or said something

simply about the subject of the picture---projected themselves into the story. I remember a remark made as I stood looking at a very prettily painted scene by Mr. Marcus Stone, representing a young lady in a pink satin dress, solemnly burning up a letter, while an old woman sits weeping in the background. Two ladies stood near me, entranced; for a long time they were silent. At last---‘Her mother was a widow!’ one of them gently breathed. Then they looked a while longer and departed. The most appreciable thing to them was the old woman’s wearing a widow’s cap; and the speaker’s putting her verb in the last tense struck me as proof of accepting the picture above all things as history.⁷⁹

In bridging the gap between the canvas and reality, viewers became involved with the image. They read common cultural signs, constructed a narrative, and empathised with the sentiment of the situation.

A number of artists reworked themes of romance and Bowkett’s *Love’s Young Dream* also connects her to another, much younger, Holland Park resident. It is quite clear that *Love’s Young Dream* can be related to a painting by Henrietta Rae (1859-1926) entitled *Doubts* (1886/7)[fig. 20]; and a multi-layered web of associations connects Stone’s, Bowkett’s and Rae’s romantic love-scenes. Though Rae is usually noted for challenging the moral conventions of the time with her depictions of the female nude, she also produced lesser-known, more conservative images. In 1885, after Rae and her husband Ernest Normand took a house and studio in Holland Park Road, the leading artists immediately befriended them. The ease with which they entered the intimate Holland Park circle would have been facilitated by Rae’s connections to high-ranking people and her prestigious art education.⁸⁰

In 1887, when Rae exhibited *Doubts* at the RA, the painting was recognised as being freely adapted from Stone’s picturesque vocabulary: “On Private View Day Mr. Stone expressed his opinion of the attempt as ‘Charming! Charming!’”⁸¹ During the mid-Victorian period, copying a living artist’s work denoted esteem, and replication of one’s own work and the work of others was not uncommon. As I will explain in the following chapters, economics were probably a determining factor in Bowkett’s replication of her own paintings and she was not alone in this practice. Well-respected artists, for example, made oil replicas of their most successful paintings for wealthy collectors. W. P. Frith, admired for his modern-life panoramas, made numerous replicas of his paintings such as *The Railway Station* (1862). Surprisingly, replication was not restricted to the original

artist: Stone also made a copy in oils of Frith's *The Railway Station* and sold it to a collector.⁸²

In a 1901 biographical sketch on Henrietta Rae, the *Art Journal* noted the similarity between Rae's picture and Stone's romantic images and claimed that *Doubts* had established Rae's name:

It was the earliest picture by Mrs Normand hung on the line at Burlington House, ... it is from this time that the artist's popularity may be said to date. We discern in this presentation of a middle-aged gallant, in stripped coat and knee britches of a bygone generation, paying court to a young girl, the influence of Marcus Stone, whose name is associated with a score of like sentimental exercises.⁸³

Bowkett's *Love's Young Dream* and Rae's *Doubts* were executed in remarkably different painting styles (while Bowkett's work is distinguished by its linear stylized clarity, Rae's technique is loose and painterly), yet the compositions bear a striking resemblance to each other. The overturned basket is a particularly significant motif and provides a direct link between the two paintings. This specific woven basket was a ubiquitous trope in Victorian paintings of women, its curved outline signalling femininity and nature. When packed with flowers or fruit, it could be construed as a symbol of the fertile woman. This type of basket appears in several artists' pictures; however, to my knowledge, it is unusual to find it overturned. In Marcus Stone's undated *Cherished Moments*, a coy young woman holds a flower-filled basket in front of her body; in *Autumn Fruits* (1883), the allegorical woman holds a basket filled with fruit before her body. In *Asleep* (1894) [fig. 21] the decorative flower basket, positioned alongside the sleeping woman's body increases the image's erotic overtones.⁸⁴ By positioning a "nature-filled" vessel beside the part of the body associated with procreation, Stone makes a discrete reference to woman's sexuality while remaining within the parameters of respectability.

The visual vocabulary for nineteenth-century romantic scenes usually comprises active men and passive women. While the suitor either gazes at or leans towards the woman, for reasons of modesty she discreetly turns away. Because the overturned flower basket in Bowkett and Rae's pictures brings an extra dimension to the female figure, I propose that their women gain a more active role in the romantic drama. Stone tended to imply lovers' emotional tiffs through figural poses, whereas Bowkett and Rae, while also

employing figural poses, add a further sign of disruption. The overturned basket and scattered blossoms brings feminine emotions to the fore, and, by signalling the young woman's inner turmoil, the damaged bouquet might be informing us of more than just a lover's tiff. What did all this signify? Has a reputation been injured or a friendship destroyed? It must be born in mind that the Victorians examined every detail of a painting to construct narratives that are usually lost on us now. The small red petal-like pattern on the lovers' clothing in Bowkett's picture symbolically unites the couple, but the red petals that fall to the stony ground work against the pattern to destroy the unity. The red line seen in the section of the shawl that wraps around the woman's body unravels into fragments around the edges to signal the frayed relationship. In the Victorian language of flowers, red roses meant love or beauty, while yellow could mean joy, jealousy or friendship. The rose's multivalent symbols offer several interpretations and add an emotional complexity to the work. Indeed, a discarded rose has even been seen as the emblem of a prostitute.⁸⁵ One of the red roses lying on the uneven path is dying. For some viewers, the withered flower might have signalled the woman's fall out of a state of innocence as well as a dying love affair.

Pictures of romance were extremely popular and the title *Love's Young Dream* was not unique.⁸⁶ Regrettably, since Bowkett's picture remains undated (and only known from an engraving), we cannot ascertain whether Bowkett's or Rae's was the earlier picture. Indeed, owing to a lack of documentation concerning Bowkett, the connections drawn between her work and that of other Holland Park residents are only made possible because artists such as Fildes, Stone and Rae achieved a higher status. Nevertheless, despite being compromised by her rudimentary art training, discriminatory social practices, and the Victorian prejudices against women artists in general, the subjects painted by Bowkett after her move to Melbury Road illustrate her understanding of market preferences and her capability to produce works within the self-same realm as more feted artists.

Exposed to the Public: Studio Openings on Show Sunday

How did the Bowkett and other Victorian women artists achieve visibility? Exposure was as necessary to marketing activity as artistic talent. In an era preoccupied with celebrity, biographies and related articles provided a medium through which artists attained merit. Except in a few cases, men were both writer and subject in biographical literature. Writers fashioned artists into refined gentlemen and their studio-houses became key symbols of power. By circulating intimate accounts of the artist's routine, his sophisticated habits, appearance, and descriptions of his home and studio, articles and photographs in newspapers and journals exposed the artist to public scrutiny. Social ideology undermined women's ability to compete for exposure, and on those occasions when women artists were considered, prevailing codes of modesty shaped and regulated their life stories. Nevertheless, little-known women artists like Bowkett could attain greater public visibility by having a studio within an important "artistic" London area. The clustering of artist's studios offered significant opportunities for public exposure.

Every year on a designated Sunday in spring, just prior to submitting their pictures to the Royal Academy hanging committee for adjudication, artists opened their studios to display their pictures. The practice, variously known as "Picture Sunday", "Studio Sunday", and more commonly as "Show Sunday", became customary in the early 1870s and by the 1880s was a well-established tradition.⁸⁷ The "openings" became a social event, which stimulated public interest and attracted potential buyers. Initially, fashionable society received private invitations to visit those painters who were "at home" and the occasion quickly became part of the London season.⁸⁸ Over time, the fabric of visiting society became less exclusive and social interaction between the various layers of society became less strictly controlled. Once access relaxed, the studios functioned as important spatial points that connected artists to a larger public.⁸⁹ Artists also made the rounds of other artist's studios and it was not unusual to visit "eighteen or twenty studios" on a single show Sunday.⁹⁰

A fashionable studio gave an artist a stamp of authority. Studios were not simply a space in which to work, they also functioned as a space to display one's work and one's lifestyle. Writing in the *Illustrated London News*, Florence Fenwick Miller informed

readers that on Show Sundays studios underwent a transformation— from a large uncarpeted space filled with “cruelly keen light” to a sumptuous exotic space:

The Eastern carpets and many hued stuffs are hung against the walls; or if they fall short, strips of parti-coloured Indian matting may serve a turn. The rugs are laid on the floor; bowls of cut flowers skilfully arranged, and growing plants are placed in pots of chased silver, or beaten brass, or artistically –tinted ware.⁹¹

Millar visited several prominent men’s studios and described how paintings were complemented by precious objects in interiors that were richly decorated in a style similar to the Bowkett/Stuart Hampstead studio. Because information regarding ornamental objects prevails over her description of actual paintings, she transforms the entire studio into a work of art. Undoubtedly, articles such as this brought artists and their paintings to the attention of the public.

By moving to Melbury Road, Bowkett promoted and secured her own artistic respectability and visibility by working within the same geographical locus as socially prominent artists. Living and working near an artistic epicentre bestowed upon artists a locally defined identity that might satisfy a potential buyers’ quest for work by an established artist. Given the large number of interested people who visited well-known artists’ studio spaces in *The Avenue* complex in Fulham Road, it is probable that Bowkett’s work became increasingly visible during the time she was in residence there. On Show Sunday in March 1874, “an inordinate number of people” visited Elizabeth Thompson’s Fulham Road studio to view *The Roll Call*.⁹² Seeing that this occurred before *The Roll Call*’s public acclaim, we can assume an increase in the number of visitors, eager to view Thompson’s latest pictures, on subsequent Show Sundays in 1875 and 1876. Given the interconnectedness of the studio units, it is to be further expected that curious groups ventured into neighbouring studios to view other artist’s works.⁹³ Through exposure to these people, Bowkett may have become financially and socially connected to a wider body of picture buyers.

In Holland Park, when the studios were open, people flocked to the easily navigated circuit and “artists and their families, art collectors and dealers, jostled with the general public curious to see the homes of rich and famous artists.”⁹⁴ In addition, artists

sent out invitations to other artists. Tristen Ellis of 7 Holland Park Road requested “the honour of a visit” to view his pictures of Egypt and sent the Stuarts an elegant card embossed with a delicate sepia line drawing of an Arab dhow.⁹⁵ On Show Sunday 1883, the Fildes family recorded almost seven hundred visitors to their Melbury Road studio.⁹⁶ At some studios, as the number of viewers increased, there was an overrun from one designated day to almost any Sunday, or sometimes both Saturday and Sunday. In 1881, Watts added a gallery to his Melbury Road studio-house solely for the purpose of receiving the public free of charge on both those days.⁹⁷ The great diversity of work available in the Holland Park studios offered the picture buyer an impressive range of temptations: “they presented a microcosm of Victorian art and consequently proved attractive to late nineteenth-century collectors interested in acquiring a quantity of works representative of the age.”⁹⁸ It is reasonable, then, to suppose that Bowkett was an active agent in this local mode of commercial exchange. Art’s association with money tends to be a troubling topic and one that art-historical writing often ignores or passes over, yet the power of the marketplace in Victorian artists’ lives and careers cannot be understated.⁹⁹

Biographical Bias: Public Men and Private Women.

As Julie Codell has shown, the Victorian commodification of art included artists’ biographic profiles in the popular press. Such literature, which was valuable for raising artistic status, generally neglected women’s participation in the art market and furthered a two-tiered system of gendered values. Using laudatory accounts of men artists’ strong work ethic and their contribution to the economy, the authors of nineteenth-century biographical books and journal articles shaped living British artists into important bearers of national culture. Catering to a middle-class public with increased leisure and an interest in the expansion of knowledge, biographical texts supplied readers with reproductions of well-known paintings along with intimate details of the male artist’s productivity, studio, and home. In exchange for public scrutiny, the artist gained an elevated position in the social order.¹⁰⁰

The art press, then, fashioned the male artist into a professional, social, national and moral being. Codell suggests that “perhaps the most suturing images were those of

artists' homes and studios which became rich symbols of artistic moral and national character, reaching the stage of fetishized spaces in biographies."¹⁰¹ The long-running *Art Journal* series "Artist's Studios", which ostensibly informed artists of design possibilities, could easily be construed as promoting art consumption. Here, detailed floor plans with illustrations of cavernous interior spaces lit by double-height windows symbolized the artist's material success. Edward Tarver's description of Marcus Stone's Melbury Road studio contains several references to grandiose space [fig. 22]: the north wall of the studio "is occupied by three large oriel windows reaching up to the top of the wall, and each is surmounted by a dormer window extending nearly up to the ceiling." According to Tarver, the huge space gives Stone the advantage of "true perspective" and allows him to "place his model sixty feet away from his canvas."¹⁰² By bringing to public attention the vast size and the design complexity of artists' working spaces, Taver elevates both the artist and the art-making process.

Artists were authenticated by the gracious space they inhabited, and the press' reiteration of these themes meant that the large studio-home signalled the professionalism of the artist.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the grand studio was not without its contradictions. Any signs of commercialism could taint an artistic identity and the inter-relationship between the production of art and the marketing of art was carefully masked. Hence the photographs of leading modern artists, published in F. G. Stephens' *Artists at Home* (1884) depicted cultured individuals, surrounded by aesthetic objects and cocooned within their studios, libraries or withdrawing rooms. The photographs distanced the artist from the outer commercial world and profiled a creative professional with refined aesthetic taste.¹⁰⁴

However, the biographical writing that afforded celebrity status to an artist was gender biased. Since Victorian women were socially expected to be shy, retiring, and inconspicuous, it was extremely difficult for them to adopt or promote a public persona. The art press seldom gave biographical space to women artists and their lives were usually shielded from public scrutiny. However, one exception to this (and a valuable source of biographical and ideological information regarding Bowkett's Victorian contemporaries) is Ellen Clayton's massive compendium, *English Female Artists* (1875). Unlike the uniform entries allocated to the men in Stephens' *Artists at Home*, Clayton's

entries are uneven; this probably reflects her difficulty in obtaining material. In the chapter on figure painters, the little-known watercolourist Rebecca Coleman commands twenty pages, whereas only four pages are devoted to Elizabeth Thompson, the dedicatee of the book. Henrietta Ward, the most established woman artist in the country, commands just five pages, and the prolific and respected Emily Mary Osborn is unacknowledged.

Adopting the format of male-based life-stories, Clayton describes talent recognised at an early age, the overcoming of adversity, and she carefully negotiates the slippery path between invisibility and exposure. In contrast to the visibility and recognition accorded to male artists, Clayton communicates codes of propriety: the women artists “as a rule lead quiet, uneventful lives,” they “do not glitter in the splendour of renown,” and “eminently respectable, they affect little display.”¹⁰⁵ Their lives are constructed within the prevailing definition of femininity and disciplined by sexual difference. Apart from Clayton there are few biographical profiles of women artists at all. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, both the *Art Journal* and the *Magazine of Art* published long-running series of biographical articles. With the exception of Emily Mary Osborn’s selection in 1864 as the token woman artist in the *Art Journal*’s ten-year series of biographical sketches,¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Thompson Butler’s 1879 entry and Louise Jopling’s 1880 entry in the *Magazine of Art*’s “Our Living Artists” series,¹⁰⁷ few women painters were allotted space in eminent art periodicals.

The Victorian penchant for celebrity recognition included the publication of portrait-photographs. Since men were more accustomed to public display and their self-promotion was more accepted, their photographic depictions differed from those of women. The ideal British woman was “neither bold in bearing or masculine in mind.”¹⁰⁸ Modesty of appearance and virtue were inseparable and visual codes in women’s biographic portraits were predicated by gender and on patriarchal systems of meaning. Within the context of photography, the relationship between the sitter and the photographer commonly suggests a direct encounter. Although this encounter can be seen in the *Magazine of Art*’s 1880 feature on the “living artist” Marcus Stone, where he gazes directly into the lens and connects with the eyes of the viewer [fig. 23],¹⁰⁹ this was not so in photographs of Elizabeth Thompson Butler and Louise Jopling. The format of their

photographs adheres to the social protocols for the public depiction of women by having their gazes demurely looking to the side and away from the lens [figs. 24, 25].

It was not until Helen Postlethwaite's 1895 article "Some Noted Women Artists" that the direct gaze of women artists appeared in the art press; significantly though, the images did not originate from photographs. They were either self-portraits or portraits executed by family members.¹¹⁰ Instead of the more public space of the photographer's studio, the five images were created within an intimate space. It was self-representation that enabled these women to articulate a strong visual presence as professional artists. Although this suggests that it was perhaps inappropriate for a respectable woman to gaze directly into the commercial photographer's lens, Bowkett did not adhere to this. In the photograph published in *Queen* [fig. 26], she adopted the more accustomed forthright and level gaze of the male artist, directly inviting spectatorship.

When the life-stories of women artists were acknowledged, they tended to be targeted towards women readers. For example, Bowkett's career was included in a lengthy series concerning eminent Victorian women that *Queen, The Ladies Newspaper*, published in 1889. Furthermore, the continued use of "Mrs. Stuart", rather than her professional name, Jane M. Bowkett, throughout the article, reinforced the notion of women's dependence and a secondary status in gender ranking.

The press furthered the image of the serene, devoted woman working within the privacy of home. Even when a living woman artist's talent was acknowledged, writers positioned them differently with regard to social exposure. As previously noted, Elizabeth Thompson Butler was one of the few women artists to be given biographical space in the popular "Our Living Artists" series. In the article, John Oldcastle assured readers that "though personal conspicuousness and public appearance have always been repugnant to her nature, she confesses to the nobler ambition of fame through her labours."¹¹¹ Thompson, by contrast, voiced rather different feelings. In describing the *Roll Call*'s reception on varnishing day in 1874, she wrote, "so crowded was I by congratulating and questioning artists and starers (sic). I by no means disliked it all. Delightful is it to be an object of interest to so many people."¹¹² When Oldcastle praised Thompson for her "noble" work ethic and for overcoming her "natural" distaste for public space, he elided

the social reality of Thompson's highly competitive nature and her pleasure in seeing her work admired.

In an 1874 article written in support of women's rights to greater occupational choice, George Augustus Sala validated Thompson's career choice as one compatible with domesticity. He wrote, "we see her endowed with a vocation which can be cultivated within her own home and with the utmost privacy."¹¹³ Even though Sala defends women's entitlement to work, he makes no mention of Thompson's Fulham Road studio, the space where she actually produced her paintings; because she is a woman, Sala presumes or advances a private domestic working space.¹¹⁴

Highly Desirable West Hampstead

One way to negotiate the gendering of artistic space and public visibility was to acquire a large studio-home, and Bowkett and Stuart advanced their professional status when they purchased *The Hermitage*, West Hampstead in 1885. As we have seen, the newly built property contained a huge galleried studio, which was connected to the spacious house by a barrel-vaulted glasshouse [figs. 27, 28].¹¹⁵ It is significant that "Charles Stuart and Jane M. Bowkett (Mrs. Stuart)" are listed as proprietors rather than occupiers of *The Hermitage*.¹¹⁶ Apart from being the first indication that the couple owned property, the wording signals Bowkett's continuing independence and their financial partnership. Although several married artist couples are on record as either studio-home occupiers or proprietors, the woman artist is invariably listed solely by her married name. Only two Victorian women artists commissioned their own studio-homes: the wealthy American widow, Anna Lee Merritt, and Kate Greenaway.¹¹⁷ In 1883, following her financial success as an illustrator and author of children's books, Greenaway commissioned the prestigious architect Norman Shaw to build her a low-budget but remarkable Queen-Anne-style studio-house in Hampstead.¹¹⁸

Although art-elitist social values permeated Hampstead, its geographical spaciousness limited the formation of an exclusive inner circle. Prior to the vicinity becoming developed, painters, encumbered by easels, canvases, paints, and brushes, had traveled from their inner-city residences to portray the natural beauty of Hampstead Heath. Early in the nineteenth century, Constable, whose name is synonymous with

scenes of the English countryside, transferred the heath's vast leafy green vistas and picturesque ponds onto his canvases.¹¹⁹ Later in the century when artists became more prosperous, the convenience of living close to Hampstead Heath became fashionable, and from the 1860s onwards artists moved in ever-increasing numbers into its spacious houses, situated on wide pleasant streets.

A large studio-house might have been necessary for the production of large canvases, but it also functioned as a space for the cultivation of fashionable society whose own social events took place "at home". As Deborah Cherry has pointed out, these huge "domains were not private work-rooms – indeed any hints of the process of painting were erased – but showcases for a life-style."¹²⁰ The studio photograph with which I began this chapter records a vast interior space, decorated in the height of aesthetic fashion. It is obvious from the photographs of studios in *Artists at Home* (1884), that the display of Eastern carpets, furniture and metal work was standard practice.¹²¹ Moreover, the studio's exotic tone corresponds to press descriptions of studios on Show Sunday. The sophisticated interior endorses the owner's participation in the materialism that was common amongst artists who aspired to professionalism, and the hybrid display of foreign and British material goods implicates Bowkett in the commodity culture of Victorian Britain.

From the 1860s onwards, the addition of large permanent collections of Near Eastern and Asian objects in the South Kensington museum complex contributed to the general desire for exotic artefacts and to the commodification of empire. Lavish arrays of colonial spoils supplemented the storehouse of British designs and triumphant displays such as those in the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition both consolidated imperial authority and created a need for goods imported from the colonies.¹²² The possession of "Oriental" objects tended to reinforce artists as bearers of the highest taste. The exotic space of Leighton's Arab Hall (described in the section on Holland Park) was the supreme example of "art for art's sake" in the decorative arts.¹²³

Significantly, until Bowkett's biographical sketch appeared in the November 1889 issue of *Queen* magazine, Bowkett had been virtually ignored by the press. Although the Hampstead studio is not mentioned in the article, it is very likely that the possession of a sophisticated studio in a sought-after area contributed to Bowkett being

thought an artist worthy of public interest. Hampstead thus marks a key transition point in Bowkett's life. She produced several paintings for exhibition immediately following the move, yet from 1887-1891 her exhibition record diminishes. However, based on the 83 pictures in Bowkett/Stuart album, I would argue that this does not necessarily mean that her productivity decreased. Titles in the album only appear in catalogues from 1880 onwards, thus the majority of the pictures probably date to the later part of Bowkett's career.¹²⁴ Since the larger studio space made a social as well as an artistic statement, it is possible that Bowkett's trappings of wealth and professionalism encouraged would be art-purchasers to visit the studio and directly purchase works on display.¹²⁵

Following her death in 1891, Bowkett was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. Graveyards often constitute the conclusion to artists' movement through the spaces of the metropolis and The General Cemetery of All Souls at Kensal Green was a particularly significant nineteenth-century public space. It was the first public burial site in London. The 79-acre cemetery, consecrated in 1832, was not only the resting place for people of all ranks and religions¹²⁶ but also a site for architecturally significant monuments. Although Bowkett's grave is marked by an unpretentious head stone (which does not record her profession),¹²⁷ splendid marble art-works enhance the grandeur and elegance of the walkways, and a noteworthy number of eminent nineteenth-century artists were buried at Kensal Green.¹²⁸ Even in death, then, Jane Maria Bowkett occupies a space in an artistically and culturally significant Victorian location.

As I have shown, urban space was a key factor in Bowkett's personal advancement. Bowkett's trajectory, as she negotiated her way through the geography of the city, exemplifies the power of space in the intersection of Victorian artist's lives and in the public's perception of artistic worth. By reconstructing highly symbolic spaces to acknowledge the presence of women within them, and by tracing Bowkett's individual narrative, we can see that, although compelled to work for much of her life on the periphery of the Victorian art world, Bowkett was an active participant in historically observable trends.

Bowkett's pictures and work habits contribute further insight into nineteenth-century British art trends. In both material and symbolic terms, Bowkett's work provides a rich topic for discerning cultural values embedded in popular taste. In the following

chapters, I will challenge the idea that minor artists and modest paintings have little art-historical worth. I will show that Bowkett catered to the market and responded to a common desire for pictures that stimulated an emotional narrative. Most importantly, her pictures show signs of resistance to women's subordination and I will offer meanings that disrupt apparently prosaic representations.

Notes: Chapter 3

¹ The unidentified woman, seated on the periphery of the studio, functions as a decorative image rather than an image-maker and, since working-class professional models were unlikely to be pictured reading, it must be presumed that she is a family member. The term "studio-home" is interchangeable with "studio house".

² Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 5.

³ Rick Allen, "Street-Life and Interdisciplinary Spaces," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 2003): 311.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 106.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, eds. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 155-199.

⁶ Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London, 1764-1914* (Hampshire: Scholar Press, 1994), 57.

⁷ Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 17. Some artists relocated in order to escape central London's dust and smoke, which blackened buildings, clothing and their artwork. Interestingly, the relative cleanliness of Kensington contributed to Isabel Constable leaving so many of her father's paintings to the South Kensington Museum in 1888.

⁸ W. J. Reader, *Professional Men: The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 173.

⁹ Lenore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and The Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), 85.

¹⁰ Stephen Jones, *Leighton House Museum* (London: Libraries and Arts of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, n.d.). The majority of the men belonged to a social elite whose background provided them with the opportunities to both travel and to study abroad, as well as affording them access to Academy tuition, all of which contributed to success in the art market.

¹¹ Foley-Fisher, "The World of Jane Maria Bowkett," 1103. (Jane and her husband Charles, their daughter Leila, Charles Stuart's parents, and his sister Theresa).

¹² These paintings and their themes are discussed in chapter 4.

¹³ Census entries 1871 for 4 Constitution Crescent record two servants, Ellen Wright (19) and Emma Dibbings (49). Emma Dibbings was present at the death of Bowkett's three young babies, which suggests that Dibbings's workload might have, during periods of sickness, encompassed the physical care of the small children. I am indebted to Foley-Fisher for sharing his copies of the death certificates.

¹⁴ Little has been written about the pleasure gardens at Gravesend, which were lesser-known versions of the popular Cremorne Gardens. Newspaper accounts of the 1878 Princess Alice shipping disaster attest to their popularity. Eight hundred passengers (most of whom were lower-middle-class trippers) were aboard the steamer when it sunk on its return journey from the pleasure spots. *Illustrated London News*, 14 September 1878, 258. Also see "Gravesham History." <<http://www.burrows.co.uk/gravesham/02Abo.htm>>

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (1836; reprint, London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 206. In Dickens' short story about a grocer named Tuggs, the family came into money and decided to become fashionable. When Mr. Tuggs mildly suggests they move to Gravesend, "the idea was unanimously scouted. Gravesend was low."

¹⁶ "Palace of Art" was a term used by the press to describe artists' studio houses and was presumably related to Tennyson's 1832 poem. "A Palace of Art."

¹⁷ Marcia Pointon, "Urban Narrative in the Early Art of William Mulready," in *Victorian Artists and the City: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ira Bruce Nadel and F.S. Schwarzbach (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 127. Pointon lists the central locations of early Academy members and describes the Kensington area during the first half of the century.

¹⁸ Moncure Daniel Conway, *Travels in South Kensington* (London: Trübner and Company, 1882), 35-8. Today, the Victoria and Albert museum is a potent reminder of Albert's vision. Brompton Road and Fulham Road run adjacent to the museum complex.

¹⁹ Tim Barringer, "Leighton in Albertopolis: Monumental Art and Objects of Desire," in Barringer and Prettejohn, *Frederic Leighton*, 138-9.

²⁰ Walkley, 43.

²¹ Jopling, 52. Jopling found a property that enabled her to build a studio just off the Old Brompton Road.

²² Johnson, *Royal Society of British Artists*, s.v. "Sharland." 233 Brompton Road was Miss L. A. Sharland's exhibition address during 1876-77. In 1879, her address was recorded as *The Avenue*, Fulham Road. This is too much of a coincidence for her not to have been acquainted with Bowkett. Huish, *The Years Art* (1880), s.v. "Sharland."

²³ Elizabeth Butler, *Autobiography* (1922; reprint, Seven Oaks, Kent: Fisher Press, 1993), 80. [Elizabeth Thompson, *The Roll Call: Calling the Roll After an Engagement, Crimea*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 91 x 182.9 cm.; (35½ x 72 in.), the Royal Collection, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. As reproduced in Wood, *Victorian Painting*, plate 468.

²⁴ Bowkett's address, 1a The Avenue, Fulham Road, is based upon exhibition catalogue entries.

²⁵ Engen, 39. The description was given when Elizabeth Thompson was a student at the South Kensington Female School of Art.

²⁶ Walkley, 141. "To this day, a forward range of capacious sculptors' workshops is separated by a low corridor from a taller rearward range. Freake must therefore be credited with the first purpose-built, flatted studios." *The Avenue*, 76 Fulham Road, South Kensington. Photograph, as reproduced in Walkley, fig. 105.

²⁷ Elizabeth Butler, 81-4. Although more has been written about Elizabeth Butler than most Victorian Women Artists (excluding Barbara Bodichon whose political activities rather than her art brought her to public attention), Butler's pictures are rarely discussed from theoretical point of view.

²⁸ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, 31-3.

²⁹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 173; Jan Marsh, "Art Ambition and Sisterhood in the 1850s," in Campbell Orr, 42.

³⁰ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, 61.

³¹ *Folkstone Beach* (1875), 91 x 183 cm.; *The Roll Call* (1874), 91 x 183 cm.; *The 28th Regiment at Quatre Bras* (1875) 91 x 183 cm. In 1875, an untraced painting by Bowkett entitled *On the Sands at Shanklin, Isle of White*, was exhibited at the BI with an asking price of £157.10. Since the high price indicates a large canvas, I questioned whether this painting was the one now known as *Folkstone Beach*. However, Foley-Fisher recalls seeing *On the Sands at Shanklin* and believes they are separate pictures.

³² Nicole Veillard, "Lady Butler: Battle Artist," *Women Artists Slide Library Journal*, 20.

(December/January 1988): 16. Thompson, who was ten years younger, travelled extensively in Europe. Following life drawing classes in London, she spent a year in Italy studying drawing and anatomy. See also Cherry, *Painting Women*, 43.

³³ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, 83. Another intriguing aspect vis-à-vis inspiration comes from Usherwood's discussion of military pictures. Usherwood's list includes C. E. Gordon Stuart among the younger generation of painters to be influenced by Elizabeth Thompson's pictures. C. E. Gordon Stuart was Bowkett's son. He would have been between ten to twelve years old when his parents occupied the Fulham Road studio and it is easy to imagine the impression that the military scenes might have made upon the young boy.

³⁴ This information is based upon prices listed in the exhibition catalogues.

³⁵ "New Houses at Holland Park, Kensington," *Building News*, 29 September 1876, 307.

³⁶ Although the term "social realism" was not in common currency during the nineteenth century, Victorian scholars use the term to categorize illustrations of hardship and the social ills that beset the poorer members of society.

³⁷ Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 46.

³⁸ Jones, unpaginated.

- ³⁹ Julie Codell, "Artists' Biographies and the Anxieties of National Culture," *Victorian Review* 27, no. 1 (2001): 1.
- ⁴⁰ Dakers, 157. When Melbury Road was first set out in 1875 the first 7 plots were built upon by artists.
- ⁴¹ Walkley, 58-78.
- ⁴² Dakers, 172.
- ⁴³ Wilfred Meynell, "The Homes of Our Artists: Sir Fredrick Leighton's House in Holland Park Road," *Magazine of Art* 4 (1881): 170.
- ⁴⁴ Dakers, 213.
- ⁴⁵ 16 and 18 Melbury Road. Photograph, as reproduced in Dakers, fig. 129.
- ⁴⁶ *Building News*, 29 September, 1876, 307; William Turner built numbers 16 and 18 next to Colin Hunter's grand studio-house at number 14; William Holman Hunt occupied 18 Melbury Road in 1902. Walkley, 207.
- ⁴⁷ Census entries, 1881, 18 Melbury Road. Emma Dollins (aged 50), Charlotte Allen (aged, 22), and Fanny Allen (aged 20). Leila Stuart, the daughter, was not included in the census and her situation during this period remains unknown.
- ⁴⁸ Branca, 38-57. According to Branca, a typical middle-class family with three children could only afford one servant.
- ⁴⁹ L. V. Fildes, *A Victorian Painter* (London: Michael Joseph, 1968), 46.
- ⁵⁰ Estella Canziani, *Round About Three Palace Green* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.), 1939, 61.
- ⁵¹ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 5. It should be pointed out that until late in the Victorian period miasma was associated with disease.
- ⁵² John Lehmann, *Ancestors and Friends* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), 219.
- ⁵³ Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 127. "Social space is constructed in such a way that the agents, groups or institutions that find themselves situated in it have more properties in common the closer they are to each other in this space; and fewer common properties, the further they are away from each other."
- ⁵⁴ See Dakers. Kate Dickens' circumstances illustrate the difficulties that might be experienced by women artists upon marriage. Kate Collins (née Dickens), an intimate member of the Holland Park circle, gave up painting at her first husband's request. Even in Dakers recent scholarship, the woman is acknowledged through the man: Kate is identified as Dickens' daughter, Collin's wife, Millais' model, and Prinsep's lover. Kate Dickens resumed painting after Collins early death and her subsequent remarriage to the artist Charles Perugini.
- ⁵⁵ See chapters 1 and 2 for surgeon/apothecaries' social standing. See also, Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 24. During the Victorian period, certain professional men became eligible for membership in the growing number of prestigious London clubs. These included barristers, members of the clergy, the armed services and physicians, but not yet surgeons and architects.
- ⁵⁶ Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 28.
- ⁵⁷ Reader, 152.
- ⁵⁸ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 38.
- ⁵⁹ Johnson, *Royal Society of British Artists*, s.v. "Bowkett." Here, I am not suggesting that Bowkett's title makes her a history painter in the academic sense. The significance of pictures that illustrate popular historical or literary themes is further discussed in chapter 4.
- ⁶⁰ Roy Strong, *Recreating the Past: British History and the Victorian Painter* (London: Thames and Hudson; New York: Piermont Morgan Library, 1978), 136-151.
- ⁶¹ Bowkett's high price of £52.10s indicates that *An Incident of the Year 1649* was a complex composition. For comparison, the price range at the SFA in 1868 was £2.2s to £52.10s. Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 82.
- ⁶² Chalmers, 15.
- ⁶³ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 171.
- ⁶⁴ *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615.
- ⁶⁵ Mitchell, 13. And see Cherry, *Painting Women*, 172-3.
- ⁶⁶ J Saxon Mills, *Life and letters of Sir Hubert Herkomer C. V. O. R.A.: A Study in Struggle and Success* (London: Hutchinson, 1923), 68; quoted in Gillett, 104.
- ⁶⁷ Hubert von Herkomer, *Hard Times*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 86.5 x 112 cm.; (33½ x 43½ in.), Manchester City Art Galleries, as reproduced in Wood, *Victorian Painting*, plate 343.

- ⁶⁸ Malcolm Warner, *The Victorians: British Painting, 1837-1901* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1997), 155. *Hard Times* is described as embodying “many of the key tenants of the social realist movement in British painting at the end of the nineteenth century.” Significantly, although Herkomer is now recognised for his contribution to nineteenth-century social realism, in 1881 he turned to portraiture as a means to providing a steady income, Gillett, 127.
- ⁶⁹ Luke Fildes, *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 142.2 x 242.6 cm.; (56 x 97½ in.) Royal Holloway, University of London, as reproduced in Wood, *Victorian Painting*, plate, 341.
- ⁷⁰ *Art Journal*, (May 1874): 201.
- ⁷¹ *Saturday Review*, 2 May 1874, 562.
- ⁷² Fildes, 26-7.
- ⁷³ Wood, *Victorian Painting*, 267-8. To meet the expenses of their extravagant studio-houses, many artists turned to the more lucrative genre of portraiture.
- ⁷⁴ *Ophelia* (1881), *Four Miles More* (1881), *Sally in our Alley, etc* (1882).
- ⁷⁵ Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, s.v. “Bowkett”; s.v. “Stuart.”
- ⁷⁶ Cowling, 70; and see Wood, *Victorian Painting*, 266. Marcus Stone began his career as a Dickens illustrator.
- ⁷⁷ Alfred Lys Baldry, *The Life and Work of Marcus Stone* (London: *Art Journal Annual*, 1896), 7.
- ⁷⁸ Stone’s paintings made very popular prints and sales of these made him a wealthy man.
- ⁷⁹ James, 150.
- ⁸⁰ Arthur Fish, *Henrietta Rae (Mrs Ernest Normand)* (London: Cassel and Company, Limited), 1905. Rae’s father was a civil servant and her talented musician mother had received music lessons from Mendelssohn. Rae had attended London’s Academy Schools and her husband had trained in Paris.
- ⁸¹ Fish, 38.
- ⁸² Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 250; 265; footnote 171. Throughout his career Frith made numerous repeats of his paintings, sometimes decades after the original was exhibited.
- ⁸³ Frank Rinder, “Henrietta Rae – Mrs Ernest Normand,” *Art Journal* (Oct 1901): 306.
- ⁸⁴ Baldry, *Asleep*, 17, *Autumn Fruits*, 21. The flowers lying across the woman’s lap further emphasises this idea.
- ⁸⁵ Werner, 199.
- ⁸⁶ In the Bowkett and Stuart picture album there is another entirely different composition entitled *Love’s Young Dream*. In this painting, young lovers gaze into each other’s eyes, here, Bowkett has attached a quotation from “The Lady of Lyons”, a popular 1880s theatre production by Edward Bulwer Lytton.
- ⁸⁷ Gillett, 196. Gillett suggests that the Sunday ritual “reflected two separate but related tendencies in English life in the latter half of the nineteenth century: the secularization of society and the sanctification of art.”
- ⁸⁸ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 78.
- ⁸⁹ I suspect single women (apart from the supremely confidant Elizabeth Thompson) were not in the habit of opening their studios to public gaze. Married women would have the advantage of their husband’s presence. Show Sunday is an under researched topic and several questions remain unanswered. It is not known how decisions regarding invitations were made or how the general public became aware of which studios were open. Personal conversation with Julie Codell, American Art Association meeting, Seattle, February 2004.
- ⁹⁰ Canziani, 70.
- ⁹¹ Florence Fenwick Miller, “The Ladies Column,” *London Illustrated News*, 2 April 1887, 379.
- ⁹² Usherwood, 28.
- ⁹³ The interconnectedness of *The Avenue* units is apparent from a modern photograph. See [pl. 3]; Walkley, 140, fig 105.
- ⁹⁴ Dakers, 238.
- ⁹⁵ Private collection (the invitation is undated).
- ⁹⁶ Fildes, 86. At every opening, Fildes wife Fanny positioned the parlour maid by the studio entrance, and each time a visitor came up the grand staircase the maid dropped a coffee bean into a bowl. In subsequent years, the count increased to over one thousand.
- ⁹⁷ Gillett, 194; Dakers, 4.
- ⁹⁸ Dakers, 255.

- ⁹⁹ Art's association with money tends to be a troubling topic and one that art-historical writing often ignores or passes over, yet the power of the marketplace in artist's lives and careers cannot be understated. Two notable exceptions are Dianne Sachko Macleod and David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: the Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
- ¹⁰⁰ Codell, "Artists' Biographies and the Anxieties of National Culture," 1-35. Codell suggests three stages to the popular concept of the nineteenth-century artist. At the beginning of the century, dramatic romantic bohemianism took precedence, the mid-century cultivated notions of hard work, morality and refinement, and by the end of the century, the artist had become a degenerate member of society.
- ¹⁰¹ Codell, "Artists' Biographies and the Anxieties of National Culture," 20.
- ¹⁰² Edward Tarver, "Artists' Studios," *Art Journal* (September 1880): 250. The series ran from 1880-1882.
- ¹⁰³ Walkley, xxiii. Dignified environs removed any suspicion of non-professionalism that might have occurred if art was produced in rather ordinary domestic surroundings.
- ¹⁰⁴ Andrew Stevenson, "Leighton and the Shifting Repertoires of Masculine Artistic Identity in the Late Victorian Period," in Barringer and Pettejohn, 239.
- ¹⁰⁵ Clayton, vol. 1, 1-2.
- ¹⁰⁶ James Dafforne, "British Artists: Their Style and Their Character," *Art Journal* 3 (1864): 261-63.
- ¹⁰⁷ John Oldcastle, "Our living Artists: Elizabeth Butler, 257-62; Wilfred Meynell, "Our living Artists: Louise Jopling," *Magazine of Art* 3 (1880): 303-308. The series ran from 1878 to 1904.
- ¹⁰⁸ Eliza Lynn Linton, "The Girl of The Period," *Saturday Review*, 14 March 1868, 339.
- ¹⁰⁹ Meynell, "Our living Artists: Marcus Stone A.R. A.," *Magazine of Art* 3 (1880): 83-7.
- ¹¹⁰ Helene L. Postlethwaite, "Some Noted Women-Painters," *Magazine of Art* 18 (1895): 17-22. Flora M. Reid (exh.1879-1929) "painted by herself", Jessie Macgregor (exh.1874-1877) "drawn by herself", Marianne Stokes (1885-1904) "drawn by herself", Henrietta Normand (1859-1928) "from a portrait by Ernest Normand", Anna Lea Merritt (1844-1930) "drawn by herself", Mary L. Waller (exh.1871-1916) "from a painting by herself".
- ¹¹¹ Oldcastle, "Our Living Artists: Elizabeth Butler," 260.
- ¹¹² E. Butler, 85. Elizabeth Thompson Butler was equally delighted when Ruskin referred to her as an Amazon. "I was very pleased to see myself in the character of an Amazon." 117.
- ¹¹³ George Augustus Sala, *Daily Telegraph* (London) 2 May 1874, 67.
- ¹¹⁴ It wasn't until the close of the century that the art press finally recognised the professional working space of a woman artist. In 1898, the *Art Annual's* biographical article on Elizabeth Thompson Butler included photographs of her studio and rooms in Dover Castle. Wilfred Meynell, "The Life and Work of Lady Butler," *Art Annual* (1898): 56.
- ¹¹⁵ Before moving into *The Hermitage*, Bowkett and Stuart lived for a brief period at *Abbotsford*, Woodchurch Road, West Hampstead. Although the reason for the interim address is unknown, the builder supplies a connection between the two locations. *The Hermitage* was erected by a speculative builder, J. Mansbridge who also built a studio-house on Woodchurch Road. Walkley, 249. Given the extent of the ivy covering the building, the exterior photographs were probably taken sometime following Bowkett's death in 1891.
- ¹¹⁶ Walkley, 249. See Walkley for a comprehensive list of owners, architects, and builders of London studio-houses.
- ¹¹⁷ Walkley, 93.
- ¹¹⁸ Engen, 98. Greenaway considered that Hampstead's rural atmosphere provided a country setting near the city. Also see Walkley, 114, and illustration 84. The pre-eminent Victorian architect, Norman Shaw, designed several of the grand studio-houses in Holland Park.
- ¹¹⁹ Mary Sturge Gretton, *Constable* (1905, reprint, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 54-5.
- ¹²⁰ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 87.
- ¹²¹ Frederic George Stephens, *Artists at Home* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1884). Stephens, an art critic on the *Athenaeum* and friend of many well-connected artists, originally published the articles in a twelve-month series.
- ¹²² Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project", in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 22-3.
- ¹²³ In its Western representation of the Near East, the Arab Hall also serves as an example of Victorian Orientalism.

¹²⁴ I am also basing this assumption on the pictured clothing styles. There is only one possible title match between the catalogues and the album prior to 1880.

¹²⁵ Of course, the paintings could have been exhibited at little-known venues of which we have no record. There is also the possibility that these were unsold paintings.

¹²⁶ James Stevens Curl, ed. *Kensal Green Cemetery: The Origins and Development of the General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, London, 1824-2001* (West Sussex: Phillimore and Co. Ltd., 2001), 204. The Duke of Sussex's burial in 1843 legitimatised the cemetery as a burial-ground for persons of rank and the grounds often provided an important locus for the bourgeoisie to erect imposing monuments that "affirmed and celebrated family" unity.

¹²⁷ As noted in chapter 1, the headstone is inscribed: In Loving Memory of JANE MARIA. The Beloved Wife of CHARLES STUART. Who Died 1st June 1891. Aged 53. Deeply Mourned by Those Left Behind. Also of the Above CHARLES STUART. Who Died 24th December 1907. Aged 68.

¹²⁸ Curl, 243-6. Perhaps the greatest irony is that Bowkett lies in the same location as John Calcott 'Clothes' Horsley R.A. (1817-1903), the conservative artist who was fervently against the study of the nude model and to women being admitted to the RA.

Chapter 4

**Nation and Image:
Bowkett's Portrayal of Rural and Historic Figures**

As Pamela Nunn observes, Bowkett was an artist “whose stock-in trade throughout her long career was whatever genres and themes were popular with the mainstream.”¹ In response to market demand, Bowkett portrayed a wide cross-section of subjects: rural women and children, popular heroines from literature or history, and middle-class figures occupied in everyday activities. Even though these themes have been recognised as hallmarks of Victorian painting, women’s picturing of these popular topics has received scant attention, and the following two chapters will examine Bowkett’s work, examining in detail the paintings that can be traced in galleries and private collections or that exist in reproductions. As I will show, Bowkett’s representations are by no means ideologically unified; they offer multiple perspectives on Victorian social ills, national desires, and class and gender identities. This ideological complexity, I will argue, reflects Bowkett’s adept balancing of market demands with her astute commentary on contemporary life. I thus see the study of market-orientated pictures, which art historians have mainly overlooked, as one of the ways to reconfigure scholarship to include Victorian women artists.

My study will also reveal important details of Bowkett’s work practices: specifically, I will show substantial and repeated evidence of pictorial replication. It was a common practice for male Victorian artists to replicate their own oil paintings; however, scholars have yet to investigate professional women artists’ participation in this custom.² Because I have assembled a substantial body of Bowkett’s work, it is possible to glean information on her work-related practices. Replication can be understood in terms of aesthetic and market agency. Replicas might entail the perfection of an idea or an imaginative deficit, and economic determination must also be considered pertinent to such practices.

In the following two chapters, I will divide Bowkett’s pictures into two broad groups for ease of analysis. In this chapter, a heavily romanticized and idealized notion of Britain’s past provides the foundation for my discussion of literary heroines, historically costumed figures, and certain nostalgic images of rural life. To evoke a common heritage,

Britain's "green and pleasant land" formed the backdrop for such scenes. In the next chapter, I will focus upon contemporary urban lifestyles and analyse the coding of middle-class leisure activities and domesticity. Since Bowkett's rural figures served middle-class pictorial requirements, they will be discussed in both chapters. Here, portrayals of rural children in morally instructive domestic situations tie into my discussion of middle-class patterns of conduct. Because Bowkett's pictures resisted definitive categorization on the basis of subject matter alone, boundaries between my groups are by necessity fluid, fractured, and somewhat arbitrary. Bowkett's art was eclectic. In order to sell her work, Bowkett had to appeal to an extensive range of middle-class buyers, people whose sensibilities and preferences varied. In both chapters, my analysis covers several interconnecting and contrasting issues. For example, in some pictures Bowkett sentimentalized rural childhood while in others she questioned its hardship. In the Victorian pictures of the period, children could sustain national unity, uphold domestic values or confirm class differences, and they often had the ability to signify such ideas simultaneously. However, I will show that Bowkett often moved beyond conventional notions of Victorian womanhood, to portray gender and class identities in forms that challenged the status quo of the "ideal" woman.

In the present chapter, then, I turn to the seemingly distanced and "romantic" subjects of rural life and literary heroines. Both of these were popular subjects, and I have aligned them because both seem to be removed from the modern urban life of the middle-class buyers who purchased and viewed these paintings. Bowkett tended to portray rural scenes and workers as purer and simpler than the urban reality of her audience. However, as I will show, although these pictorial subjects appeared temporally distanced from the urban middle-class picture buyer, such images were inextricably linked to contemporary life. In particular, I will argue that both contributed to concepts of Victorian British nationhood. As part of nation building, a common history was desired, and historically costumed characters representing British heroines played a part in the construction of national identity. Moreover, because Victorian picture buyers were living in the first industrial age, they had a nostalgic desire for idealized scenes of unspoilt countryside; it is thus significant that Bowkett's historically costumed figures were often situated in untamed grassy areas, accessible only by irregular stone pathways. Moreover, even where

Bowkett's rural scenes suggested economic hardship, they always balanced this with beauty and a certain nostalgia for the nation's rural past. Such picturesque irregularities provided a view of Britain's unchanging bucolic geography as well as a romanticized spatial understanding of the nation, and hence I suggest that these two apparently dissimilar groups of paintings may be productively linked.³

In the following two chapters, although I briefly touch upon the formal qualities and technical virtuosity of Bowkett's work, my intention is to concentrate on meaning.⁴ I will forefront potential meanings that might have resonated consciously or subconsciously with the ordinary art purchaser. Drawing upon Mieke Bal's theories, I employ the premise that communication between art and the individual depended upon a system of signs. Since more than one meaning can be attached to the works, an openness to ambiguity is absolutely essential.⁵ Pictorial realism and familiar codes of behaviour enabled Victorian viewers to relate to scenes; and the resulting empathy then enhanced a viewer's ability to cross the void between the picture and the viewing position. He/She stepped inside the familiar, became absorbed in the action, and created his/her own personal and subjective response.⁶

In the first part of this chapter, I look at two interrelated but significantly different portrayals of British rural life. I begin with Bowkett's highly marketable view of an unspoilt rural Britain, and then turn to more unsettling images that take rural poverty as their theme. The second part of the chapter examines Bowkett's portrayal of popular heroines from British history, literature, and ballads, as well as elaborating on the vogue for the historically costumed figure. In conclusion, I will further link popular art and literature by tracing the historical circumstances surrounding one particular painting, *Love's Young Dream*, which was reproduced in the compendium *Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment*. As a book illustration, the picture extended national cultural values beyond Britain and the confines of the fine-art market.

Since my concern is with pictures that appealed to the average British picture buyer and with their worth as historical and cultural artefacts, I will begin by chronicling the roots of middle-class taste and the cultural priorities of the Victorian picture buyer. Bowkett's anecdotal, well-executed, affordable, and eye-pleasing pictures, I will argue, exemplify the distinctive qualities of nineteenth-century mainstream British art.

Affordable and Decorative: British Paintings in the Middle-Class Home

As Catherine Gordon suggests, the nineteenth-century shift “from a predominance of portraiture to a majority of contemporary genre scenes and literary or historical subjects suggests the increasingly narrative bias of British painting.”⁷ Following the 1855 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, French critics declared that the art in the British section was unique and refreshingly original. These favourable reviews of small-sized narrative paintings⁸ contributed to an acceptance of a recognisably English school of art. Spectatorship, in turn, added another facet to the idea of a national artistic sensibility. The emotive way that British spectators approached paintings was considered nationally specific. As part of the viewing process, British art viewers transmuted pictorial time into personal time; they created a story and became involved in an emotional dialogue with the image.⁹ The construction of stories from pictures both reflected and contributed to a shared ideology that, while never static and often contested, was a salient feature of art appreciation in Britain.¹⁰

During the nineteenth century visual art became fully integrated into British homes. While old masters continued to grace mansions and museums, inexpensive prints and paintings by living British artists enhanced Victorian home interiors. Since paintings acted as material and symbolic capital, their presence in middle-class homes suggested a certain refinement as well as the command of disposable funds. Middle-class wealth, urban expansion, and a nationalistic pride increased the demand for British art and for pictures of a moderate size and price. In 1860, the *Art Journal* disparagingly noted:

People with houses large enough to accommodate large pictures have generally inherited large canvases of old masters and have ceased to be art patrons; modern artists, therefore, tend to paint small pictures to accommodate small houses, and the scope and subject of the older school has diminished accordingly.¹¹

Instead of vast canvases depicting classical myths, many of the new art buyers preferred smaller pictures with British themes. Although less ambitious in content and size, the number of such pictures required for middle-class homes was staggering. Ideally, a dining room contained “twelve good furniture pictures.”¹² Art complemented other articles of furniture as well as the activities associated with each room, and it contributed

to the construction of a middle-class identity, in which gracious surroundings and the refinement conveyed by narrative pictures were key elements. To a large extent, new art buyers wished to see an expression of British life and customs upon their walls.¹³

Throughout the nineteenth century, the sensibilities of British taste were challenged and championed.¹⁴ As early 1817, the landscape artist Henry Richter urged artists to adopt a more democratic approach and orientate their work towards the people:

The Arts, in order to prosper, must once more address themselves, not to the learned antiquary, not to the curious amateur, nor to the technical admiration of the mere professors, but to the general sense, to the feelings and understandings of THE COMMON PEOPLE.¹⁵

By the 1860s, the artists, art historians, and educators Richard and Samuel Redgrave claimed that a populist community of taste had promoted national distinctions:

It was soon found that pictures to suit the English taste must be pictures to live by; pictures to hang on the walls of that home in which the Englishman spends more of his time than do men of other nations, and loves to see cheerful and decorative.¹⁶

By contrast, pictures that met with mainstream approval often dismayed the critics. Writing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the right-wing critic J. Beavington Atkinson decried the nation's loss of taste: "painters paint down to the level of the multitude, a mass which in all countries is essentially one in its rude element of humanity."¹⁷ Nonetheless, "rude humanity" propelled the market and, although they frustrated some critics, narrative paintings were promoted as "a democratic genre that would appeal to all, regardless of education or training"¹⁸ and as such they were extremely marketable. This was the type of painting produced by Bowkett: recognizably British, relatively modest in size and price, suitable for the middle-class interior—in short, highly marketable.

Imaging a Rural Idyll: Nature Uncontaminated

Bowkett's romanticized versions of womanhood, which show figural subjects within landscape settings, provided a welcome visual antidote to the problems of urban life. Time stands still in images with a picturesque component and, as Marcia Pointon

notes, in the Victorian period, “the value of what was deemed timeless was marketable precisely because it was threatened.”¹⁹ Nineteenth-century industrialization and urban life created a longing for scenes of unspoilt countryside as representing the purest aspects of the nation. For this reason, landscape pictures that eschewed any hint of the changing face of the British countryside became increasingly popular and, within the Academy, landscape became the dominant representation of a national art.²⁰ Though Bowkett did not undertake landscape, she capitalized on the aesthetic appreciation for British scenery in her portrayals of women as emblems of British heritage.

Bowkett’s undated *Girl at the Well* [fig. 29] follows a fully established tradition by which the rural picturesque became mythologized by the middle-class city dweller. In exploring the Victorian desire to recuperate the past, Davidoff and Hall find the belief in the purity of nature central to emerging middle-class ideology, and they link evangelical piety to the romantic idealization of rural life.²¹ *Girl at the Well* records traditions lost to the city dweller and its tranquil setting would have offered some urbanites a striking contrast to their overcrowded daily environment. A scene not so much of poverty as of rural simplicity, *Girl at the Well* celebrates the countryside in an idyllic manner, its dreamy tenor established by the feathery brushstrokes that carried connotations of the poetic.²² Soft brushwork and low-keyed colour imbue the scene with light, shade, and atmosphere. On one side of the canvas, the luminous sky melts into diffused golds and whites to evoke the heat of summer, while on the other, the shady glade’s green and brown tones and the flow of silver water provide cool relief. The girl’s clothing pulls together the contrasting elements. The purple of the foxgloves is repeated in her cap and overdress, and the pitcher’s shining rich copper tone is echoed in her folds of her underskirt.

Unlike the scenery, the girl’s beauty is more difficult to define. In contrast to a timeless appreciation of unspoilt countryside, ideals of beauty are anchored to changing sensibilities. Because we lack nineteenth-century cultural references, we might find the girl’s facial expression insipid; nonetheless her gentle countenance adhered to contemporary convention. The Victorians fully believed that physiognomy reflected character and that a sweet exterior denoted a moral interior.²³ The girl’s demure stance

connotes innocence and her neat clothing signals rural working-class respectability. She occupies a sentimental haven of stability and symbolizes innocence and peace.

In his "Art of England" lectures, Ruskin contrasted the ugly misery of suburban waste ground with the moral qualities of unspoiled countryside.²⁴ In *Girl at the Well*, the leafy glade, uneven path, and rustic stone basin implicitly counter the baseness of the city. The figure at the well, with its interrelated symbolic overtones, was a nineteenth-century leitmotif grounded in the desire for the picturesque. Ultimately though, the problem with nostalgia is that it discards the unwanted and sentimentalizes the desired.²⁵ Though suggesting the collection of water, the ewer acts as a formal attribute rather than a practical vessel; it is neither being filled nor carried. Bowkett thus elides the tiring physical labour involved in transporting water to the family dwelling. Instead, the picture conforms to middle-class nostalgia for a lost tradition.

The girl's rosy cheeks, which signal country health, provide another dimension to the rural functioning as idyll. After mid-century, when most middle-class city houses were linked with communal water pipes over which they had no control, people gradually became aware that water could disseminate illness.²⁶ For the city dweller, the imagined pureness of the pictured spring water may have provided a striking contrast to idea of contaminated city water. Following London cholera epidemics in 1832, 1848, 1856, and 1866, public health measures prompted a general recognition that poor health was directly related to London's polluted water supply.²⁷ The public was constantly being reminded of issues connected with water. The *Illustrated London News*, a champion of municipal water and sewage improvement, pictured and charted the extensive tunnelling and pipe-laying process that protected the Thames from becoming a cesspool. Pictures of new public drinking fountains and pumping stations contributed to what Lynda Nead terms "the visual culture of drains."²⁸ In comparison to the engineered sources of the city water, the natural source of the spring water in *Girl at the Well* could have been envisaged as a sign of country purity.

Conceivably, this concern with the impurity of water was one reason for the popularity of such images. Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum, for example, has several Victorian paintings entitled "Girl at the Well" in their collection.²⁹ A similar painting, which contains a more overt reference to pure water, supports my line of reasoning.

Using the same model, clothing and setting, Bowkett reworked the girl-fetching-water theme in *Adam's Ale* (n.d.) [fig. 30]. In this work, the title's biblical reference signals the primary importance of water to humanity,³⁰ and the girl's rather theatrical gestures draw attention to the natural abundance of pure water in the rural area. The girl looks out to the audience, her body turned towards the stream. With one hand, she gathers her overskirt away to the side; with the other, she makes a stage-like gesture towards the fresh flowing water, which fills the pitcher.

Girl at the Well may also have appealed obliquely to Victorian concerns over employment of servants. In the city, dirt and disease were directly linked to the overcrowded lives of the urban poor;³¹ hence "employers preferred servants from the county, who were thought to be healthier and less likely to have unsavoury local contacts."³² Rural working-class women often found domestic work within urban middle-class homes—including Bowkett's own. Once cast in the context of class, the marketability and popularity of a picture that showed a healthy, neat, and demure young rural woman appears in a new light and creates a potential extension of its meaning—that is, the picture functioned not only as a nostalgic representation of an unspoiled England but represented the ideal domestic worker.³³ I contend that representations of rural respectably as seen in *Girl at the Well* possibly reassured the bourgeois family that lax working-class morals had not penetrated their environment via their domestic servants.

With reference to this context, Bowkett's neatly clothed girl bears the visual signs of a domestic commodity. Her chaste air fits the description of the "trim damsels" that met with approval at hiring fairs.³⁴ The girl's upright posture is emphasised by the symmetrical folds of her clothing and her feet are encased in sturdy boots. Her practical overdress, rolled up sleeves, and bare arms code her as a working woman. Interestingly, with her passive stance and sun hat, Bowkett's figure could be related to one of the country females pictured by Helen Allingham and approved of by Ruskin. There are, however, notable differences between the two artists' constructions of rural femininity. Bowkett's pictures do not conform as readily to the "picturesque". In Allingham's extremely popular watercolours, women's arms are invariably covered and the models are usually dressed in impractical white pinafores, dated dresses, and "sun bonnets provided by the artist herself."³⁵ In *The Stile* (1883) [fig. 31], Allingham's figures interact

with their setting and are captured as if in a moment of time gone by. These differences in pictorial styles can be related to traditions within British art genres. In traditional scenes of the countryside, the figures are usually seen at a distance and are going about their lives unobserved, whereas in British portraiture, the life-sized figure is consciously posed, often with an attribute (in this case the ewer), and framed by a landscape setting.³⁶ Bowkett thus interweaves distinctive British portrait conventions into her rendition of *Girl at the Well*.

In spite of their different approaches, both artists connoted respectable working-class femininity, and participated in what Deborah Cherry calls the “categorization . . . of working-class women.”³⁷ Moreover, since servants also modelled for Bowkett, in one sense, Bowkett is representing contemporary urban work. The image, then, has multiple meanings. We should also remember that such paintings had multiple viewers, amongst them servants themselves. In migrating from the countryside to London for work, Bowkett’s two young servants, Charlotte and Fanny Allan, left behind their family and friends.³⁸ Surviving accounts of such separations indicate the distress experienced by young women who relocated into the urban middle-class domain.³⁹ Most interestingly, then, servants occupied another, but largely ignored, viewing position within the middle-class household.⁴⁰ On the one hand, their nostalgia could be real as opposed to the largely indulgent bourgeois perception of a lost idyllic England. On the other, they may have dismissed the scene as a romantic urban myth.

Imaging Rural Poverty: Empathy and Ambiguity

Although rural poverty existed throughout the nineteenth century, scenes of harvests and winsome gleaners portrayed a vision of rural plenty to urban viewers. Such images contained political messages and were appreciated as displays of British agricultural productivity and the social harmony of the workers.⁴¹ Even though Bowkett produced reassuring representations of harvesting and gleaners,⁴² her picture of two itinerate young figures, *A Rest by the Wayside* [fig. 32], is a simultaneously picturesque and troubling image. Through a reading of this painting, I will argue that Bowkett introduces a disturbing social reality without disrupting the possibility of a sentimental reading.

In *A Rest by the Wayside* (1872), Bowkett has chosen to deviate from the comfortable images of rural nostalgia, to focus upon two children caught up in the social inequities of the period. The climate for reception of such paintings was already in place, as parliamentary reports and press articles on children in agriculture had alerted the public to the meagre diets and wide unemployment of the rural poor.⁴³ In 1872, the year this work was produced, newspapers reported the grievances of farm labourers, who resorted to strike action because they could not afford food.⁴⁴ Earlier, in 1867, Bowkett's father had attended a meeting to protest the further enclosure of Epping Forest.⁴⁵ The enclosures benefited the gentry and meant hardship for families dependent upon free grazing to feed their domestic animals. It thus seems very possible that *A Rest By The Wayside* was shaped by Bowkett's social conscience.

Although the socially conscious painters Hubert Herkomer and George Clausen created strong images of rural poverty and vagrancy, women artists rarely ventured into this genre.⁴⁶ Perhaps because women were viewed as delicate, their artistic subjects generally did not offend a viewer's sensibilities. When women artists did picture rural hardship, like most artists, they usually softened images of misery.⁴⁷ Given that most of Bowkett's pictures with titles that suggest social realist themes remain untraced, it is difficult to know the general tenor of her social messages.⁴⁸ We do, however, have *Queen* magazine's emotive descriptions of the exhausted family in her *Four Miles More* (1881). The paragraph is worth quoting because the writer supplies a narrative interpretation—one that ordinary viewers might bring to the picture:

We have an illustration of the pathetic side of humble life, as represented by a young man tramping along a monotonous road in a flat country. He has with him his wife and child, the woman evidently nearly worn out with fatigue. As they pass a mile post, the husband draws his wife's attention to it saying, 'Four Miles More,' probably with the hope of encouraging her to the extent of at least a definite termination of her long journey. A sturdy Irish navvy companion trudges on determinedly through the rain at their side, smoking his pipe. The colouring of the picture—which was exhibited at the Royal Academy—is of a sympathetic grey tone, in harmony with the pathos of the subject.⁴⁹

In the *Queen* article, Bowkett's picture becomes a document of real social upheaval: the man is understood as actually saying the words "four miles more". Furthermore, the

reading is based on a viewing position that requires a common awareness of pictorial signifying systems. For example, the writer identifies one figure as Irish; this reference presumes readers familiar with the visual coding attached to itinerant Irish labourers.⁵⁰ The politics of understanding Bowkett's pictures, then, cannot be divorced from their given cultural moment, which underscores the immediacy of social issues in *Four Miles More* as well as in *A Rest By the Wayside*.

Creating empathy was key to viewers accepting such pictures of rural poverty. Despite being aware of rural distress, most Victorians did not embrace overt depictions of it. The *Art Journal* warned, "it is not the office of Art to present to us truths of an offensive kind, these are abundant in every-day life and it is in Art that we seek refuge from them."⁵¹ For this reason, any social messages in art had to be cloaked with a pleasing image. Furthermore, Richard Altick suggests that apart from stimulating the imagination and enriching the mind, pictures in the home "often had a more intimate value as little shrines on the wall, their subjects—a face, a natural vista—conjuring up memories of departed relatives or happy occasions in the countryside; they served as a visual focus of private sentiment."⁵² I see Altick's idea as pertinent to a reading of *A Rest By the Wayside*.

Symbols embedded within *A Rest By the Wayside* heighten its potential sentimental value, and the painting's visual tensions create ambiguity. A single red poppy blooms by the side of the narrow rocky path: in the Victorian language of flowers, the poppy symbolizes death.⁵³ The open heath, wild flowers, and blue sky suggest an idyllic English countryside and yet the children look weary. Instead of the carefree country children depicted by most artists, Bowkett's figures appear to be tired. They rest upon a hard rock. The older girl has had to carry the toddler; her arms encircle her weighty burden and her inwardly curved body suggests protection. The girl's sad eyes engage the viewer. Her expression and the tender touching of the two faces enhance her appeal.

It seems probable that Bowkett adapted the girl's pose from Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola* [pl. 7],⁵⁴ a favourite maternal image in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Due to advances in engraving techniques, such images had become broadly known.⁵⁶ Furthermore, owing to early Pre-Raphaelite images, Victorian audiences had become familiar with biblical scenes cast in a modern setting and with the merging of sacred and

secular messages.⁵⁷ Bowkett has reversed Raphael's image and made several changes to the infant: most significantly, thinner extremities have replaced the chubby arms and legs, poignantly suggesting the child's hunger. But the touching cheeks, the Virgin's protective maternal embrace, and her memorable liquid eyes and emotional facial expression are remarkably similar to that of Bowkett's figure.

Bowkett might have chosen to refigure the Madonna image in order to elicit the viewer's compassion. In this regard, the interrelationship between mothers and children (in Raphael's image) or sisters (in Bowkett's image)⁵⁸ might have been especially pertinent for someone who had lost a child. In literature, Elizabeth Gaskell had already set a precedent that linked Raphael's image with female itinerant travelling and child death. In her popular novel *Cranford* (1853), Gaskell relates the story of an impoverished English woman who, while crossing India in an attempt to return to England, carried her baby from place to place to find work. On her arduous journey, she is brought solace by a small print of Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*, given to her by an English woman whose children had all died: "I took out that picture and looked at it, till I could have thought the mother spoke to me, and comforted me."⁵⁹ When viewed in this context, Bowkett's picture sends a strong maternal message, and for an audience familiar with the loss of children, the image would have evoked deep personal feeling.

Although we do not know the reception of Bowkett's painting at the time, several readings of this painting suggest themselves. Perhaps the weary-looking children induced a social awareness of rural hardship or brought infant mortality to the fore. For some viewers, the form, colours, and pleasing scenery may have offered a softer emotional alternative. Of importance is that the subject (rural children and natural scenery) does not stray too far from convention and its social message does not exceed its aesthetic value. Since pictures with controversial subject matter were more difficult to sell, a deliberate ambiguity may well have been intended.

The malleability of interpretive codes can also be applied to Bowkett's pictures with a literary theme. Nineteenth-century enthusiasm for the past took several forms; along with the romantic reshaping of rural life was the promotion of British history and literature. In such romantic works, where the heroine was often placed in a landscape setting, the symbolic importance of the countryside enhanced the picture's appeal for an

urban audience. In this category, Bowkett produced innovative as well as traditional images, both of which allow for further investigation into her patterns of artistic practice.

Literary Heroines: The Conflation of Painting and Literature

In 1881, Bowkett's beautiful and deranged *Ophelia* joined the long list of Shakespearean paintings to be shown at the Royal Academy [pl. 8].⁶⁰ Bowkett was just one among many painters, who, anxious to satisfy the vogue for literary subjects, represented heroines from the works of Shakespeare, Scott, and other canonical British writers. Given that scenes taken from literary sources ranked above landscape and portraiture in the artistic hierarchy,⁶¹ female artists subverted conventional gender boundaries when they produced work within this genre. Although a well-executed literary figure could enhance an artistic reputation, and a high proportion of Bowkett's paintings were based on literary themes, bias in scholarship has obscured women artists' contribution to this major category of Victorian art.⁶² I will show that Bowkett's work demonstrates her awareness of the almost unlimited potential for pictures with literary, musical or historic associations.

From the mid-1700s onwards, paintings with literary associations produced for viewers "a new kind of imaginative activity in which the experiences of reading and beholding coalesced."⁶³ By the 1840s, in an effort to accommodate this cultural development, the parameters of history and narrative painting overlapped and merged. As part of this process, heroines from British history and literature usurped the position traditionally held by mythical goddesses. Early in their careers, most Victorian figure painters produced literary themes within the genre tradition and artists such as Frith, Redgrave, Millais, and members of the Holland Park circle who had made their names in other categories, periodically returned to literature for their subject figures.⁶⁴ This veering away from classical subjects allowed female artists to enter more fully into this section of the art market. Since propriety limited female education, women tended not to be exposed to the "moral dangers of the classics" and the majority would be unfamiliar with Greek mythology.⁶⁵ Due to their lack of life-drawing training, women were disadvantaged when painting the nude, whereas a costumed figure allowed for greater "figural" liberties. The anti-classical art theories published during the 1850s and 1860s by members of the Pre-

Raphaelite Brotherhood in which Greek subjects were rejected in favour of British themes may have helped to smooth the path for female artists. They were better equipped to depict the literary themes that they and their audience understood.⁶⁶

Even within the genre of the literary painting, however, male artists dominated. In 1888, the editor of the *Graphic* asked twenty-one artists to create a painting of a Shakespearean heroine. The paintings were then exhibited, catalogued, lithographed, and sold at Christie's the following spring. Despite the fact that numerous female artists had produced paintings of literary heroines, Mrs. L. Alma Tadema was the only female included in this prestigious enterprise. A hundred years later, the exclusion of female work remained. Out of thirty-four entries in the 1980 exhibition catalogue for Buxton Art Gallery's *Shakespeare's Heroines in the Nineteenth Century*, Anna Lea Merritt was the only female artist represented.⁶⁷ More recently, Pamela Nunn has addressed the long silence and deliberate erasure of the numerous literary themes produced by female painters.⁶⁸ In highlighting Bowkett's literary paintings, I intend to supplement Nunn's scholarship by highlighting Bowkett's contribution to the visual merging of British history, literature, theatre, and art.

As the nineteenth century progressed, Shakespeare's heroines appeared repeatedly in books, on the stage, and as I will show, on the walls of exhibition halls and middle-class homes. Lavish illustrations in the later editions of popular books such as Anna Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical* (1832) and Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1852) provided artists and readers with templates, and female readers were encouraged to identify with Shakespearean heroines. As tastes changed in the second half of the century, the emphasis shifted from theatrical scenes to a solitary female figure.⁶⁹ During her career, Bowkett exhibited scenes or single figures from *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Winter's Tale*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Taming of The Shrew*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. Bowkett exhibited *Juliet* and *Ophelia* on several occasions and certain iconographical conventions undoubtedly played a role in her approach to these subjects.⁷⁰

In her representation of Ophelia, Bowkett certainly chose a popular Victorian subject, although it is difficult to assess precisely how popular it was. In a discussion of Henrietta Rae's 1890 *Ophelia*, Arthur Fish contended that "'Ophelia' is doubtless the

most be-painted character of any created by Shakespeare.”⁷¹ In more recent scholarship, Altick suggested that “Ophelia pictures issued from studios in a relentless stream,”⁷² and according to Nunn, male artists concentrated on Ophelia.⁷³ However, Casteras found “the subject of Ophelia was not as popular as might be supposed, probably because of the difficulty.”⁷⁴ Entries in the *Shakespeare’s Heroines* catalogue would seem to substantiate Casteras’ observation. While there are several paintings of Juliet and others, Ophelia is not represented. While it is difficult to estimate how common the Ophelia theme was, we do know that with any literary theme, original expression was problematic and experienced picture-gazers often compared a work to the style of a previously successful painting.⁷⁵

An undated painting by Bowkett now entitled *Girl with Flowers* [pl. 9]⁷⁶ was possibly one of her early versions of *Ophelia*. Because original titles are often changed, knowledge of Ophelia’s established iconography is essential for identifying the image. Although Bowkett’s passive-looking figure may seem an odd interpretation of Ophelia’s madness, Victorian conventions probably dictated the style. Richard Redgrave’s highly successful *Ophelia Weaving Her Garlands* (1842)[pl. 10]⁷⁷ may have served as a prototype for Bowkett’s treatment. Critics approved of Redgrave’s work: the *Athenaeum* noted with approval “mournful sweetness”, “disordered clothing”, and “strange light in her eyes”. The *Art Union* thought that “the painting of her dress, which is white, resembles the manner of some of the old masters.”⁷⁸ Since Redgrave’s *Ophelia* was part of the 1857 Sheepshanks gift to the South Kensington Museum, Bowkett would have had free access to the painting. In both artists’ work, the traditional attributes associated with Ophelia—the flowers scattered in the seated maiden’s hair, the garland of reeds, rosehip, nettles, the flowers on her lap, and her placement in a natural setting—suggest the girl’s literary identity.

There is a conspicuous difference between these two paintings (Redgrave’s 1842 *Ophelia* and Bowkett’s *Girl with Flowers*) and Bowkett’s 1881 *Ophelia*. Most significantly, her 1881 *Ophelia* seems far more deranged. The later *Ophelia* appears as if walking in a trance: her left hand cupped to her ear signals inner voices, her right hand clutches at thin air, and her huge eyes gaze skyward. The restless figure signals agitation rather than a passive vacancy of mind, and this point is important. Despite her crazed

state as described in Shakespeare's text, Ophelia was most often pictured in the nineteenth century as a passive mad woman. For example, in July 1874 the front page of the *Illustrated London News* featured W.S. Herrick's seated, introspective *Ophelia* [fig. 33]. In 1876, the *Art Journal* chose to give James Bertrand's quiescent *Ophelia* [fig. 34] a full-page illustration.⁷⁹ And John Everett Millais' celebrated *Ophelia* (1855) now in the Tate Gallery depicts the heroine's body floating in a stream in the ultimate state of passivity. In a climate that saw increasing claims for women's rights, in death Ophelia's female body represented the ideal state of non-threatening femininity.⁸⁰ Given the ubiquity of the "passive" Ophelia, Bowkett's 1881 dramatic image is all the more striking. Since "artists looked for either familiar or original approaches, according to how they judged their chances in the market place",⁸¹ Bowkett's interpretation of Ophelia suggests her confidence and maturity as an artist. Pertinently, in an undated version of *Ophelia* [fig. 35], Bowkett has used the same model; the stance, hand gestures, and setting are almost identical; only the gown is markedly different. Perhaps the undated version is the prior work and Bowkett with the 1881 pictures was perfecting an idea or she may have copied the 1881 version because the picture had been accepted by the Royal Academy or perhaps did so to save money—professional models were expensive. Whatever the reason, Bowkett had two canvases to sell for relatively little output.

It seems, then, that Bowkett was both artistically ambitious and prepared to cater to more mainstream tastes. Another popular source for artists' historical characters was Sir Walter Scott's romantic novels. The critics viewed Scott as an author of Shakespearean stature and Scott's protagonists were frequent choices, subject to constant adaptation and interpretation.⁸² Bowkett began her foray into Scott's synthesis of historic fact and romantic fiction with *The Last Parting of the Earl of Leicester and his wife, Amy Robsart, Countess of Leicester, at Cumnor Place* (1870, RHA) and *Amy Robsart* (1870, GI).⁸³ The tragic death of the Elizabethan Amy Robsart was an actual historical event upon which Scott based the novel *Kenilworth* (1820). Robsart was the young wife of the ruthless and ambitious Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth's court favourite and possible suitor. Given that both Glasgow and Dublin's receiving days were in January, Bowkett clearly sent separate versions of "Kenilworth" to the exhibition venues. Moreover, the higher price and elaborate title of the Dublin picture (£50.00)

indicates at least two figures in the composition, whereas the Glasgow *Amy Robsart* (£21.00) was probably a single figure. Such interrelationships strongly suggest that, as with the *Ophelia* painting, Bowkett painted a number of versions of the same painting, in this case mining her own compositions for spin-offs.

Why did Bowkett choose to portray Amy Robsart? Perhaps the London stage provided the impetus. In the year the picture was painted, *Amy Robsart* was performed at Drury Lane.⁸⁴ However, despite her stage portrayal, Robsart remained an unusual subject for female painters. Only two women exhibited “Robsart” pictures prior to 1870: Miss M. A. Sharpe in 1832 and Mrs J. Robertson in 1847, and the subject is not included in discussions of later artists’ work.⁸⁵ The dearth of Robsart images may be because of an association with lowbrow culture. In the late 1840s, Amy Robsart and the Earl of Leicester’s waxwork effigies formed part of the sideshows at the annual Greenwich Fair⁸⁶ and, this association with the burlesque may perhaps have rendered them an inappropriate subject in the eyes of discerning picture-buyers. Indeed, Bowkett may actually have chosen this subject with a view to less discriminating audiences. It must be remembered that from 1873-1878 her paintings were a favourite of Art-Union lottery winners, ordinary art enthusiasts who choose pictures from the cheaper end of the market.⁸⁷

In 1874, Bowkett showed two pictures in Edinburgh with the same subject, one entitled *Lesbia* and the other *Nora Creina*.⁸⁸ Since it was unusual to submit two versions of one subject to the same venue, I believe this again reflects Bowkett’s commercial practice of replicating and altering her own work in order to have more pictures available for sale. The gentle Nora Creina was the heroine of “Lesbia Hath a Beaming Eye”, a popular song by Thomas Moore:

Oh, my Nora Creina, dear,
My gentle, bashful Nora Creina,
Beauty lies
In many eyes,
But Love in yours, my Nora Creina.⁸⁹

Sheets of Moore’s Irish ballads, written for piano accompaniment, were sold on the London streets, and it is easy to imagine Nora Creina’s attractive portrait gracing the wall alongside the piano in a Victorian parlour.

Bowkett's exhibition record concludes with another representation of a woman from a popular song: the entry in the 1891 Royal Hibernian catalogue lists her painting *The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington*. The title calls to mind the romantic folk ballad, "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," that was sung throughout the country.⁹⁰ Even at the end of her career, then, Bowkett continued to portray heroines of popular songs and, because it seems likely that female images were used to decorate the covers of music sheets and advertise their contents, I suggest that with pictures such as *Nora Creina* and *The Bailiff's Daughter*, Bowkett was perhaps aiming her work towards the lucrative print market. As Lynda Nead explains, "sheet-music covers were a direct product of new forms of technology, of the growth of urban leisure and the primacy of the visual in the formation of mass markets."⁹¹ Since music shop windows were full of illustrated covers, market-oriented artists must have seen the potential for oil paintings being engraved for this market.

The popular appetite for heroine worship included female characters from foreign works, and Bowkett catered to this trend. The French version of Goethe's *Faust* was a favourite with Victorians,⁹² and, according to *Queen* magazine, Bowkett's portrayal of *Marguerite* was "a really lovely presentment of Goethe's heroine leaving the cathedral, followed by the congregation."⁹³ With *Marguerite*, Bowkett once again projects the idea of an active female character, in this case by her leading the congregation. Significantly, instead of being positioned within the British countryside, Goethe's foreign heroine is located in an urban setting and framed by church architecture.

Bowkett was also one of the many artists who aggrandized their work with literary quotation, and this widespread practice further reflects spectators' demand for narrative as well as for cultural capital. An 1885 catalogue entry for Bowkett's *Katharine*, for instance, included the quotation from *Taming of the Shrew* (Act II, Scene i):

Petruchio - Twas told me, you were
rough, and coy, and sullen.
And now I find report a very liar;
For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing
courteous,
But slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-
time flowers;
Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look
askance.

Nor bite thy lip, as angry wenches will;
 But thou with mildness entertainst thy
 wooers.
*The Taming of the Shrew*⁹⁴

The text anchors the meaning, encouraging the notion of Kate as a sweet (and controlled) female. As in *Nora Creina*'s image, the spectator would be guided by the male lover's idea of a desirable woman. Still, "while a solitary female courtship figure may suggest an absent male, by representing the female figure as the subject, it also allows for a reading of female energies and desires."⁹⁵ For some viewers, Katharine might have acted as a sign to stimulate women's imagination and feeling.⁹⁶

This interpretation can also be applied to the solitary figure of *Lucy Ashton at the Mermaidens' Fountain* (1884)[fig. 36]. Bowkett returned to Scott's tragic heroine in *The Bride of the Lammermoor* (1819) on several occasions. The story, set in Scotland, is about ill-fated lovers, hostile families and political power relationships. For political and financial gain, Lucy was used by her family as a pawn in the marriage stakes. After being forced to marry the Lord of Buclaw (a man that she does not love) in lieu of Edgar Ravenswood (whom she does), Lucy stabs and murders her bridegroom. Hearing screams, the wedding guests discover a bloody scene with delirious Lucy crouched in a corner, her glassy eyes and dishevelled state attesting to her insanity. The Mermaidens' Fountain provides the setting for Lucy and Edgar's doomed pledge of love, as well as the appearance of Lucy's ghost. Omens at this fatal spot foreshadow Lucy's slip into madness. Perhaps Lucy's contemplative expression prompted viewers to empathise with her innocence and pity her demise.

Bowkett's large well-executed painting of the beautiful heroine follows conventional depictions of Victorian femininity. Light falling across the picture emphasises Lucy's clothing and the body. It highlights the period costume, the sheen of the fabric, the decorative lace collar and latticed bodice, and Lucy's tiny waistline, delicate complexion, and fine features. Lucy is seated upon logs, with a plaid mantle draped beside her, and in the wooded background Grecian columns frame a water fountain. The fountain is important because it both identifies the literary source and brings Lucy's role in the drama to the fore.

Whereas Scott's tragedy concluded with the death of Ravenswood, the operatic version of Scott's work, *Lucia di Lammermoor* refocused the drama to place Lucy Ashton at its centre.⁹⁷ As such, it may provide a meaningful context for Bowkett's painting, which shows the doomed Lucy rather than the doomed lovers.⁹⁸ The preference for interpreting the female role worked both with and against the heated discussions concerning woman's increasing self-awareness and heightened need for self-fulfilment during this period.⁹⁹ Within this cultural context, Bowkett's single-figure rendition of Lucy Ashton might thus be considered as countering female dependency.¹⁰⁰ Lucia's power, however, was temporary. While the operatic version featured female dissidence, it also controlled it. Once the murder was accomplished, her power dissipated and she became a passive heroine akin to Ophelia, whose non-violent deranged figure became a less threatening model for female insanity.

In Bowkett's work, Lucy does not share the picture space with her lover as she does in one of Millais' pictures. In *The Bride of the Lammermoor* (1878)[pl. 11],¹⁰¹ Millais chose to portray the scene where Ravenswood has just rescued Lucy from a wild boar. Ravenswood's upright figure supports the frail Lucy—the composition thus draws attention to male bravery and signals the female need of chivalrous protection. Of this painting, Henry James wrote “it would be hard to find a lovelier specimen of English beauty than Lucy Ashton, or a more magnificent young man than her companion.”¹⁰² Although both artists' versions of Scott's drama contain similar details—trees and ferns, the decorative scallop on Lucy's dress, her bracelets, and the customary tartan—in Bowkett's interpretation the message focuses on female subjectivity rather than on male protection and chivalry. In Bowkett's painting, the fountain takes on a symbolic force; by replacing Ravenswood it reshapes the narrative to send a different signal, one that encourages the viewer to empathise with Lucy's lonely and tragic fate.¹⁰³

Romance and Historical Costume Pieces

In catering to picture-buyers' wishes to retain the romantic spirit in a modern world, artists often depicted figures (representing the sweet or bitter course of love) that lacked a specific historical identity but were dressed in the costume of a previous age. Historical costume lent a certain dignity to a painting's expressed sentiment as well as

signalling the timelessness of human nature.¹⁰⁴ Paired sets of pictures were also very much in vogue,¹⁰⁵ and Bowkett portrayed love's inevitable difficulties in the complementary (and vaguely historical) images, *Anticipation* and *Lingering Hope* [pl. 12].¹⁰⁶ In *Anticipation*, an attractive young woman dressed in Elizabethan costume leans on a country gate. Her head tilts upward and she shields her eyes as she gazes into the distance. In the sequel, *Lingering Hope*, the same young woman, now with a doleful expression, turns away from the fence, and leans her head on her hand. The sentiment displayed in these two pictures is similar to the Bowkett's companion pictures reviewed by the *Art Journal* in 1872: "'Waiting' and 'Disappointed' are two pretty little episodes of maiden experience."¹⁰⁷ For a Victorian woman, a marriage proposal was seen as vital and the image of thwarted love was a familiar theme in paintings and novels.

Generic images of lovesick females conceivably acted together with favourite Victorian stories.¹⁰⁸ The impact of popular novels and paintings depended upon readers and audiences making links with their own desires,¹⁰⁹ and I suggest that emotive literary associations vitalized paintings of lovesick female figures. For example, in the popular and much reprinted domestic sensation novel, *East Lynne* (1861), clandestine meetings took place at a secluded country gate. At one point, when the heroine Barbara Hare realised her beloved had passed by without stopping, she "looked out with a yearning gaze."¹¹⁰ Given this emotive language, it is easy to draw a link between Barbara Hare and the figure in *Anticipation* and *Lingering Hope*. Bowkett's pictorial narratives would induce a mood expressed within popular novels and common to feminine experience. Bowkett's eminently marketable paintings, then, can be seen as the counterparts in painting of female actions and emotions made familiar by popular contemporary novels.

There was perhaps another facet to the Victorian fashion for paintings vaguely located in the past. Fancy dress parties, another Victorian form of leisure and entertainment, may have heightened the desire for pictures of literary heroines and costumed figures. Such parties became especially fashionable after Victoria and Albert hosted three magnificent costume balls in the late forties and fifties.¹¹¹ In the art world, the dealer Ernest Gambart threw spectacular annual costume balls. The artist Henrietta Ward reminisced about one of his dances: "my husband, and I, and my eldest daughter, had very elaborate costumes of the Elizabethan period." The women wore satin gowns

covered with pearls with ornate sleeves, “crossed and worked all over.”¹¹² Arden Holt’s book, *Fancy Dress Described or What to Wear at Fancy Balls* (1879), which advised female readers on the correct accoutrements for appearing in public as Ophelia, Juliet and so forth, ran to six editions. Historical dress marked the wearer as a participant in middle-class cultural rituals, and perhaps the painted image provided pleasurable memories, inspiration or even impressed visitors with the elegant and cultured nature of the family’s pastimes. There can be little doubt that Bowkett catered to the interest in this now forgotten but extremely fashionable Victorian pastime. According to Holt, “any popular play or opera will be pretty sure to originate the most fashionable costumes of each season, or possibly some pretty pictures.”¹¹³ The book gives details for literary heroines as well as for other themes Bowkett depicted. These untraced paintings included the heroine from *Rob Roy*, *Dorothy Vernon* (1881, SBA), *The Escape of Dorothy Vernon* (1883, GI), and the perennial favourite *Cinderella* (1876, SBA). Rather surprisingly, Bowkett’s *A Lace Maker* (1878, GI) and *The Lace Maker* (1880, SBA) can also be linked to fancy-dress fashions. Holt indicates that the lace maker’s costume was to resemble a “Dutch Frau or a woman of Louis XIV period.”¹¹⁴ This advice contradicts the notion that images of lace makers were usually social-realist depictions shaped by the painstaking female task of lace making.¹¹⁵ On the contrary, Holt’s description signals that these paintings were probably highly romanticized portraits fashioned upon the leisure experiences of affluent Victorian women.

Children also attended fancy dress balls and the artists Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway’s illustrations inspired their “quaintest dresses.”¹¹⁶ Bowkett referenced this contemporary pastime in her undated *In the Parlor* [fig. 37], which depicts a child dressed in a Cavalier costume posing before two admiring women.¹¹⁷ On the chair in the foreground, an open book signals the historical or literary connection. Bowkett’s technical virtuosity is especially evident in the detailed lace work on the child’s collar and cuffs and in the rich textures that describe the women’s elaborate dresses. Popular pastimes thus provided Bowkett with both the material and the audience for her work.

The audience for Bowkett’s historical costume pieces also spread beyond the confines of Britain. As early as 1891, Bowkett’s *Love’s Young Dream* was viewed as a book illustration in various cities throughout North America. As I will discuss in the next

section, the romantic liaison of Bowkett's petulant, Regency-costumed young lovers became an element in the widespread dissemination of middle-class cultural values.

Bowkett's Art and the North American Publishing Market.

By tracing *Love's Young Dream* [fig. 18] beyond its life in the fine art market, we find that the printed version of the painting became part of a North America publishing phenomenon. In 1890, a coloured engraving of *Love's Young Dream* was reproduced in *Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment: Being a Vast Treasury of Choice Productions in Poetry, Prose and Song from the Literature and Music of All Ages*.¹¹⁸ Published throughout North America, the gift book was beautifully bound and embellished with fine-quality steel-plate engravings. It was sold by subscription, a mode of selling that was part of nineteenth-century North American publishing history.¹¹⁹

Subscription publishing was at its height during the final decades of the nineteenth century when thousands of agents went door-to-door. Catalogues and library indexes suggest that in 1890 numerous publishing companies, situated in cities such as Ottawa, Chicago, Omaha, Boston, and Philadelphia, published editions of *Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment*. The book was evidently popular and went into a second edition.¹²⁰ Contributing to the book's success was the availability of new printing techniques, which reduced reprinting expenses, and the expansion of railroad service, which facilitated the distribution of plates to a wider geographical area.

Fifteen full-page illustrations enhance the 663 pages of *Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment*. Only three, including *Love's Young Dream*, are coloured. Gilded title pages and decorated illuminated capitals at each chapter's opening signal the book's luxurious quality. Each copy is identical except for the bindings, the dedication pages, the verso of the final page, and slight variations in colour. In McDermid & Logan's London, Ontario edition, intricate Art Nouveau scrollwork and foliage decorate a gilded presentation page.¹²¹ While the other editions I have examined contain less ornate presentation pages, several include a full-page advertisement for "Agents . . . for the most Valuable and Saleable Books". Since agents worked on a commission basis, it was essential for a prospective buyer to be convinced of a book's value, and purchasers expected such books to be lengthy and beautifully illustrated. To demonstrate a book's

worth, agents were provided with a “canvassing book”, which was a thin volume containing specimen pages, some illustrations, and a variety of promotional literature such as handbills, “tipped-in pastel sales speech slips”, and sales advice.¹²² Fortunately, in one of the *Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment* canvassing books, held in the Zinman Collection at the University of Pennsylvania, the ephemeral sales slips remain intact. The slip that accompanies Bowkett’s work presents her as a celebrated artist:

This is a charming engraving, entitled LOVE’S YOUNG DREAM. The original is a masterpiece of art by the famous Jane M. Bowkett, whose unrivalled works are praised by every beholder. The scene represents two lovers sitting under trees, each face having the subdued, far-away look which speaks more than words can express. The richly coloured dress carries us back to the Continental period. This plate is very suggestive as well as very beautiful.¹²³

Despite the commentary’s hyperbole, does the wording imply that North American audiences accepted that a woman could be a famous artist? Although men played the central economic and political role in the United States, women’s labour was a necessary part of the building of the country and they enjoyed greater rights and privileges than women in nineteenth-century Britain.¹²⁴

The Philadelphia engraving firm of Illman Brothers produced the illustrations for both the *Beautiful Gems* editions and the canvassing books,¹²⁵ and British, Dutch, French, and American artists painted the original pictures. The black and white illustrations include a wry and humorous cottage scene by the popular American genre painter Edward Lamson Henry (1841-1919),¹²⁶ and a figural work by Briton Riviere R.A. (1840-1920), a highly regarded British painter who specialized in uniting images of animals with classical subjects and with children.¹²⁷ *The Three Friends*, one of the three coloured illustrations, is by Philip R. Morris A.R.A (1838-1902).¹²⁸ Bowkett’s *Love’s Young Dream* is the second coloured illustration and occupies a privileged position opposite the opening chapter. As the chapter opens with *The Holidays*, a Christmas poem by Eliza Cook, we may surmise that publishers anticipated the book’s potential as a Christmas gift. The initial poem establishes the importance of the family and signals the moral ideology that runs throughout the book. Eliza Cook produced *Eliza Cook’s Journal* (1849-1854), “a weekly octavo sheet which appealed to the domestic and social feelings

of the middle classes.”¹²⁹ *Beautiful Gems* was undoubtedly intended for the same target audience. The dissemination of cultural mores was a contributory factor in consolidating the emerging middle class of the New World. By offering the North American consumer a “treasury” containing highly valued sentiments of distinguished European and American writers, composers, and painters, *Beautiful Gems* contributed to the development of a shared social identity.

As I have shown in this chapter, in responding to the need for an identifiably British art, Bowkett’s literary and rural figures link country and city—they perform as a panacea for social ills, frame female emotions, and promote Britain’s heritage. To analyse the cultural impact of Bowkett’s pictures, I have appropriated multiple viewpoints, available to Victorian viewers. On the surface, Bowkett’s nostalgic evocations of the countryside create an idealized pictorial legacy for middle-class city dwellers. I have argued, however, that we should not understand images akin to *Girl at the Well* as simply pleasing—they also acted as potent reminders of city problems such as contaminated water. And, as we have seen, pictures nuanced with social inequities strike a discordant note between a desired romanticized myth and a harsh reality. I have illustrated that Bowkett’s historically costumed figures not only fostered the idea of a shared culture but also directed viewers towards a feminine point of view. Moreover, by portraying protagonists from popular songs, Bowkett attracted a socially lower audience. As I have argued, she was more concerned with catering to a wide spectrum of middle-class buyers than appealing to a narrow, more refined, audience.

It is the cultural breadth of Bowkett’s work that makes it potent. In the next chapter, I will focus upon Bowkett’s portrayals of contemporary middle-class leisure pursuits and home life. The depiction of quotidian scenes is thought to give credence to many Victorians’ real-life experiences. I will argue, however, that such pictures remained as highly structured and nuanced as other Victorian narrative paintings, and show that Bowkett’s pictures dislodge idealistic concepts of women as selfless and dependant beings, flawlessly suited to domesticity and motherhood.

Notes: Chapter 4

¹ Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 425-447.

² In fact the practice of replication during the Victorian period has received minimal study. Although commonplace, it seems the practice became more questionable (and probably more difficult to execute) towards the end of the century when formalist theories and abstraction rather than realism became highly esteemed. See David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 122-143.

³ Admittedly, plants such as ferns, foxgloves, and daisies were not exclusive to the British Isles. However, since the majority of picture buyers did not travel abroad, the familiar trees and plants would have suggest the British countryside.

⁴ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 245.

⁵ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); as discussed in Mieke Bal, introduction by Norman Bryson, *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (Amsterdam: G and B Arts International, 2001), 6.

⁶ Bal, *Looking In*, 6.

⁷ Catherine M. Gordon, *British Paintings of Subjects from the English Novel, 1740-1870* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 142-3.

⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 148-50. As a Protestant country, Britain differed from France, which relied more on church and state for art patronage.

⁹ As for example, the unsophisticated picture gazers observed by Henry James at the RA (see chapter 3).

¹⁰ Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians*, 109-117.

¹¹ "The British Institution," *Art Journal* (March 1860): 78.

¹² Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 79.

¹³ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 59. The desire to see pictures that constructed and confirmed the viewer's sense of identity can be related to modernity and nationalism. In tracing the rise of English nationalism Anthony Easthope proposes that the unlimited horizons of nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialisation created the greatest need for a national identity. When people were unanchored from a relatively closed group with similar and longstanding values (village life) and confronted with difference, the displaced people (city dwellers) lost a sense of belonging. Their desire to create a secure identity promoted and sustained the collective distinction of Englishness. Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54-57.

¹⁴ The full complexities of this subject are beyond the scope of this thesis. See, among others, Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd, *Governing Cultures: Art Institutions in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

¹⁵ Henry Richter, *Daylight: A Recent Discovery in the Art of Painting*, (London, 1817); quoted in Hemingway, 103.

¹⁶ Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters* (1866; reprint, London: Ruthven Todd, 1947), 288.

¹⁷ J.B. Atkinson, "Pictures British and Foreign: International Exhibition," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 92 (1862): 360.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians*, 117.

¹⁹ Marcia Pointon, "The Artist as ethnographer: Holman Hunt and the Holy Land," in *Pre-Raphaelites Reviewed*, ed. Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 26-7.

²⁰ Tim Barringer, *The Pre-Raphaelites: Reading the Image* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), 81.

²¹ Davidoff and Hall. *Family Fortunes*, 28.

²² Hemingway, 103.

²³ *Art Journal* (August 1873): 238; *Graphic*, 7 June 1873, 539. Ruskin, for example though that sweetness bestowed a stamp of virtue and the press expressed admiration for faces with "sweet and pure expressions."

²⁴ Ruskin, *The Art of England*, 156-7.

²⁵ Ann Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 27.

²⁶ Flanders, 90-1.

²⁷ Mitchell, s.v. "cholera."

²⁸ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 24.

- ²⁹ I am again grateful to Ann Steed of Aberdeen Art Gallery for this information. Bowkett's untraced catalogue entries include, *At the Dripping Well* (1873, RHA), *Coming from the Well* (1873, RHA) and *At the Dripping Well* (1875/6, SBA).
- ³⁰ *Adam's Ale* could also be seen in relationship to the temperance movement, which began in Britain in the nineteenth century. Mitchell, s.v. "Temperance Movement."
- ³¹ Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, 76-81.
- ³² Mitchell, 707.
- ³³ Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*, 259.
- ³⁴ "A Hiring Fair," *Illustrated London News*, 17 August 1872, 415.
- ³⁵ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 182.
- ³⁶ Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain, 1530-1790* (1953; reprint, Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1994), 228-30.
- ³⁷ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 150.
- ³⁸ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 146.
- ³⁹ Jane Lewis, *Women of England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1884), 56.
- ⁴⁰ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 150.
- ⁴¹ Christiana Payne, "Murillo-like Rag or Clean Pinafores: Artistic and Social Preferences in the Representation of the Dress of the Rural Poor," *Textile History* 33, no.1 (2002): 56.
- ⁴² As for example, *Father's Dinner*, n.d. [fig. 10].
- ⁴³ Helene E. Roberts, "Marriage Redundancy or Sin," in Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 55.
- ⁴⁴ "A Hiring Fair," *Illustrated London News*, 17 August 1872, 415.
- ⁴⁵ Newens, 146.
- ⁴⁶ Wood, *Victorian Painting*, 302-6. While Herkomer's paintings commented upon the lack of work, Clausen depicted the harsh backbreaking conditions of rural work.
- ⁴⁷ Alice Havers was one of the few women artists to picture adversity in the life of rural working-class women. Yet, as Cherry has pointed out, in Havers depiction of a woman's death by the roadside, *The End of Her Journey* (1877), she alleviated the pain of the image. The plump cheeks of the pretty onlookers and their children effectively neutralize the emaciated state of the deceased female. Cherry, *Painting Women*, 173-4.
- ⁴⁸ *Four Miles More* (1881, RA), *Trudging Through The Rain* (1884, RSA), and *Weary Wayfarers* (1889, GI).
- ⁴⁹ *Queen*, 2 Nov 1889, 595.
- ⁵⁰ In two undated female personifications of Scotland and England, Bowkett shows herself fully conversant with national stereotyping. In *Scotland*, a smiling young woman is shown in the motions of dancing the highland fling. Her long unruly hair flies outwards and her swirling dress is draped with a tartan sash. In *England*, a demure-looking young woman stands perfectly upright. One hand gently draws the folds of her dress, demurely towards her body and a headband of roses decorates her short neat hair. "Pictures by Charles Stuart and J. M. Bowkett".
- ⁵¹ *Art Journal* 5 (1852): 173.
- ⁵² Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 80.
- ⁵³ Malcolm Warner, *The Victorians: British Painting, 1837-1901* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1997), 69. Whether Bowkett intended this symbolic connotation is unknown; however, her mother did die in 1872, the same year that this painting was exhibited.
- ⁵⁴ Raphael, *Madonna of The Chair (Madonna della Seggiola)*, n.d. Galleria Palatina, Florence, as reproduced in *The Complete Works of Raphael* (New York: Harrison House Publisher, 1969), plate 175, (also known as *Madonna della Seggiola; Madonna della Sedia*).
- ⁵⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, ed. Elizabeth Porges Watson (1853; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 190. My thanks to Dr. L. SurrIDGE for this reference.
- ⁵⁶ Shattock and Wolff, plate 5. For example, in 1833 to illustrate an article on "Woodcutting and Type Founding", The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge featured Raphael's *Madonna of The Chair* on the title page of its widely distributed *Monthly Supplement of The Penny Magazine*.
- ⁵⁷ Werner, 92.
- ⁵⁸ Because the girl does not wear a wedding ring, Bowkett's figure is probably an elder sister. Nonetheless, the possibility that she is a young unwed mother cannot be ruled out. Even here an ambiguity might be supposed.

⁵⁹ Gaskell, 109.

⁶⁰ Jane M. Bowkett, *Ophelia*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 76 x 31cm.; (30 x 12 in), Christie's, "British and Victorian Pictures," lot 653, London, 15 March 2006.

<<http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/search/lotdetail.asp?intObjectID=4674210>>

⁶¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 68. In his promotion of national art, the artist and educator Richard Redgrave argued that British narrative painting approximated European history painting, especially if the scene was taken from a literary source.

⁶² Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 431.

⁶³ Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 1.

⁶⁴ Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 168.

⁶⁵ Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class*, 86.

⁶⁶ See Werner, for a discussion on the Pre-Raphaelite's theories.

⁶⁷ Geoffrey Ashton, *Shakespeare's Heroines in the Nineteenth Century* (Buxton Museum and Art Gallery: Derbyshire Museum Service, 1980).

⁶⁸ Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality."

⁶⁹ Ashton, 4-5.

⁷⁰ 1873 (RSA), 1874 (BSA), 1875 (GI), 1877 (RSA), and 1881 (RA).

⁷¹ Fish, 56. Rae's 1890 version of *Ophelia* depicts her as the protagonist in a multi-figured dramatic composition.

⁷² Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 301. Altick found at least fifteen Ophelias exhibited in the first half of the century; he gives no figures for the second half of the century.

⁷³ Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 428.

⁷⁴ Susan P. Casteras and Ronald Parkinson, eds., *Richard Redgrave: 1804-1888* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum; The Yale Center for British Art: Yale University Press, 1988), 108.

⁷⁵ Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 177.

⁷⁶ Jane M. Bowkett, *Girl with Flowers*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 56.9 x 40.7 cm.; (22 x 16in.), Empire Gallery, Los Angeles, August 2004, <<http://www.empiregalleryla.com/inventory/10041c.jpg>>

⁷⁷ Richard Redgrave, *Ophelia Weaving Her Garlands*, 1842. Oil on panel, 76.2 x 63.5cm.; (30 x 25 in.), as reproduced in Casteras and Parkinson, cat. no. 23.

⁷⁸ *Athenaeum*, 4 May 1842, 410; *Art-Union*, 1842, 121; quoted in Casteras and Parkinson, 107-8.

⁷⁹ *Art Journal*, 15 1876: 144. At the end of the half page discussion on Bertrand's portrayal of Ophelia's insanity, even this anonymous critic wondered what had tempted the artist to cover the wall "with a modern French paper— though not of a strongly-marked pattern?"

⁸⁰ In a related issue, Roy Strong notes that in Victorian paintings, strong powerful women such as Mary Queen of Scots and Lady Jane Grey "are deliberately distorted to approximate to a view of women as inferior beings in a male dominated society." Roy Strong, *Recreating the Past: British History and the Victorian Painter* (London: Thames and Hudson; New York: The Piermont Morgan Library, 1978), 154.

⁸¹ Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 428.

⁸² Gordon, 151.

⁸³ Stuart; Billcliffe, s.v. "Bowkett." Both paintings are untraced.

⁸⁴ "Scene from Amy Robsart at Drury Lane Theatre," <http://www.iln.org.uk/iln_years/year/1870.htm>

⁸⁵ Gordon, "Subjects from the novels of Sir Walter Scott, 1816-1870," 286-358. Pamela Nunn does not list Amy Robsart or Nora Creina in her extensive inventory of "heroines".

⁸⁶ Albert Smith et al., *Sketches of London Life and Character* (London, 1849), 130. There was some confusion among the Easter and Whitsun holiday crowd as to whether the figures of Robsart and Leicester were supposed to be Victoria and Albert in "fancy dresses of the Elizabethan period." This uncertainty suggests an audience familiar with the costume parties held by the more affluent members of society.

⁸⁷ The Art-Union lottery scheme is discussed in Chapter 2. And see Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 432.

⁸⁸ Billcliffe, s.v. "Bowkett." The paintings have separate catalogue numbers.

⁸⁹ Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 83. Altick suggests that the painting, the song, and the piano formed a trio of sister arts.

⁹⁰ "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," <<http://www.contemplator.com/child/baliff.html>>

⁹¹ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 122.

⁹² Gounoud's Opera was first performed in London in 1863.

⁹³ *Queen*, 2 November 1889, 615. We cannot be certain which particular painting of Marguerite the article references. Bowkett exhibited *Marguerite*: (1873, SBA), (1881, RSA), (1885, SBA). There is an example of *Marguerite* in "Pictures by Charles Stuart and J. M. Bowkett"; unfortunately the reproductive quality is poor.

⁹⁴ Billcliffe, s.v. "Bowkett." It was not unusual for Bowkett to attach quotations to her literary work. For example, *Scene from The Winter's Tale* (1877, RSA): "Fair madam kneel, and pray your mother's blessing-Turn good lady our Perdita is found." Baile de Laperriere, *Exhibitions of the Royal Scottish Academy*, s.v. "Bowkett."

⁹⁵ Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 190.

⁹⁶ This theory also applies to Bowkett's modern-day romance pictures as for example, *Yes or No* [fig. 9].

⁹⁷ John Lauber, *Sir Walter Scott: Revised Edition* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 88.

⁹⁸ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 90. "Ophelia became the prototype not only of the deranged woman in Victorian literature and art but also of the young female asylum patient."

⁹⁹ Ashton, 5. For an excellent discussion on the subject see Cherry, *Beyond the Frame*, "Tactics and Allegories," 142-218.

¹⁰⁰ Showalter, 15-18. According to Showalter, "women's escape from the bondage of femininity into an empowering and violent madness was a popular theme in nineteenth-century romantic opera." Given the high percentage of supposedly insane females in mid-century lunatic asylums plus those confined within the home environment, a deranged feminine mind had become a considerable issue for many Victorian families and audience members may have empathised and sympathised with the heroine in *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

¹⁰¹ John Everett Millais, *The Bride of the Lammermoor*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 151.1 x 108 cm.; (59½ x 42¼ in.), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, as reproduced in Altick, *Paintings from Books*, fig. 32.

¹⁰² James, 170.

¹⁰³ Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 442-3. According to Nunn, several female artists concerned themselves with Lucy Ashton. Since most of these paintings have not been published (I haven't found any) and are only known by titles or by the briefest of descriptions, it is impossible claim originality for Bowkett. It is interesting to note, however, that Bowkett's painting is considerably larger than most of the literary pictures illustrated in nunn's article.

¹⁰⁴ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 253. Historical costume pieces were held in nearly every major middle-class collection.

¹⁰⁵ Nunn, *The Mid-Victorian Woman Artist*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ Jane M. Bowkett, *Anticipation and Lingering Hope*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 611 x 35.6 cm.; (24 x 14 in.), Walker's, "Important Fine Art and Antiques Auction," Ottawa, 26 March 2003, lot 81, <http://archives.icollector.com/photos/walkers/2519/2519_0081_2_lg.jpg>

¹⁰⁷ "Royal Scottish Academy, Exhibition, 1872," *Art-Journal* 12 (1872): 111. These may be the same pictures or another version of this marketable subject. The trend for the pair or partitioned romantic picture shows itself recurrently in women's work.

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, although both men and women artists fed prevailing taste with characters from Dickens' novels, the heroines from Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot's work were usually neglected. Nunn, "Between Strong-mindedness and Sentimentality," 437; Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 109.

¹⁰⁹ Ellen Wood, *East Lynne*, ed. Andrew Maunder (1861; reprint, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), 35.

¹¹⁰ Ellen Wood, 63.

¹¹¹ Strong, 60.

¹¹² O'Donnell, 137.

¹¹³ Arden Holt, *Fancy Dress Described or What to Wear at Fancy Balls* (6th ed. London: Debenham and Freebody, 1879), 12.

¹¹⁴ Holt, 145.

¹¹⁵ Richard Redgrave's *The Sempstress* (1846) encouraged widespread sympathy for the plight of the female needle worker and generated a number of similar scenarios. It was thus tempting to see pictures entitled the lace maker as related to the theme of the overworked needlewoman.

¹¹⁶ Holt, 12.

¹¹⁷ The child is dressed in clothing similar to that of the young boy being questioned by Cromwell's men in the well-known painting, *And when did you last see your Father* (1878), by William Frederick Yeames, RA. As reproduced in Wood, *Victorian Painters*, s.v. "Yeames."

¹¹⁸ The *Beautiful Gems* book was compiled by Henry Davenport Northrop, a prolific American author, who had lived in London before returning to Philadelphia.

¹¹⁹ I am indebted to Sid Huttner at the University of Iowa for suggesting that *Beautiful Gems* might be a subscription book.

¹²⁰ The National Publishing Company in Philadelphia printed a second edition in 1892, which was followed by a further reprinting in 1903 by a New York publisher C. G. Clarke, Perry, New York. World Cat internet library site lists nine different publishers and internet booksellers such as ABE offer *Beautiful Gems* editions from a whole range of publishers.

¹²¹ Henry Davenport Northrop, Comp. *Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment: Being a Vast Treasury of Choice Productions in Poetry, Prose and Song from the Literature and Music of All Ages* (London: Ontario, McDermid & Logan, c.1890).

¹²² Keith Arbour, *Canvassing Books, Sample Books, and Subscription Publishers' Ephemera, 1833-1951, in the Collection of Michael Zinman* (Ardsley, New York: The Hayden Foundation for the Cultural Arts, 1996), 15.

¹²³ I am indebted to John Pollack of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania for examining the two *Beautiful Gems* canvassing books on my behalf: (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.H Moore and Co., c.1890); (Newark, Ohio: Allison Publishing Co., c.1890).

¹²⁴ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Art and Society* (1990; reprint, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 204-5. In this respect, the American artist Lilly Martin Spencer (1822-1902) is of particular interest. She supported her husband and children by her artwork, and her success demonstrates what American women could achieve. In 1858, *The Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, a magazine designed for a female audience, featured Spencer's idealistic family scene *Fi! Fo! Fum!* as its frontispiece. In the 1850s and 1860s, her paintings were sent to France to be lithographed and then sold throughout America in print format. In due course, the wide reproduction of Spencer's domestic genre paintings made her name familiar across the country.

¹²⁵ David McNeely Stauffer, *American Engravers upon Copper and Steel* (1907; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), 139. My attempts to discover whether the artists were recompensed for the engravings have been hampered by a lack of information regarding the Illman Brothers.

¹²⁶ Jane Turner, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Art before 1914*, s.v. "Henry."

¹²⁷ Stephens, 1884.

¹²⁸ At first glance, the plates would appear to have been assembled from diverse and seemingly unrelated sources; however, at least two of the featured artists moved in the same circle as Bowkett. Both Riviere and Morris were dinner guests of Bowkett and Stuart during the 1880s (I am grateful to Foley-Fisher for allowing me to examine the original invitation cards). Since Bowkett and Morris both exhibited at the British Institution for the first time in 1860, their association could have been long-standing [James Daffone, "Philip Richard Morris," *Art Journal* 15 (1876): 161-3.

¹²⁹ *Queen*, 5 Oct 1889, 465. According to the obituary in *Queen*, Eliza Cook (1818-1889) was a self-determined and self-educated English woman. Collected volumes of her work appeared in print from 1840-1869, and her popular verses contributed to more than one English journal's success.

Chapter 5

Nation and Image: Bowkett's Portrayal of Contemporary Life

As early as 1850, *Punch* made the link between young English women and hothouses: “why but that the women of England are the loveliest in the world—should we not rear young ladies under glass, and see if we can grow circassian beauties.”¹ Bowkett too was interested in women under glass: her *Young Lady in a Conservatory* (c.1873) [fig. 38] plays with these same notions of beauty and containment. The picture, which connects with questions concerning control and women’s bodies, unites two fashionable Victorian structures, conservatories and corsets. Conservatories are carefully controlled artificial environments designed to tame and subvert nature. The corset is also devised to contain, support, and create an artificial manifestation of nature. Bowkett’s painting, as I will show, brings together and interrogates these two images of containment and control. Although most Victorian pictures of contemporary women’s lives portray virtuous and domestic middle-class wives and mothers, many of Bowkett’s representations do not adhere to societal norms. In the following chapter, I will analyze Bowkett’s pictures of modern life and argue for their complexity. This chapter, then, will investigate how Bowkett’s work challenged—albeit sometimes in subtle ways—the position allotted to women by society.

In *Victorian Figurative Painting*, Mary Cowling asserts that “genre” paintings are “uncontroversial, undemanding and intelligible.”² I disagree; such views marginalize the political potential of genre paintings and underestimate the plurality of viewing positions. My concern is with a narrative painting’s potential to hold plural messages. What part of the picture, I will ask, negotiated viewpoints that might confirm or deviate from convention? As I will show, referents to real life could be either reassuring or controversial. Since narrative fields are never transparent and viewers’ interpretations were and are determined by personal and cultural circumstances, a single or simple reading is impossible. Notwithstanding these inherent difficulties, I provide social contexts that substantiate readings of Bowkett’s resistance to the status quo.

This chapter considers images of contemporary women at leisure, at the seaside resort, and within the home. In discussing Bowkett’s depictions of women at leisure, I

will argue that Bowkett's three distinct aspects of youthful pastimes—tending lilies in a hothouse, playing croquet, and enjoying the seashore—should be contemplated in light of women's increasing independence. I will also explore the setting of the beach as a public social space to expose Bowkett's classed and gendered narratives. In considering Bowkett's portrayal of domesticity, I will show that her eminently marketable images of childhood often, but not always, conform to standard formats that exemplify prevailing class and gender values. By contrast, Bowkett's treatment of middle-class maternity is atypical. I will argue that Bowkett's resistance to the "good mother" image countered the idea of the dutiful selfless woman and subverted the carefully defined role of Victorian motherhood.

Young Women at Leisure: Containment and Freedom

At first sight, *Young Lady in a Conservatory* appears to be an unproblematic representation of femininity and middle-class leisure. To associate women with flowers was standard Victorian practice, and the painting draws on the Victorian conflation of the cultivation of gardens with the cultivation of femininity. Society's heightened demarcation of gender difference³ and Ruskin's homage to women in *Of Queens' Gardens* (1864) further advanced the conflation of women and flowers in art and in life.⁴ For Ruskin, the ideal woman protected within the home "grows as a flower does".⁵ In art, numerous pictures of Victorian women together with flowers in an enclosed garden evoked the Virgin in the garden in the medieval *hortus conclusus*. The inaccessibility of such young women intensified erotic undercurrents and to induce the idea of purity, such images habitually included the symbolic white lily associated with the Madonna.⁶

A *Young Lady in a Conservatory* incorporates the iconographic traditions of women-flower paintings where women's shape and beauty have been converted into symbols associated with the beauty and growth of flowers. The image ostensibly belongs to the category of Victorian paintings concerned with submissive female sexuality and yet, I suggest, it evokes both modesty and intense sexuality. While the sweet circumstances of the pictured young woman would have charmed those who approved of privileged domestic leisure, the picture contains potentially subversive elements that signal the restrictions imposed upon Victorian middle-class women.

In *Young Lady in a Conservatory*, the cropped objects on the margins of the canvas heighten the sense that we are looking into the private realm of the young woman, who, all unaware of the onlooker is engaged in supporting the tall stalks of a lily. Her frothy white muslin dress with lavender trim stands out in relief against the warm hues of the rough wooden slats, the red brick floor tiles, and the lichened clay pots. The shades of red highlighting her hair and lips are repeated in the flowers and in the gloves lying upon the floor. In the background, large deciduous trees and an overcast sky are visible through the conservatory's glass panes. The cool tones of the stormy-looking sky offer a contrast to the heated cultivated interior. On the floor, the dark green metal watering can on the left and the dark volcanic rock on the right provide spatial depth to the interior. In the middle distance, several hothouse plants (exotic orchids, fuchsias, and geraniums) are arranged upon a wooden shelf, their delicate curving shapes echoing that of the graceful young woman.

The picture purported to show an archetypal image of a Victorian young lady, and undoubtedly provided a highly desirable image for those women viewers who fully believed their duty lay within the home environment. But does the painting unambiguously celebrate such a domestically centred activity? The picture is almost too lush: the profusion of colour and bloom create an overabundance. It seems as if the leggy blooms are barely contained. Most significantly, prison-like vertical metal bars uphold the barrier between interior and exterior space. Perhaps the barred enclosure metaphorically signals concerns similar to those of M. E. Braddon, whose novel, *Vixen* (1879), depicts an independently minded heroine Violet Tempest, who rejects controlled ladylike behaviour and enjoys the freedom of sporty outdoor leisure pursuits. By contrast, her rival, who is restricted by social mores, confines herself to growing plants within a splendid conservatory.⁷

Outspoken Victorian women who questioned gender inequality provide a historical context for the subversive subtexts of *Young Lady in a Conservatory* and they offer support for my non-traditional reading of Bowkett's picture. For example, Anne Brontë linked the metaphor of the hothouse with woman's enforced dependence. In a scene where a boy's upbringing is under discussion in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), the Markham family attempt to dissuade the artist and mother, Helen Huntington,

from molycoddling her young son and protecting him from the evils of the world. They believe that virtue will be learned if he is exposed to trials and argue that an oak reared in a hot house will not become hardy. Helen asks if the same argument should be applied to a girl. Following their indignant “certainly not”, Helen replies:

No; you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hot-house plant -taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil. But will you be so good as to inform me, why you make this distinction? Is it that you think she *has* no virtue?⁸

The feminist Frances Power Cobbe also linked woman’s uselessness and hothouses in her 1862 essay, “Celibacy v. Marriage”. She argued that women were unable to contribute meaningfully to society because they were kept “in ignorance of real life” and that society assumed a wife to be “a wholly passive medium of expenditure, like a conservatory or a pack of hounds.”⁹ For Cobbe, women protected from the exterior world became useless decorative ornaments, only displayed as an extravagant expression of family status.

Such values are reflected in *A Young Lady in a Conservatory* where the well-dressed woman and luxurious plants functioned as commodities in the display of family wealth.¹⁰ Victorian middle-class wives’ and daughters’ fashionable clothing signalled a family’s disposable income; here the stylish dress also defined this young woman’s femininity. By 1870, the bustle had replaced the bell-shaped crinoline. The skirt became narrower with drapery drawn into a bustle at the back and the figure flattened at the front by a tightly laced corset. By restricting movement, a tight corset separated its wearer from those involved in physical exertion and was thus a clear signal of class status.¹¹ The young woman’s figure manifests the fashionable “Watteau toilette,” a design that required a long corset to mould the body into the required shape. Seen from the front, the style was unremarkable but was striking from the side elevation where the shape of the narrowed waist and protruding bustle sexualized the feminine figure.

The bunched-up puff of fabric which swelled out from below the waist at the back – held and emphasised by bows of ribbon with fluttering ends - the hair was drawn away from the face and massed at the back of the head to produce

what was named a 'chignon' formed of huge, loose intertwined plaits or rolling curls.¹²

The style's exaggeration of women's bodily characteristics became particularly potent in visual depictions of maidenhood. As in *Young Lady in a Conservatory*, the white muslin negotiates between sexual attractiveness and impeccable virtue.

Two years before the exhibit of a *Young Lady in a Conservatory*, the illustrator Florence Claxton exploited the sexual potential of the fashionable bustle to make a strong statement about ways of viewing women who worked outside the home. The sketch, *The Adventures of a Woman in Search of Her Rights* (1871)[pl. 13]¹³ depicts a woman artist working upon a portrait. Claxton exaggerates the curves of the artist's fashionable body to draw attention to problems experienced by women artists. The enclosed caption reads "What Tompkins said to Jones— 'BOTHER the old masters, look at the young Miss-esses'". Here, the deprecating remark and the implication that the artist is confined to a limited subject range (the sketch shows her painting a woman's portrait) confronted contemporary male attitudes toward women and their chosen profession. By signalling women artists' increased presence in the art world and the fact that they were evaluated by virtue of their bodies rather than for their professional capabilities, Claxton directly questioned the politics of gender inequality. As the texts of Braddon, Brontë, Cobbe, and Claxton suggested, the problems associated with middle-class women working for a living were intricately linked with gendered social mores.

The theme of women and conservatories is far from unique; in *Victorian Figurative Painting*, Mary Cowling writes that "there are many paintings which make manifest Ruskin's ideal of 'Queens Gardens.'" However, in reference to pictures of girlhood innocence enclosed and protected within conservatories, Cowling notes that in contrast to other artists' depictions of women gracing conservatory interiors, "Bowkett's example at least makes some pretence at being useful."¹⁴ Yet, to perceive the *Young Lady's* actions as an unproblematic lesson in flower tending ignores the picture's potential subversive power. I consider the girl's activity, with its thinly veiled references to sexuality, as an invitation to explore gender-defined issues of power. In the picture, the relationship between girl and lily creates a tension between sexuality and control. The lily's large stamens (the male organ of fructification) provide phallic symbolism. The

prominent anthers are pregnant with red pollen. Since flower arranging was a requisite art for middle-class women, viewers would have recognised the danger of tending the blooming plant with its staining pollen whilst wearing white.

The image, then, plays with viewer's expectations. This is not the ancient white madonna lily with golden pollen; instead it belongs to a forced, indoor species.¹⁵ While the woman is clothed in the colour of purity, the lily does not reinforce this sign of virginity. The exotic petals are merely tinged with white, and the heavy red pollen works against the message of moral propriety. In addition, her red lips sexualize the young woman; her bare arms can be glimpsed through diaphanous sleeves and lavender ribbons accentuate her bosom, tiny waist and bustle. Both woman and flower require control, and just as the young woman restrains the lily, she in turn is restrained by the corset that heightens her femininity. In an article critiquing women's devotion to petite waistlines, *Queen* described the corset as a "secret prison."¹⁶ The young woman's body is thus twice controlled. From my perspective, Bowkett's picture discreetly negotiated issues relating to the contained body by ambiguously fusing a desirable (by some people) image of women's leisure with subversive elements that questioned such a lifestyle.

By contrast, Bowkett's *Awfully Jolly* (1877)[fig. 39] signals the plurality of middle-class leisure experiences and appears less ambiguous in character. In *Awfully Jolly*, a confident-looking young woman sits facing outward and her eyes engage the viewer; her smiling countenance and the painting's title work together to fix a positive interpretation of the scene. Whether by design or not, it plays with signs of contemporary pictorial communication for it seems as if the girl looks straight into a camera lens. The picture is theatrical in mode, and is an unusual example of a Victorian woman directly facing the viewer. Perhaps Bowkett's forthright young woman suggests women's increasing independence.

Indeed, this independence is signalled by the young woman's sporting interests. From the 1860s onwards, croquet games took place in private gardens and in public parks. Since it was physically undemanding, the game was considered eminently suitable for ladies. In *Awfully Jolly*, the croquet paraphernalia designates the girl's source of pleasure and the chair confirms a private domestic location. The house gable end in the distance is reminiscent of one of the large Holland Park houses, and the extensive lawn

points to a substantial property. Croquet was an outdoor sport enjoyed by both middle-class men and women. In the All-England Croquet Club competitions:

There were two prizes for ladies playing single-handed, the winner was she who proved best player in three games. Four prizes were given, to be won by any members of the club, gentleman or ladies; and the champion prize, a silver cup, worth 50 gs, to be held for a twelvemonth, was open to all comers.¹⁷

Although the awards attested to croquet's egalitarian character, male members ran all clubs. Even so, Bowkett's picture offered an index of women's social progress in what would lead to organized sports.¹⁸

Bowkett's undated *Windy Day* [fig. 40] suggests further changes in gendered social order, and I contend that this image marks women's increasing control over their lives. The painting focuses upon a modern young couple positioned against a picturesque backdrop of fishing boats, tackle, ropes, and lobster pots.¹⁹ The way the figures are posed sends a further signal of shifting attitudes towards gender equality. Roles are reversed in this atypical version of Victorian courtship, and the disparity between this picture and established depictions of masculine and feminine identity is striking. Here, Bowkett denaturalizes the binary categories of active man-passive woman. Most pertinently, instead of being the passive recipient of the male gaze, the woman usurps the act of looking. The male, normally constructed to demonstrate self-control and authority within the public sphere, struggles against the wind's strength. The woman's evident amusement at his loss of dignity further undermines conventional notions of proper feminine and masculine behaviour.

While there is a thematic similarity between *Windy Day* and a picture by Gabriel Rossetti, *Writing on the Sand* (1859) [pl. 14],²⁰ Rossetti's image conforms to gender expectations far more than Bowkett's does. In both pictures, a large expanse of sea, breached by a distant headland, outlines the background. A young couple is centrally located on a sandy stretch of beach, clothing flapping in a strong wind. However, in *Writing on the Sand*, the man retains his composure. Even as the forceful wind blows away the young man's hat, he gazes at his sweetheart's face and draws her likeness in the sand, all the while holding her hand in his to support her billowing figure.

Humour allows *Windy Day* to be experienced as pleasure and, at the same time, to destabilize conventional gender roles. Furthermore, the image is a refreshing alternative to the numerous journal and newspaper illustrations that poked fun at the wind's disruption of women's costume and composure.²¹ In *Windy Day* the woman's femininity coexists with a strategic shift towards equality. The fresh wild flowers, the primroses pinned to her bonnet and the posy of violets in her hand, symbolize love and springtime and connect her emotions with the natural force of the waves. Her dress, the flower patterned soft-velvet material, fur cuffs and collar enhance her femininity while avoiding any clichés such as might be attached to the image of the young lady in a conservatory. In *Windy Day*, freedom and femininity are not mutually exclusive, and I suggest that Bowkett's image points to women's increasing independence. Bowkett's paintings of women in leisured activities thus open multiple possibilities for interpretation—while they may appear conventional, they subtly critique women's hothouse world of domesticity and celebrate their growing independence.

Shifting Sand: Class and Gender on the Beach

In this section, I will analyse Bowkett's seaside pictures and the purposes served by their imagery. I will argue that these paintings were a product of prevailing taste, with notions of class and place informing representation. It is especially interesting to note that although the beach became a particularly domestic space, populated by mothers, children and nursemaids,²² the modern-life crowd was a rare subject for Victorian women artists. Bowkett's predilection for multi-figured resort scenes thus sets her work apart from that of her peers.

Though the subject was unusual for a woman artist, Bowkett's seaside pictures appealed to a general Victorian vogue for sea resorts. Despite, or perhaps because of, their breezy nature, sea airs were widely believed to promote health, and the perceived therapeutic effect of sea-air and salt-water promulgated the development of resorts along the coasts of England and Wales. Prevailing medical opinion saw the coast's bracing air as countering the debilitating evils of urban miasma and illness.²³ By the mid-nineteenth century, with the expansion of the railway system, increasing numbers of Londoners traveled to coastal resorts in pursuit of health, leisure, and entertainment. Cheap rail

tickets increased the flow of the poorer day trippers, and the annual seaside holiday became a fashionable ritual for middle-class families.

The seaside resorts which were originally exclusive to the aristocracy altered in social tone once the railways brought increasing number of people in search of amusement.²⁴ The changes were noted by Charles Dickens in “The Tuggs’s at Ramsgate” (1835), where he provides us with a derisive sketch of the rituals that were transforming the face of seaside resorts:

The ladies were employed in needlework, or watch-guard making, or knitting, or reading novels; the gentlemen were reading newspapers or magazines; the children were digging holes in the sand with wooden spades, and collecting water therein; the nursemaids, with their youngest charges in their arms, were running in after the waves, and then running back again.²⁵

William Powell Frith’s 1854 *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)* [pl. 15] was the first visual counterpart to Dickens’ fictional description of the modern beach. When the painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy, Frith’s lively characterization of the seaside crowd became an instant success. With its emphasis on family groups and recognisable social types, the busy scene stimulated people’s imagination by inviting them to identify characters as they might do in a novel.²⁶ *Ramsgate Sands* established Frith’s reputation as the pre-eminent painter of modern-life panoramas and also inspired subsequent renditions of the crowded seashore.²⁷

Victorian artists were expected to depict realistic figures whose appearance and deportment were consistent with their station in life. As such, Bowkett’s *A Beach Scene* [fig. 41] implicates her in the selecting, ordering and categorization common to the depiction of the seashore. Bowkett marks social rank by clothing and activity. While middle-aged men read newspapers, ladies read books and shade their delicate complexions with parasols. Elaborate hats distinguish middle-class women from the nursemaid, who wears a bonnet. As well as being defined by her bonnet, the nursemaid continues to work even though this is predominantly a leisure scene.²⁸ In the background on the right, the tradeswoman is also working and her class, too, is defined by her bonnet, which is noticeably plainer than that worn by the nursemaid. In such paintings, each item of clothing and nuance of action classified the wearer. Shopping was considered a

feminine pursuit, and we see a woman and a little girl choosing purchases from a stall. The paterfamilias is centrally placed within the family group, but is then connected to the outer world by the newspaper. In the right-hand corner, the courting couple, effectively in a world of their own, do not seem to draw the attention of the family members. Acquiescing to bourgeois taste, Bowkett provided a prospective art purchaser with a well-ordered, reassuring depiction of a family at leisure.

Whether Bowkett sketched onsite or derived her ideas from the work of other artists is unknown. Certainly drawing material would have been easy to transport and the inclusion of a sketching woman in Bowkett's undated painting *A Day on the Beach* implied that she worked on location. In the picture, three young women are seated on a grassy bank, overlooking the sea: one reads a novel, one is doing needlework, and the other is sketching.²⁹ Although the sketching of nature was considered a ladylike accomplishment, it was unconventional and unladylike to draw attention to oneself; women's working in public, then, was fraught with social difficulties. We should further consider that propriety might have prevented most women from recording the beach's social milieu. I should note here that the behaviour at seaside resorts created a dilemma for morally sensitive Victorians and there seems to have been a conflict between what was expected and what took place. According to the historian James Walvin, the relaxed atmosphere made some people bold, and the practice of sea bathing in the nude or with the minimum of clothing was surprisingly widespread at some resorts.³⁰

Although some women artists portrayed sea views and the coastal landscape, their works rarely included figures and were usually executed in watercolour.³¹ I have not discovered any oil paintings of a modern-life seaside crowd by a woman artist contemporaneous to Bowkett. Out of the 443 illustrations included in Nunn's exhaustive study of the *Mid-Victorian Woman Artist's* productivity, Bowkett's undated *Promenade at Brighton* [fig. 42] is the only example of a painting depicting a seaside crowd, and is moreover unusual in its incorporation of English urban topography. Women artists rarely pictured recognisable metropolitan locations or the public on the street.³² For example, even though the figure painter Louise Jopling spent time at Brighton, she did not produce scenes of Brighton's parade or beach.³³

To find parallels for Bowkett's work, we therefore have to turn to her male counterparts. For example, Abraham Solomon's undated *Brighton Front* [fig. 43] and Bowkett's *Promenade at Brighton* contain remarkably comparable elements, with both artists capturing Brighton's seafront from almost the same viewpoint. In both pictures, on the left, the carefully delineated buildings provide the backdrop to the wide esplanade with its railing separating the Marine Parade from the street. On the right, the sands stretch towards the Chain Pier, which can be glimpsed on the horizon line.³⁴ Although Bowkett has cut down the number of figures and made the picture easier to read, elements within the two compositions are strikingly similar: in the centre, a bench and a flirting couple, on the one side, the two prominent women, and on the other, a child and dog.

There are, however, significant differences between the two pictures. In *Promenade at Brighton*, fashions have changed and trailing dresses have replaced the crinolines worn by the two young women in *Brighton Front*.³⁵ Solomon's two figures dominate the foreground; the concentration of dark colour, which describes the parading, identically dressed figures, takes up a considerable amount of the picture space and draws spectator's eyes. Whereas Solomon's female figures are on view, Bowkett's two individualized women are not positioned for the gaze, but instead are engaged in a private conversation. In Solomon's work, a male figure occupies an invalid carriage while an attentive woman leans towards him in a dutiful manner similar to that portrayed in such pictures as Hick's *Woman's Mission* [pl. 1]. In Bowkett's, the carriage contains a woman and is pulled by a man, and, most importantly, Bowkett provides a chaperone for her flirting couple.

By replacing Solomon's socially fluid and rather rowdy throng with more sedate and decorous figures, Bowkett changes the social tone of the Brighton setting. Resorts were evaluated according to the particular type of visitor attracted and his/her behaviour. Whereas in the Regency period Brighton had been a summer playground for the aristocracy, by the 1840s it was often perceived as a place full of noisy tradesmen.³⁶ Such class-based opinions tarnished Brighton's image, and by the 1860s the town was attempting to build a respectable reputation.³⁷ As discussed in chapter 3, since a sense of place is closely aligned to a sense of class, the human figures in Solomon's *Brighton*

Front describe a social mix that might have been considered dangerous or offensive;³⁸ whereas Bowkett's depiction of the Brighton social scene is in a form more acceptable to middle-class tastes and sensibilities and her more sedate image would presumably have been easier to sell.

In Bowkett's highly accomplished picture of *Folkstone Beach* (1875)[fig. 2], the social practices of the characters provide a revealing contrast with her previous work. The figures appear less stiff and formal than in the earlier *Beach Scene* and the picture contains a density of social references. Although the figures in the colourful crowd represent a spectrum of social strata, they are woven together into a complex tapestry that suggests the distinctive way of life at the seaside. On Folkstone's beach, then, we see many of the characters and activities one might expect to find at the Victorian seaside: women and children of all ages, a newspaper-reading man, a flirting couple, hawkers, and, perhaps more unusually, a black minstrel. Folkstone enjoyed a superior status as one of the smaller, more respectable resorts and the women here are fashionably clothed.³⁹ An expanse of ocean on one side, dotted with sailing craft, was a characteristic feature of beach scenes in general, as was the juxtaposition between old and new. On the shoreline, the bright symbols of modern leisure stand out against the background. Victorian bathing huts have displaced the fishing equipment, which is consigned to inactivity at the back of the beach. The curved shapes and brown tones of the winch, the wooden boat, the nets, the ropes, and the empty lobster pots contrast with the modern changing machines' white geometric outlines. Two figures on the left provide a further juxtaposition between work and leisure. Perched upon the end of the boat, a seafaring man holds a model of a sailing boat for a young boy's close inspection. The child is dressed in a fashionable blue and white sailor suit, and when juxtaposed with the practical working clothes of the maritime man, his nautical outfit appears as a middle-class indulgence.⁴⁰

On the right of the picture, a tall black minstrel attempts to engage the attention of a seated paterfamilias who ignores the minstrel and continues to read his newspaper. Interestingly, here the paterfamilias is an insignificant figure. The black minstrel's theatrical clothing draws viewers' eyes to this section. Dress, that essential coder of cultural difference, marks him as a spectacle; the colourful outfit designates the black man as a figure of fun and entertainment and plays a part in racial stereotyping. At the

resorts, the minstrels' lively music and droll acts provided entertainment for the whole family. By the 1860s, minstrel shows were a firmly established part of the English theatrical scene.⁴¹ Their popularity was entwined with the hugely admired stage presentations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and national anti-slavery sympathy. In fact, the majority of the entertainers were not African American or Ethiopians but white performers who coloured their skin with burnt cork.⁴² The idea of black as "other" was thus appropriated and commercially exploited. The treatment of the minstrel in Bowkett's beach scene then lends shape to Victorian attitudes towards racial difference.

In spite of the minstrel's colourful appearance, the visitors appear to take no notice of him, perhaps indicating that his display had become so familiar as to be no longer noteworthy.⁴³ By contrast, the discrete courting couple clearly attract the attention of an elegantly attired woman. A trip to the seaside offered thrilling opportunities for flirtation and romantic liaisons were a distinctive feature of Victorian seaside scenes. Otherwise, it was most unusual in paintings for a flirtation scene to distract a woman from her maternal duty. Griselda Pollock claims that nineteenth-century women "were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch".⁴⁴ I would argue that the beach had become such a "feminine" public realm that its unfettered space presented women an opportunity to exercise the observing gaze.⁴⁵ In Bowkett's painting, the woman pays no heed to the crying child beside her; she is more intrigued by the romance unfolding before her. Rather than depicting a paradigm of maternal perfection, Bowkett has humanized the woman and given her agency by positioning her in the act of looking.

In the earlier *Beach Scene*, the paterfamilias is centrally placed, but in *Folkstone Beach* a seated elderly woman occupies the central position. The grey-haired woman both anchors the composition and acts as a sign of a matriarchal family centre. From her innermost position, the grey-haired woman looks to the horizon through a pair of binoculars, and the two wading girls in her sight line lead your eye into the far distance. Although a figure with a telescope, looking out to sea, was a familiar trope in seaside images, the figure was usually male, which was in keeping with binoculars being associated with the sporting and seagoing male realm.⁴⁶ Bowkett's gendered reversal here was an effective device for contravening and challenging gendered expectations.⁴⁷

It is highly significant that the three figures in the centre of *Folkstone Beach*—the elderly woman with the telescope and the two young mothers—all look outwards rather than in towards the family. In Bowkett's woman-child imagery, the more usual fond maternal gaze is often absent. Adults rarely show much connection with the children around them. For example, the little girl pictured in *The Donkey Ride* [fig. 44] turns towards the young woman holding the donkey's reins and seems to be trying to attract the adult's interest, but the woman does not respond to the child with either delight or reassurance. She appears lost in her own thoughts.⁴⁸

Bowkett's beach images foreground problematic conflicts between maternal care and what was thought of as physical work. In picturing the changing scenario of middle-class maternity, discrete boundaries had to be negotiated. In the earlier *Beach Scene*, the nursery maid is responsible for the children, whereas in *Folkstone Beach* mothers perform this domestic duty. It is often supposed that middle-class women had minimal contact with their children, but practice was widely inconsistent with this perception.⁴⁹ Whether the modification acknowledged a shifting social pattern or was meant to suggest a somewhat lower middle-class group remains unclear.

The duties of nineteenth-century motherhood took various and sometimes contradictory forms. While "domestic duty" connoted moral worth, "domestic service" suggested something quite different. Although advice manuals were written for socially privileged families and encouraged mothers in their roles as moral educators, the paradigm that middle-class women should appear not to work resulted in the more mundane day-to-day tasks of child rearing being associated with servants. Since the great majority of the "servant-keeping classes" could not afford more than one servant,⁵⁰ the stigma attached to physical labour could be problematic when it came to the pictorial construction of middle-class activities. Although the kneeling mother in *Folkstone Beach* is removing the little boy's boot, she is not shown concentrating upon her task; her attention is drawn elsewhere. Perhaps the children playing on the sand distract her. If this is the case, Bowkett might be pointing to the multiple responsibilities associated with motherhood. What I am suggesting, then, is that Bowkett's portrayal of middle-class mothers articulates the fractured potential of mother-child relationships, a topic normally absent in paintings of idealized Victorian motherhood. I suggest that Bowkett's

representations of middle-class maternity take into account the fact that women's leisure served as a crucial agent of refinement in some middle-class families. It may be for this reason that she rarely depicts mothers fully engaged in caring for their children; in Bowkett's images it is usually siblings who exhibit maternal concern

Marketing Childhood: Sentiment and Symbol

During the nineteenth century, endearing pictures of children were in vogue. Because children were considered suitable subjects for women artists, many women produced work within this category. The marketing of sentiment, as Janice Helland has pointed out, sanctioned women painters' "acumen in an economy from which they were often excluded."⁵¹ Such pictures were made to please their audience and Bowkett's intentions were patently commercial; like other artists, she depicted a range of childhood experiences that were eminently saleable. As well as elucidating Bowkett's modification and replication of her own images, I will show that such pictures divided activities along class lines, foreshadowed adulthood, and enforced contemporary views regarding gendered social behaviour.

Victorian paintings of children are associated with a genre known as "fancy pictures". Early in the eighteenth century, the term "fancy picture" was coined to describe a self-consciously modern art category. This democratic type of picture, which arguably could be enjoyed regardless of station or education, portrayed anonymous figures engaged in familiar tasks.⁵² Due to the bourgeois fascination with children, paintings of charming children and ragged urchins formed the most popular subjects of this genre.⁵³ Since the Victorian era was often referred to as the golden age of childhood,⁵⁴ it is not surprising that the delight in such images increased during the nineteenth century, and that accordingly, numerous artists produced this category of picture.

Of the many Victorian images that reinforced the idea of childhood innocence John Everett Millais' *Bubbles* (1886), is perhaps the era's best-known commercial success.⁵⁵ Millais' charming picture of a little boy dressed in a velvet costume with a Vandyke collar blowing bubbles into the air alluded to the transience of childhood purity. Although its blatant sentiment and commercial style attracted critics' scorn, Millais, seemingly unperturbed, said that he painted whatever was in demand.⁵⁶ If an artist of

Millais' renown could respond to fashion, it is not surprising to find lesser-known artists catering to the same market demands.

The commodification of art is clearly demonstrated in two of Bowkett's undated pictures of childhood, both of which are entitled *Ready for School* [figs. 45, 46]. A comparison between the paintings offers significant insight into women artists' working practices. (Moreover, it provides evidence that cautions against the assumption that when titles reappear in exhibition catalogues it is because the painting had not sold.) Bowkett's two paintings have identical titles and they depict the same young models in the same poses, only the settings are different. Bowkett has changed the background to produce an additional saleable product.

In both pictures, an older girl gently adjusts her young sister's bonnet. The figures are positioned in a doorway and the younger, who gazes up at her sister, carries flowers, books and a slate. The background of one image suggests a middle-class city location; the girls are posed before a substantial townhouse front door with a brass knocker and a large umbrella hanging on the doorknob. In the other, the door is missing. Instead, a coarse wooden door jam and uneven stonework frame the doorway and climbing, rambling flowers decorate the entrance. To further authenticate a country setting, Bowkett has replaced the young girl's city shoes for sturdy boots, lengthened the older girl's dress and added an apron.⁵⁷

As previously noted, women were regarded as uniquely fitted for copying, but such activity largely depended upon the meticulous duplication of male artists' works. And although art-historians recognize that male artists such as Frith made copies of their own pictures,⁵⁸ there is little scholarship on the practice as it applies to nineteenth-century women's work. Research on this topic continues to emerge and Bowkett's pictures provide much-needed documentation of women artists' work practices. It has become abundantly clear to me over the course of researching this thesis that Bowkett engaged repeatedly in replicating, reworking, and abstracting from her own work.

One of the ways in which women's professional contribution to Victorian art has been underestimated is that sentimental pictures of childhood have been relegated to the margins of art-historical regard under the premise that such pictures are intellectually and culturally unimportant. While run-of-the-mill images such as *Ready for School* may look

uncomplicated, I will argue that the reasons for their popularity were less so. Victorian women were defined through motherhood,⁵⁹ and I will argue that Bowkett portrays womanly attributes in symbolic terms by picturing children as signifiers of motherly impulses. The theme of sisterly love such as the tenderness seen in *Ready for School* embodies maternal virtue while avoiding any disruption of middle-class behaviour codes. As I suggested earlier, there might have been inherent ideological problems in associating the leisured woman with the more corporeal aspects of maternity.⁶⁰ This might be one reason that Bowkett often avoided physicality between middle-class mothers and their children. Of course, in reality, older girls often did care for their siblings. Nonetheless, to elicit an emotional response from middle-class audiences it was perhaps more acceptable to visually transpose maternal caring onto sibling relationships.

There was a further intriguing aspect to pictorial mother-child relationships. What I find particularly interesting is that the displacement of maternal duties onto children was especially potent in pictures of lower-class experiences, such as displayed in *A Rest by the Wayside* [fig. 32], where the older girl's arms encircle the young child's body. Another instance can be seen in one of Bowkett's paintings that recently sold in Switzerland (2005) and is now entitled *Der Brief* [fig. 47]. In this picture, a young servant girl attired in plain blue dress, white pinafore, and mobcap supports a little boy as he reaches to post a letter. The servant girl's deliberate turn towards the viewer was unusual.⁶¹ For Victorian viewers, her pretty face probably both heightened the picture's aesthetic value as well as facilitated the development of a story, which is already suggested by the letter. (To the Victorians, letters were a familiar narrative device, implying a past and inviting viewers to construct a future). Furthermore, since the painting was exceptionally small in size, it may well have gone unobserved at crowded exhibition venues, if it wasn't for the girl's eye-catching prettiness. Following our thread of maternal children, it is important to note that the girl's and the child's bodies connect. As I have argued, Victorian narrative paintings coded class distinctions into human bodies; it is thus significant that visualizations of close bodily contact were typically reserved for portrayals of the lower classes as well as for pictures of children with animals. Such natural-looking, seemingly benign images were highly sociopolitical.

In Victorian pictures of children with animals, the sentiment expressed was especially strong, as for example in Bowkett's *Do You like Butter* (1884), which was engraved for the print market.⁶² The picture shows a pretty little girl wearing a frilly dress and holding a buttercup beneath the chin of a large longhaired dog. They are seated together in a grassy daisy-filled meadow and, as she leans across the dog, the girl's gesture further unites the two bodies. Importantly, to heighten a sentimental response, the painting is full of interesting textures: ribbons, lacy frills, long rough grass, and the dog's thick hairy coat. In "Sentimentality in Victorian Paintings", Caroline Arscott proposes that textural naturalism in genre painting stimulated a sentimental reaction in the Victorian viewer that cannot be replicated by our more austere modern society.⁶³

Arscott further argues for social and sexual differences inscribed into realist pictures and their moralist didactic purposes. To support her idea that "maternal feeling and affections could be read off from animal painting and would encourage similar affections in the viewers",⁶⁴ she discusses paintings similar in sentiment to Bowkett's anecdotal *Little Dears*, a painting which depicts an episode in rural children's lives. In *Little Dears* [fig. 48], a small girl holds a downy young duckling tenderly in her arms while an older girl leans forward to touch her gently on the shoulder. Meanwhile, the mother duck, with one offspring on her back and surrounded by the rest of her brood, looks anxiously towards her missing baby. *Little Dears*' moral potential is realized through the analogy between maternal caring in the human and in the animal worlds.

In separating and naturalizing different ideals of Victorian childhood, Bowkett envisaged subsequent adulthood; children were pictured as miniature adults and were socialised according to class. Children absorbed with their toys were also perennial audience favourites⁶⁵ and Bowkett's undated *Preparing for a Garden Party* [fig. 49] is an example of this popular theme. It depicts an exquisitely clothed little girl, who is applying powder to her elegant doll. Aesthetically the image is delightful, but we should also appreciate its cultural coding. Entrenched within this illustration of a child innocently at play is a naturalization of middle-class feminine pursuits. The beautifully dressed child and her expensive-looking doll reproduce powerful codes of feminine conduct that help cement associations between wealth, fashionable attire, and social behaviour.

While affluent young girls spent their leisure time with dolls, less-wealthy children's activities were of a more practical nature. These young girls often assumed the task of caring for their younger siblings with surrogate motherhood being part of their childhood experience.⁶⁶ In Bowkett's undated *Feeding Baby* [fig. 50], a neatly dressed country girl tends to the baby's needs. Many pictures of rural living adhered to a social formula that incorporated a set of virtues including frugality, contentment and industriousness. Bowkett created a positive image through the warm tones and neat order of the humble dwelling and the contented look on the children's faces. *Feeding Baby* then seems calculated to propose an optimistic view of rural poverty and as such might have acted as a panacea for the city dweller's conscience as well as appealing to middle-class views on girls' natural maternity.

Each iconographic detail in *Feeding Baby* opposed those in *Preparing for a Garden Party*. In *Feeding Baby*, the lower-class girl's hair is drawn back, she wears modest, practical garments, the book is old, and the mug is chipped. Here, the domestic interior does not contain luxurious textures and patterns such as lacy flounces, exotic decorative cushions, flowered carpet, or fluffy powder puff. Instead, rough textures and irregular shapes of wooden beams, knotty floorboards, and uneven plasterwork describe the sparse interior. The utilitarian rug is striped and the patchwork cover squared. For Victorian viewers, the disparity between the paintings must have been divisive and obvious. While the privileged child concerned herself with appearances, the lower-class child's tender consideration conveyed selflessness.

Both images addressed a middle-class audience and they disseminated cultural messages regarding proper feminine behaviour. Here the patterns of domesticity woven into *Feeding Baby* prompt what Susan Casteras has identified as women's duty:

the need to be selfless even in childhood –to help an older relative, assist the poor or the sick, and above all to minister to a brother of father's needs, were all lessons for females who might either in wedlock, or spinsterhood lead a life of service for others.⁶⁷

The pictured subject may have been lower class but the theme of selflessness was available to viewers from all walks of life. And it is precisely when pictures appeared

simple and neutral that their highly political messages become most naturalized and were insidiously effective for this very reason.⁶⁸

As I have shown, Bowkett's pictures of children for the most part promoted the maternal instinct, whereas in images such as *Folkstone Beach* and *The Donkey Ride*, the attitude of middle-class women towards their children was less idealized. I also find an unsettling of the mother-child bond occurring within Bowkett's renditions of domestic interiors. In images that portrayed private moments in middle-class homes, mothers' tender looks were noticeably absent. It was here that Bowkett countered hegemonic ideas of femininity and implied a different version of reality to the status quo.

Pictorial Realism: Disarray with the Domestic Interior

Taking the premise that Victorian pictures of contemporary life contributed to a historical understanding of the period, I contend that Bowkett's images of the domestic interior evoked experiences that were often suppressed within Victorian visual art. As discussed earlier, ideally the middle-class woman embodied a submissive and orderly housewife and a devoted wife and mother. In Bowkett's images of contemporary life, however, female figures were not necessarily passive, domestic interiors could be untidy, and women could be inattentive to their children.

In the debates surrounding a "national" art, the *Art Journal* championed modern-life domestic scenes as representing English life. In reviewing the 1863 RA exhibition it heralded "the hallowed relations of domestic life" as particularly English and encouraged its readers to evaluate "these pictorial transcripts" against "their own experience".⁶⁹ Modern domestic scenes were key sites for the dissemination of cultural values. For women, complex issues of image and reality were interwoven with the inherent difficulty in attempting to be the woman idealized in such paintings. In this section, I will examine the symbolic importance of the tidy home and the untidy sewing box along with other signs by which the domestic ideal was partly formed. I will demonstrate that Bowkett makes maternity into a vehicle for articulating social experiences that subverted ideological structures.

Given the inclement British summer weather, long periods at seaside resorts would be spent indoors. Bowkett's *An Afternoon in the Nursery* (1860s)[fig. 51] suggests one

way that women passed their time within the nursery. In this painting, a young woman in a shiny satin dress and ornate bolero faces an open French window and an ornamental iron balcony intersects a sunlit view of the ocean. The white cliffs edging the shoreline suggest a south-coast location. Intent upon her book, and positioned comfortably with her legs crossed and her dainty feet resting upon a low upholstered stool, the woman transgresses the feminine ideal by ignoring her young charges.⁷⁰

The children in the picture have abandoned their toys and books and strewn the contents of the ransacked sewing box all over the table and floor. The extent of the muddle verifies that this was not a momentary digression; these children have been occupied with this inappropriate activity for some time. The girl in the striped dress is busy unravelling—or perhaps we might say deconstructing—the woman’s work. The other little girl turns away from investigating the other contents of the sewing box to look on with interest. For Victorian viewers, the disarray spilling from the sewing box may have had the visual potential for countering some aspects of popular sermons that cited “scriptural support for the moral value of needle work”⁷¹ If sewing functioned as a cultural sign of morality, this muddle perhaps created a symbolic disjuncture in the ordered home.

The painting depicts its central figure in the traditional masculine “Thinker” pose, her chin supported by her hand. Her body is upright and her gaze serious. For contemporary viewers, the image thus challenged the pre-determined notion of a subordinate feminine intellect. Interestingly too, *An Afternoon in the Nursery* was painted in a “decade notable for a massive growth in the literary market for women, not only as writers and readers, but also as publishers, editors and printers.”⁷² From the 1860s onwards, the Victorian public embraced the written word and it was during this period that the “sensation” novel became popular: as Jennifer Carnell notes, “not only were sensational novels perceived to be challenging the position of women, but also the whole order of society.”⁷³ In sensation fiction, the closed doors of respectable homes often hid deviant behaviour.⁷⁴ Whether the woman within the nursery’s private interior behaved in a deviant manner is, of course, open to interpretation.

From a moral standpoint, since narrative pictures often functioned as disseminators of moral values, this reading woman could be viewed as a source of

anxiety. Instead of serving others, the woman in the picture is self-absorbed. The unsupervised children have not been corrected with respect to the hidden dangers of the sewing box. For some viewers, the picture might thus have evoked the perceived perils of self-indulgent conduct. Nevertheless, despite the transgression of ideally prescribed feminine conduct, the visually satisfying aesthetic elements within the painting no doubt mitigated against a reading of morally wrong behaviour. Bowkett's use of light conveys a strong theme of enlightenment. The sunlight streaming into the room lends radiance to the shimmering yellow dress and the woman's body. The open windows, the bright view, and the low decorative railing suggest a lack of containment. The natural light that falls across the pages would seem to have heightened the viewer's pleasure at the woman's reading figure.

The pictorial narrative does not suggest a transitory occurrence, but appears to be framing an established experience, and one that, for Victorian viewers, might have redefined domestic normalcy. In the press, woman's mission and maternity had already been challenged. As early as 1851, the feminist Harriet Taylor had openly criticized the prescribed view of motherhood as an all-absorbing duty.⁷⁵ In *An Afternoon in the Nursery*, the absence of the maternal gaze may have challenged viewers' widely held belief that nurturing was an innate feminine characteristic and thereby suggested an alternative to the prescribed view of motherhood. By implying that reading could be more engaging than attending to small children, this image may have helped women viewers to validate their own sense of themselves.

An image of a mother completely engrossed in a book and neglecting the children in her care was unconventional and could have been hard to sell. The artist Charles West Cope, for example, had difficulty finding a buyer for his *Time Ill Spent*. The now lost picture showed an idle and careless mother, described by the *Art Journal* as "addicted to French novels," and with a household in "confusion."⁷⁶ By contrast, its companion piece, *Life Well Spent* [fig. 52], sold immediately.⁷⁷ The preferred image depicts a vigilant mother, "who is ever watchful over the physical and moral welfare of her children."⁷⁸ In *Life Well Spent*, mother and children occupy a domestic interior rich with moral symbols such as the family Bible and the madonna lily. Although knitting, the industrious mother

in the painting pays complete attention to her son's lessons. The daughter, who reads while rocking the baby, obviously emulates her mother's exemplary behaviour.

What happened when Victorians were presented with contrasting images of motherhood? The visual interpretation of a "life well spent" paralleled the rhetoric in advice manuals, and for many women, such strictures determined their sense of duty. In 1862, the didactic contrast between industriousness and idleness shown in *Life Well Spent* and *Life Ill Spent* attracted critical praise from the *Art Journal*, which approved both paintings "as mirrors of real life". When reviews accepted such paintings as reflections of reality, they contributed to systems of power that constructed the idea of the ideal mother and the bad one.

The production of "truth" circulates as a network of belief to form and maintain knowledge.⁷⁹ At the present time, *Life Well Spent* is widely reproduced in texts on Victorian painting,⁸⁰ and the image re-circulates and continues to inform scholars and general readers about Victorian women's lives, whereas Bowkett's *An Afternoon in the Nursery* is reproduced only in art-historical texts concerned with feminist issues.⁸¹ Despite this marginalized treatment, the popular appeal of Bowkett's image continued outside the narrow confines of art history. Late in the twentieth century, the publishing company Medici brought *An Afternoon in the Nursery* into circulation as an art-quality greeting card (thus confirming the continuing commercial appeal of Bowkett's pictures). Of course, I am not suggesting that *Afternoon in the Nursery* offers the truth about the spaces of Victorian femininity, but it does encroach on the understanding of the ideologically fixed condition of Victorian motherhood.

Bowkett's work also broadened awareness of one more aspect of motherhood, that of the working-class woman as seen in *Mischief* (1882)[fig. 53]. Here again, the painting brought an unruly child and chaotic sewing material to the fore. *Mischief* was an unusual image and problematic on several counts. Firstly, the picture depicts a buxom working-class woman akin to a domestic servant: the apron, her striped cotton blouse, the stout shoes, and, in particular, the floral snood covering her head signal her station and possible occupation. Although artists' households frequently contained servants, and domestic service was one of the major occupations open to women,⁸² in Victorian genre paintings, female servants rarely formed the central component of a picture. Their figures

were typically relegated to secondary status; they attended or hovered in the background, and were often seen through a doorway.⁸³

While dark social-realist imagery elicited sympathy for the oppressed condition of lower-class women workers, such as the seamstress,⁸⁴ the overburdened working-class wife and mother lacked a champion in the fine art world. I suggest that with this particular image Bowkett acted on their behalf by questioning the woman's lack of leisure time. In the painting, the drawn blind on the left of the picture denotes evening and yet, after presumably working all day, the woman continues with domestic endeavours. The picture's setting, too, is also significant, as urban lower-class interiors were rarely pictured in oil paintings. Although images of rustic interiors which appealed to Victorians' nostalgic desire for an earlier simple era often included a woman sewing and a baby in a crib, *Mischief* contains no indices of rural life. Here, the heavily framed picture, the substantial, gleaming wood cupboard, and ornate table-cover imply a decent urban home.

In comparing *An Afternoon in the Nursery* and *Mischief* it is apparent that Bowkett marks class difference through dress, activity, and setting. *Afternoon's* spacious nursery, lit from an open window, presents an airy and spacious interior, whereas in *Mischief* the elimination of daylight makes the room darker, the furniture heavier, and the room smaller and crowded.⁸⁵ However, for all these differences, the dishevelled sewing boxes in both underscore both women's inattentiveness to the children, and I contend that the children's disruption of the sewing material renegotiated boundaries of class and signalled a commonality in the experience of motherhood.

Finally, however, *Mischief* is a paradox. The woman is dressed like a servant, yet the worn crib and rudimentary toys imply that the baby is hers. Yet, in Victorian visual art and literature, lower-class mothers and their babies usually went unaccounted unless they were rural, desperately poor, ill or illegitimate. For example, in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1873), the servant was dismissed as soon as her pregnancy was discovered.⁸⁶ And an 1848 medical advice book pointed out "it was very common in England for servant girls who became illegitimately pregnant, to absent themselves for an hour or two and, after giving birth to a child, to return to their household duties."⁸⁷ However, in *Mischief*, the darning of the man-sized sock counters a reading of

illegitimacy. But paradoxically, censure and tensions emerge from the symbolic sewing. While the woman's domestic industry constructs a positive ideal, the implied neglect of the baby counters the positive message. What a Victorian viewer took from this picture remains conjectural: empathy, industriousness, and failure are all possibilities.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I noted that *Preparing Tea* (1860s)[fig. 1] was the first of Bowkett's pictures to be included in art-historical literature. *Preparing Tea* accommodates contemporary domestic values, but at the same time questions their validity. As I have shown, Victorian images of a home-centred life were deeply influenced by the gendered ideologies discussed in chapter 2. In *Preparing Tea*, a neatly dressed wife prepares for and anticipates her husband's return from the work place, which is signalled by an approaching train that is visible through the window. On the surface, the pictorial composition suggests middle-class respectability and the endorsement of domesticity; nevertheless, there are ambiguities that disrupt this initial reading. Here my premise bears repeating—if Bowkett was to sell her work, she could not directly approach controversial issues such as the fulfillment of the domestic ideal.

Despite the fact that the woman faces the window, her expression suggests that, far from eagerly awaiting her husband's arrival, she is lost in her own thoughts. As we have seen, children were trained for their future roles in life, and the two daughters emulate their mother in her role as domestic model. The younger child appears most diligent. She prepares for her adult role, and the man-sized slippers she holds infer "that female domesticity is contingent on power that is elsewhere." By contrast, the older child (who may embody a new generation of women) appears less interested in her domestic task. She seems to be unfocused or bored, perhaps daydreaming or imagining pictures in the flames. The girl's inattention echoes the mother's and both their expressions undermine the purported fulfillment of domestic duties.

The sewing box, a repeated motif in Bowkett's work, further undermines the domestic ideal. As previously stated, sewing and neatness functioned as cultural signs of morality. In *Preparing Tea*, then, even though the sewing box might suggest that the woman employs her time fruitfully, the jumbled contents serve as a crucial subversive

element. In 1886, Mrs Eliza Warren's popular advice manual aimed at young middle-class wives warned "baby should be in bed when Mr Hall returns, and then be sure that no basket of stocking-mending or household needlework be introduced to his notice."⁸⁸ Since the husband's return seems imminent, I would argue that the disordered box signals a rupture in carefully defined middle-class women's conduct. Untidy and disordered, the sewing box here suggests the gap between advice manuals and lived reality.⁸⁹

We have seen that picture buyers desired particularly British scenes to decorate their homes. *Preparing Tea* was identifiably British in that it depicted an activity that was temporally pertinent to the picture's historical moment of production.⁹⁰ It was specifically during the mid-Victorian era that afternoon tea became a middle-class British tradition.⁹¹ The painting also evokes other nineteenth-century cultural phenomena such as urban expansion, suburban living, the railway lines that crisscrossed the countryside, and the trains that carried workers to and from the city. As I illustrated in chapter 4, urban dwellers desired pictures of nature, unblemished by industrialisation, and at the RA exhibitions landscapes far outnumbered history paintings. In the painting, the landscape hanging above the cabinet signals the family's cultured taste. However, the romantic scenic view of the countryside is countered by the modern view, framed by the window. The family looks out onto a distant city and the evolving suburban terrain. This juxtaposition invited Victorian viewers to consider the antithesis between an idealized scene and actuality, a recurring theme, embedded in Bowkett's work.

I have highlighted the class and gender distinctions in Bowkett's scenes and these can be appreciated in *Preparing Tea*. Although Bowkett would seem to have been picturing an everyday bourgeois domestic scene, considerable differences in fact existed between her interiors and those that artists usually choose to portray. In visual art, middle- to upper-middle-class interiors usually defined the domestic space occupied by middle-class women. However, in comparison to the elaborate settings, which signified familial wealth, status, and refinement, depicted by many artists, Bowkett's family interiors were, for the most part, relatively modest. In pictorial convention, middle-class women usually dispensed or "partook of tea",⁹² they did not "prepare" the tea. Indeed, the preparation of food was a feminine activity normally reserved for the servant or rural class; however, of necessity, middle-class women did perform household tasks but these

were regarded as private activities and not a subject to be brought to the public eye. In the picture, the young wife is actually performing the physical act of buttering the toast, which would not be thought of as “genteel” and it could suggest the family’s material circumstances were those of the lower-middle class. As we have seen, dress was an essential component in discerning a person’s place in Victorian society. My interpretation of this family’s socio-economic circumstances is thus further supported by the comfortable but modest room and the neatly coiffed woman’s plain attire.

I contend that Bowkett’s nuanced approach, which is evident in *Preparing Tea*, established the distinctive character of her work. Moreover, the plausibility of pictorial scenes was acutely relevant to their ability to prompt an audience response, with *Preparing Tea*, then, Bowkett has created a scene with which the evolving middle class might have identified. At this point we should recall my earlier claim that in order to appeal to a wide audience Bowkett depicted “heroines” that might have resonated with picture buyers of modest means.

I have chosen to conclude with *Preparing Tea*, not only because it was the first of Bowkett’s paintings to enter art-historical texts and has attracted the most attention but also because it exemplifies key points of this thesis. Victorian spectators were invited to share this family’s private space and construct a story around the characters and their environs. This painting typifies the complex response demanded by Bowkett’s paintings, which prompted viewers to draw upon their individual experience and then incorporate differing ranges of ideology into their interpretation. This complexity is not readily recognised by modern viewers, as we fail to recognise the significance of tiny details that resonated with a Victorian audience. My thesis, then, has reconstructed as much as possible about this rich viewing experience. To account for multivalent interactions between image and viewer, I have deliberately oscillated between contradictory readings of Bowkett’s paintings.⁹³ I have thus shown that Bowkett’s portrayals of modern-life intervened in, challenged, and encouraged a questioning of contemporary ideology as presented on the academy walls and in advice manuals.

My readings illustrate that Bowkett’s pictures were more informative than might at first be supposed. To cater to a wide audience, Bowkett’s narrative paintings were necessarily made up of differences; some affirmed and others fractured Victorian gender

and class paradigms, in so doing they contributed significantly to our understanding of the heterogeneity of Victorian women's experiences. Her women and children acted as signifiers of the social biases that permeated Victorian society, and her scenes manifested the changing status of women in public and private. This thesis has shown that several of Bowkett's scenes were unconventional in that they differed from standard Victorian images of women as selfless paragons. In *Windy Day*, *Folkstone Beach*, and *An Afternoon in the Nursery*, women display a spirited independence, their conduct appears more realistic, and strikes a chord with a new generation of viewers. Even in pictures which seemingly display ideologically imposed values, my readings have exposed a multiplicity of encoded signs which express a different reality, one that reshapes the concept that anecdotal genre scenes have no meaning beyond their surface presentation.

I have also illustrated that Bowkett's production was directed by the trends and needs of the art market and contended that her methods of replication provide much needed information on women artists' working habits.⁹⁴ I have studied titles as meaningful reference points, and I would argue that Bowkett's, as well as others', repeated use of the title, *Love's Young Dream*, reflects both Victorian artists' and their audiences' ambivalence towards originality. The changes made to background and costume, such as in *Ready for School* and *Ophelia*, can be considered intentionally modified versions of prior works rather than as simple replicas: they are examples of artistic agency and do not represent a failure of imagination. I believe that Bowkett's practice of extracting figures from one portion of a composition to produce a second work of art (*Amy Robsart*) reflects her opportunistic approach, which is a significant form of agency.⁹⁵ Rather than detracting from the vitality of Bowkett's work, such resourceful techniques contribute another crucial layer to our knowledge of Victorian art.

Notes: Chapter 5

¹ Punch vol. 19, 1850, 229; quoted in Andrew H. Millar, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66.

² Cowling, 9.

³ Prior to 1800 man and woman generally were thought originate from the same model with woman being the weaker copy. During the nineteenth century as definitions of sexuality changed, man and woman developed oppositional characteristics. "On the terrain of sexuality, modernity seems to foster desire for an

identity more starkly distinct and delineated, a more emphatically masculine man over against a more distinctly feminine woman." Easthope, 54.

⁴ Nunn, *Problem Pictures*, 29-36.

⁵ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 166.

⁶ Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, 57-9. The Pre-Raphaelite painters, in particular, made frequent use of the lily's Christian symbolism in picturing feminine sensuality.

⁷ M. E. Braddon, *Vixen* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co., Ltd.), n.d.

⁸ Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, edited by Herbert Rosengarten (1848; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 30. The man supposedly possessed strength and "natural" goodness to help him overcome evil; by contrast, if the "weaker" woman was exposed to sin, she succumbed.

⁹ Frances Power Cobbe, "Celibacy v. Marriage," *Frazer's Magazine* (February 1862), in Hamilton, 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors', 76.

¹⁰ The nineteenth-century horticulturalist T. James believed that the plants people grew suggested their societal rank. He proposed that the lady in her conservatory was one of the best pictures to show the intelligent foreigner the upper-class English way of life. Steegman, 314 -5.

¹¹ For an extensive social analysis of Victorian corsetry see Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

¹² Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1974), 37.

¹³ Florence Claxton, detail of a page from *The Adventures of a Woman in Search of Her Rights*, London: The Graphotyping Co., 1871, as reproduced in Casteras and Peterson, fig. 5.

¹⁴ Cowling, 37.

¹⁵ *Reader's Digest Encyclopedia of Garden Plants and Flowers*, s.v. "lily." The madonna lily has been cultivated for 3500 years but it wasn't until the twentieth century that hardy hybrids became popular garden flowers.

¹⁶ *Queen*, 19 June 1880, 553.

¹⁷ *Illustrated London News*, 9 July 1870, 42.

¹⁸ The positive connotations are important—in terms of outdoor recreational sports and games there continued to be a marked amount of hostility to physical activity among girls and women.

¹⁹ Hemingway, 172.

²⁰ Daniel Gabriel Rossetti, *Writing on the Sand*, 1858-9. Watercolour, © The British Museum. As reproduced in Werner, plate 30.

²¹ Caricaturists were fond of showing the way women's seaside costumes became unmanageable. See Christina Walkley, *The Way to Wear'em: 150 years of Punch on Fashion* (London: Peter Owen, 1985).

²² Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2000), 131.

²³ James Walvin, *Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 65.

²⁴ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840* (Trans Jocelyn Phelps, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). In her unfinished story, *Sanditon*, Jane Austen was the first novelist to satirise the speculative development of the seaside resort as well as resort visitors' middle-class pretensions. Jane Austen, *Sanditon, The Watsons, Lady Susan and Other Miscellanea* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1934).

²⁵ Dickens, *Sketches By Boz*, "The Tuggs's at Ramsgate" (1835), 210.

²⁶ Gail-Nina Anderson and Joanne Wright, curators, *The Pursuit of Leisure: Victorian Depictions of Pastimes* (The Djanogly Art Gallery: University of Nottingham; London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd., 1997), 16.

²⁷ Wood, *Victorian Panorama*, 187. *Ramsgate Sands* was purchased by Queen Victoria.

²⁸ It is rather difficult to make out in the reproduction. The nursemaid is filling the children's cups with the contents of a brown bottle.

²⁹ I am indebted to Foley-Fisher for showing me a photograph of this painting.

³⁰ Walvin, 69-72. The oft quoted Reverend Francis Kilvert recorded the delights of seeing female nude bathers at Shanklin on the Isle of White in 1875. As previously noted in chapter 3, Bowkett exhibited a painting at the SBA in 1875 entitled *On the Sands, at Shanklin, Isle of White*. Since it was priced at £157.10, it is reasonable to presume that it was a large picture with a complex composition.

- ³¹ Barbara Bodichon is one such landscape painter and sketcher who spent considerable time on the south coast. The artists Sophie Anderson, Emily Mary Osborn, and Sonia Boyce also produced landscapes, interestingly though “their portraits and genre pictures were seemingly much more marketable.” Casteras and Peterson, 25.
- ³² Nunn, *Mid-Victorian Woman Artist*, figure 406. Nunn’s only other example of a group of people pictured in a public space is Rose Taylor’s *Eating Air on the Maiden*, figure 176. They are seated under a tree on the grassy maiden with a background of colonial architecture. This was obviously executed in India where moral bourgeois constraints might have been more relaxed.
- ³³ Jopling, 95, 327-330.
- ³⁴ According to Christopher Wood, Solomon’s “picture shows the crowded front near the Bedford Hotel”. Wood, *Victorian Panorama*, 191. Solomon, born 1823, died of TB in 1863; we can thus attribute a date prior to 1863, which makes it reasonably clear that Bowkett’s is the later picture.
- ³⁵ Madeleine Ginsberg, *Victorian Dress: in Photographs* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1982), 62. The trailing dress was fashionable around the late 1860s–1870.
- ³⁶ Hemingway, 156-171. Hemingway documents the derogatory statements made about Brighton by Constable and other conservative nineteenth-century landscape painters. Even before the London to Brighton railway route opened in 1842, the resort had lost its exclusive character. The unwelcome lower-middle class had infiltrated the town and Queen Victoria was one influential person that found Brighton too noisy. Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 277.
- ³⁷ Anthony Hern, *The Seaside Holiday: The history of the English Seaside Resort* (London: Cresset Press, 1967), 50. *Punch* was of no help to Brighton in this regard. The cartoonist John Leech continued to satirise Brighton’s heterogeneous crowd and the discomfort that proximity to low-class day trippers might bring about for middle-class visitors. John Leech, “Perfectly Dweadful,” *Punch*, 27 September 1856; “Class Confrontation at the Sea-side,” *Punch*, 21 June 1862. See Cowling, 104.
- ³⁸ There was always a fear of contamination in public spaces. Here, the dandy leers at two women and the gypsy-looking mandolin player almost rubs shoulders with a bewhiskered toff.
- ³⁹ Wood, *Victorian Panorama*, 92. In Victorian art texts, pictures of Folkstone are rare. However, it should be pointed out that there may be little-known pictures in local gallery and museum collections.
- ⁴⁰ Sarah Levitt, *Victorians Unbuttoned: Registered Designs for Clothing, their Makers and Wearers, 1839-1900* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1986), 101. Little boys were often dressed as miniature soldiers and sailors.
- ⁴¹ Walvin, 167. Minstrels entertained in the London theatres and throughout the provinces. Musical bands also played in the streets.
- ⁴² Douglas A. Lorimer, *Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 86-91. Lorimer sees the increase in racist stereotyping stemming from the belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority.
- ⁴³ A group of dancing minstrels are depicted in the upper left margin of Frith’s *Ramsgate Sands*.
- ⁴⁴ Griselda Pollack, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 71.
- ⁴⁵ Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 171. For Corbin, the beach had become “the site of an extended maternity”.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, Henry Garland, *Looking out for the Mail* (1861), Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, figure 103, 126.
- ⁴⁷ In *Captain* [fig. 7], Bowkett also assigns masculine power to the feminine though the prominent display of the (phallic) telescope.
- ⁴⁸ It is unclear whether the woman is a nursemaid or a mother.
- ⁴⁹ Hall, 63-5.
- ⁵⁰ Branca, 38-48.
- ⁵¹ Helland, 112.
- ⁵² Martin Postle, *Angels and Urchins: The Fancy Picture in Eighteenth Century British Art* (Djanogly Art Gallery: Nottingham University; London: Lund Humphries, 1998), 5.
- ⁵³ Postle, 8. Fancy picture subjects also included such figures as winsome market women and poor beggars.
- ⁵⁴ Claudia Nelson, “Growing Up: Childhood,” in *The Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 69-80. Nelson asserts that the Victorians were obsessed with childhood. The sentimental response to pictures of children confirmed that fine inner feelings had not been destroyed by the harsh industrial age.

- ⁵⁵ *Bubbles* was bought by Pears Soap Company and the image became a hallmark for their products.
- ⁵⁶ Robert M. Polhemus, "John Millais's Children," in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 300.
- ⁵⁷ The two pictures could suggest that children from all sections of society received schooling (in 1880, elementary education was made compulsory).
- ⁵⁸ Macleod, 320.
- ⁵⁹ Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians*, 154. For the historical visual construction of maternity and the family unit see Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- ⁶⁰ Although "secular" Madonna images were common at the RA (images of middle-class mothers holding or gazing at small babies), I have been unable to locate any examples of middle-class women engaged in the more mundane tasks of child rearing. Contact between middle-class adults and children tended to be located within commissioned family portraits. Even though Queen Victoria was portrayed embracing her offspring, it would be understood that servants generally looked after the royal children, whereas in middle-class families that could not be assumed.
- ⁶¹ One notable exception to children facing towards the viewer is Millais' *Cherry Ripe* (1879) in which a pretty young girl wearing a mobcap makes eye-to-eye contact with the viewer. Scholars have analysed Millais' picture in terms of its unsettling subtext of sexuality; yet, Millais stated his intentions were simply commercial and that "there was a fashion going now for little girls in mob caps." See Polhemus, 300. Although Bowkett's figure is displayed for the spectator's gaze, she does not make eye-to-eye contact.
- ⁶² Huish, *The Years Art* (1884). The photograph of *Do You like Butter* in "Pictures by Charles Stuart and J. M. Bowkett" is unfortunately too dark for reproduction.
- ⁶³ Caroline Arscott, "Sentimentality in Victorian Paintings," in *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain*, ed. Giles Waterfield (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994), 81.
- ⁶⁴ Arscott, 66.
- ⁶⁵ Helland, 130.
- ⁶⁶ Frederick P. Shuckard' picture, *The Park Bench* (1870), deliberately contrasts rich and poor children's life experiences. The picture depicts two young girls, sitting on either end of a park bench. The elegantly attired child with feet neatly crossed and holding a parasol in one hand stares at the other child, who is plainly dressed and is gazing at the baby she hold in her lap. Wood, *Victorian Painters*, 1971, 375.
- ⁶⁷ Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, 38.
- ⁶⁸ I have taken this idea from Julia Thomas's discussion of realism and semantically neutral elements. Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians*, 120-21.
- ⁶⁹ "Scenes Domestic – Grave and Gay," *Art Journal*, June 1863, 105-8.
- ⁷⁰ It is probable that the woman is the mother but we cannot be certain. Her dress codes her as middle class—she is not coded as a governess or a servant. Even if the woman was a relative, she is still a middle-class woman, neglecting the children in her custody.
- ⁷¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 606.
- ⁷² Ellen Wood, 9.
- ⁷³ Jennifer Carnell, *The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon: a Study of her Life and Work* (Hastings: The Sensation Press, 2000), 156.
- ⁷⁴ Carnell, 156.
- ⁷⁵ Harriet Taylor, "The Enfranchisement of Women," *Westminster Review*, July 1851, in *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, comp. Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), 91-121; cited in Cherry, *Painting Women*, 136.
- ⁷⁶ *Art Journal*, (June 1862): 134.
- ⁷⁷ Cowling, 38. The paintings were later reunited when Agnews subsequently purchased them. However, it is interesting to note that the "good mother" survives while the "bad mother" has disappeared.
- ⁷⁸ *Art Journal*, June 1862, 134.
- ⁷⁹ Pollack, *Vision and Difference*, 99.
- ⁸⁰ Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, figure 32; Cowling, figure 24; Wood, *Victorian Painting*, figure 318.
- ⁸¹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, plate 18; Perry, *Gender and Art*, plate 118.
- ⁸² Along with textile and dress manufacture and rural labour.

⁸³ One notable exception is John Finnie's *Maids of All Work* (1864-65). The painting depicts two servant girls, gossiping upon their mistresses' doorstep. Pertinently, the maids' outfits and caps are very similar to the woman's in *Mischief*, which suggests that Victorian middle-class viewers would identify her as a servant. Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood*, figure 82.

⁸⁴ See for example, Cherry, *Painting Women*, plate 27, Anna Blunden, *For Only One Short Hour* (1854).

⁸⁵ Here it should be noted that the baby is in physical contact with the working-class woman.

⁸⁶ Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (1903; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1966), 190-2. Written in 1873, published in 1903.

⁸⁷ J. T. Conquest M.D., *Letters to a Mother on the Management of Herself and Her Children in Health and Diseases, Embracing the subject of Pregnancy, Childbirth, Nursing, Food, Exercise, Bathing, Clothing, Etc. Etc.; With Remarks on Chloroform* (London, 1848), 48; cited in Branca, 90.

⁸⁸ Mrs Eliza Warren, *A Young Wife's Perplexities* (London: Houlston and Sons, 1886), 35; quoted in Flanders, 176.

⁸⁹ Bal and Bryson, 191.

⁹⁰ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 7.

⁹¹ Flanders, 229-31. Where previously it had been common to serve supper early in the evening, once it became fashionable to dine later, tea was required to bridge the gap between lunch and dinner

⁹² Beale, 134.

⁹³ As I illustrated in the introduction to this thesis, multivalent viewpoints continue to shape interpretations of *Preparing Tea* (for Graham Reynolds, Christopher Wood, and Deborah Cherry the pictured scene confers differing meanings).

⁹⁴ David Thomas, 126-7. Well-respected artists charged the same amount for copies as they did for the original work, and, according to contemporary commentary, the practice did not detract from their merit as artists; we do know that Louise Jopling sometimes made watercolour replicas of her oil paintings. Jopling, 326-7.

⁹⁵ In another example, the young couple in Bowkett's harvest scene, *Father's Dinner*, n.d. [fig. 10], reappear in a separate picture entitled *It's Love that makes the World Go Round*, n.d.

Afterword

At the end of this study I find myself returning to Deborah Cherry's words, quoted at the beginning of this thesis. She held that the topic of underrepresented women artists remained a priority and that biographies of such women could encompass sophisticated questions about visual representation, about social history, and about the cultural formations of gender. Over the course of this thesis, in an attempt to expand the scholarship on Victorian middle-class women artists as social beings and workers, I have considered the relatively unknown Jane Maria Bowkett, in terms of family, class, gender, and work. In doing so I have tried to create a written portrait of this little-known figure—a portrait which, I am aware, is unavoidably incomplete in many details, given the evidentiary gaps that exist in our knowledge of her life and work. There exist, in fact, a number of visual portraits of Bowkett that were painted or photographed during her lifetime, and in my conclusion I turn to these as a final way of contemplating this enigmatic but fascinating figure. As we might expect, these portraits represent Bowkett in different stages of life; they also show her in very different roles—as family member, as independent young woman, as independent artist, as an equal in a painting partnership, as companion to her artist husband, and as a pensive mature woman.

The first of these portraits [fig. 3] is a miniature, taken from the family grouping mentioned in chapter 1, above. In this 1855 miniature, Bowkett, aged eighteen or nineteen, is represented within the context of her respectable family. Her sensible dress, upright body, and drawn-up hairstyle associate Bowkett with the responsibilities of the eldest child, and the portrait's place in the family group reminds us of Bowkett's relationship to family structures and responsibilities throughout her life, and how these impacted her career.

A second portrait [fig. 54] contrasts with the sedate family image of the first. The miniature presents Bowkett as a young woman of markedly different character. Here, the unknown artist has captured a playful expression, one that parallels Bowkett's exuberant accessories and mode of dress. In this undated painting, Bowkett displays a penchant for fashionable adornment. Her elaborate outfit is in keeping with the return, during the 1850s, to the rococo when frivolous ruffled trims were in fashion.¹ Even so, the lacy

bonnet with its outsized floral petals was unusual for the time and possibly displays an early assertion of individuality. It should be remembered that the young Bowkett attended every possible exhibition opening and that they were fashionable affairs. Dress and appearance, as I have shown, defined women and perhaps the little-known Bowkett used her body at this time to display her creative instinct.²

Two later images of Bowkett, a commercial photograph [fig. 27] and a chalk drawing [fig. 55] supply further evidence of her public and private personae. The portrait photograph shows Bowkett in her thirties and was probably taken in the early 1870s.³ We know that a professional photographer, named Robert Hilder, took the photograph in a studio in Gravesend, and that the image was subsequently reproduced in the public press. By contrast, the chalk drawing by an unknown artist (who may have been a family member) has been handed down the Stuart family line as a family heirloom, and, at present, is in the possession of Eckhard Stuart, Bowkett's great grandson. Once again we are offered differing representations of appearance and personality. The photograph (which accompanied *Queen's* 1889 sketch of Bowkett's career) indicated how the mature Bowkett wished to be socially and professionally represented to the public. Here, Bowkett chose to present herself in an unconventional way, adopting a forthright, frontal gaze. Moreover, although female painters were rarely portrayed adorned with jewellery, the photograph shows Bowkett wearing ornate earrings and a beaded necklace with a matching heavily beaded collar. Her upright pose, together with her frank gaze and elegance, emphasises Bowkett's individuality and femininity. For Victorian viewers, then, Bowkett's self presentation as a working woman, would have conveyed both professional success and social refinement. In comparison, the unofficial red-chalk portrait gives the impression of intimacy and portrays a soft, even sad, expression and an introspective gaze. This sensitive likeness of Bowkett (probably executed when she was her late forties) gives us a sense of how the mature Jane Maria Bowkett was and is seen within her family circle.

The components in the official photograph of Bowkett and Stuart in their studio, as discussed in chapter 2, constructed them as artists, who shared a working relationship; the image, however, erased all physical signs of work. By contrast, work was at the forefront of another photograph of Bowkett and Stuart [fig. 56]. Dated to the late 1880s,⁴

the informal picture recorded Stuart seated at work in the countryside, painting *en pleine aire* with messy oil-painting paraphernalia in full sight. Bowkett, standing at his side, gazes at the distant view. Here she wears an unstructured peaked beret and a loose baggy jacket. This kind of practical dress, suitable for outdoor activities, makes yet another different statement about Bowkett's unconventional femininity. This mode of attire was "identified with 'strong minded' women"⁵ and Bowkett's informal style bears few of the visual codes that regulated conventional Victorian femininity. Bowkett's unconstrained figure thus sustains a forward-thinking image of womanhood.

This thesis has attempted to meet Deborah Cherry's challenge of constructing the lives of Victorian women artists. In trying to recapture aspects of Bowkett's life, I have wrestled with evidentiary gaps; my portrait of this woman painter is necessarily fragmentary. At times we can only glimpse the subject of the thesis by examining her milieu, her work, or her social geography. Yet such portraits are important nevertheless, because Jane Maria Bowkett and her pictures are bearers of Victorian culture and history. I have questioned the basic assumption that "ordinary" pictures have little value for art historians. By ignoring the potential of this largely unstudied category we make social as well as artistic distinctions. I have further shown that during the nineteenth century when women's entry into professional and public life was persistently contested, Bowkett created a viable and profitable career as a professional artist. Her pictures, then, survive as tangible fragments of history which articulate and sometimes question nineteenth-century societal expectations and values.

Most importantly, this thesis fills a gap in art-historical literature and also points to flaws in existing scholarship. It seems that Victorian women's contribution to society is often obscured by literature that focuses on women's lack of agency and on limited role models. Using Bowkett as a case study, I counter the silences in the archives to show that a Victorian woman from a lower middle-class background could and did sustain a professional career as an artist. For my supporting evidence, I readdressed and shifted the nature of critical enquiry beyond orthodox value systems and worked through the cultural issues surrounding Bowkett's life. Undeterred by the lack of existing work on Bowkett, I have illuminated the mutability of nineteenth-century class and gender constraints. As I have shown, Bowkett adeptly negotiated or simply ignored scholarship's much-quoted

principle of proper womanly conduct, and in fact this case study suggests that such scholarship should be re-assessed. I have affirmed the reality of the successful working woman artist. Indeed, I have laid the framework for further investigation into the neglected topic of Victorian women artists' individual agency.

Notes: Afterword

¹ Ginsberg 41.

² It is significant that Bowkett herself referenced early artistic individuality in a painting entitled *The Young Professor* (whereabouts unknown). Bowkett's picture is considered unusual by art-historian Susan Casteras, who describes the portrayal of a young girl engrossed in examining her drawing materials as a rare image of spirited independence (see introduction, note 21). As I have shown, pictures of children coded their subsequent roles as adults. Given that *Queen* magazine noted that Bowkett, as a child, spent all her spare time drawing, one wonders if the determination pictured in *The Young Professor* was in some ways a self-portrait of Bowkett's early experience.

³ Bowkett lived and worked in Gravesend from 1866-1874.

⁴ Date supplied by E. Stuart.

⁵ Cherry, *Beyond the Frame*, 46.

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Illustrations



Figure 1. Jane M. Bowkett, *Preparing Tea*, 1860s.



Figure 2. Jane M. Bowkett, *Folkstone Beach*, 1875.



Figure 3. Bowkett Family Portrait Miniatures, c.1855.

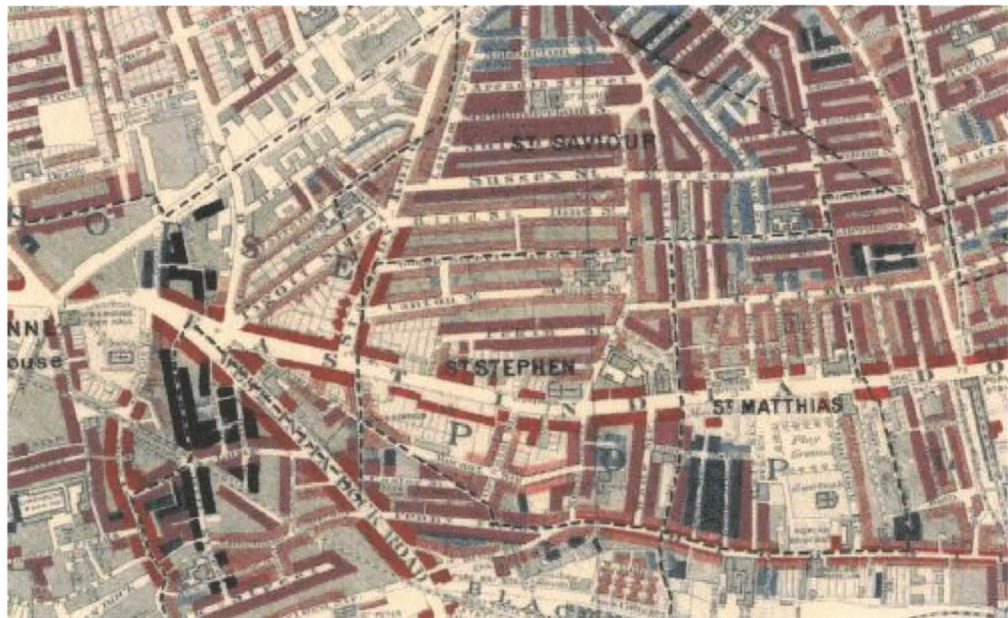


Figure 4. Poplar, London. Booth Poverty Map, 1889.



Figure 5. Jane M. Bowkett, *Wonders of the Prawn Net*, 1864.



Figure 6. Jane M. Bowkett, *Britannia Rules the Waves*, n.d.



Figure 7. Jane M. Bowkett, *Captain*, n.d.

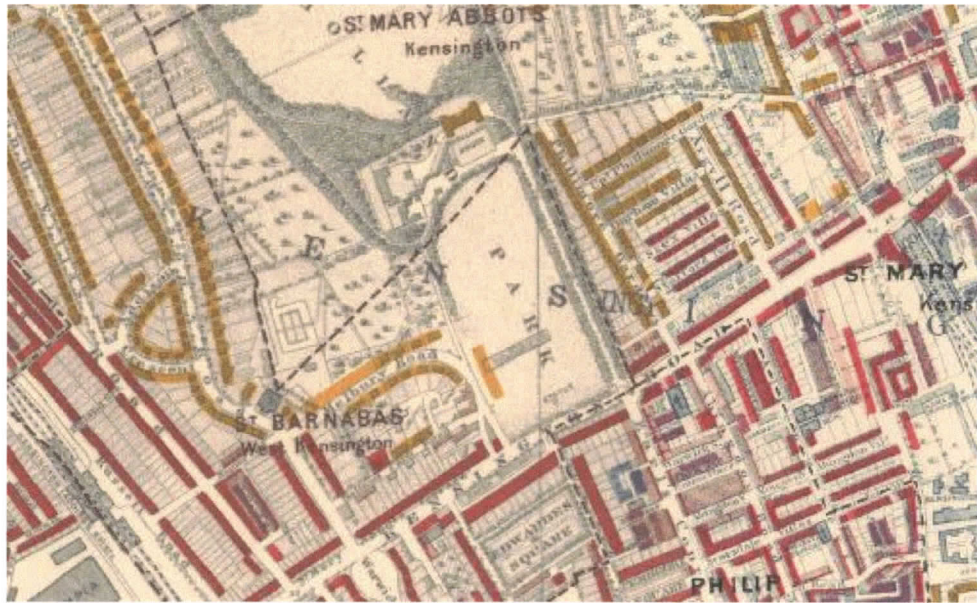


Figure 8. Kensington, London. Booth Poverty Map, 1889.



Figure 9. Jane M. Bowkett, *Yes or No*, n.d.



Figure 10. Jane M. Bowkett, *Father's Dinner*, n.d.



Figure 11. Jane Maria Bowkett and Charles Stuart in their Studio, n.d.



Figure 12. Agnew's, Exchange Street, Manchester, c.1840.

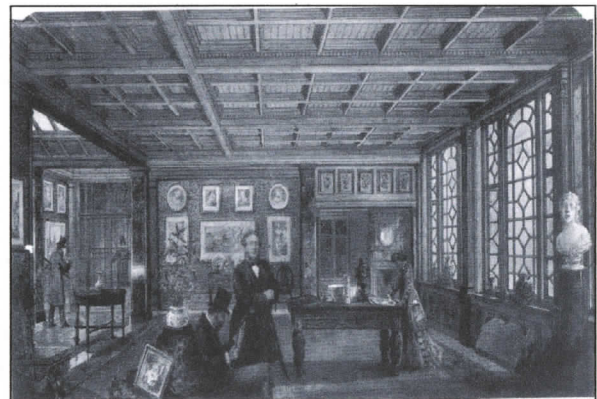


Figure 13. Agnew's, 39 Old Bond Street, London, 1877.

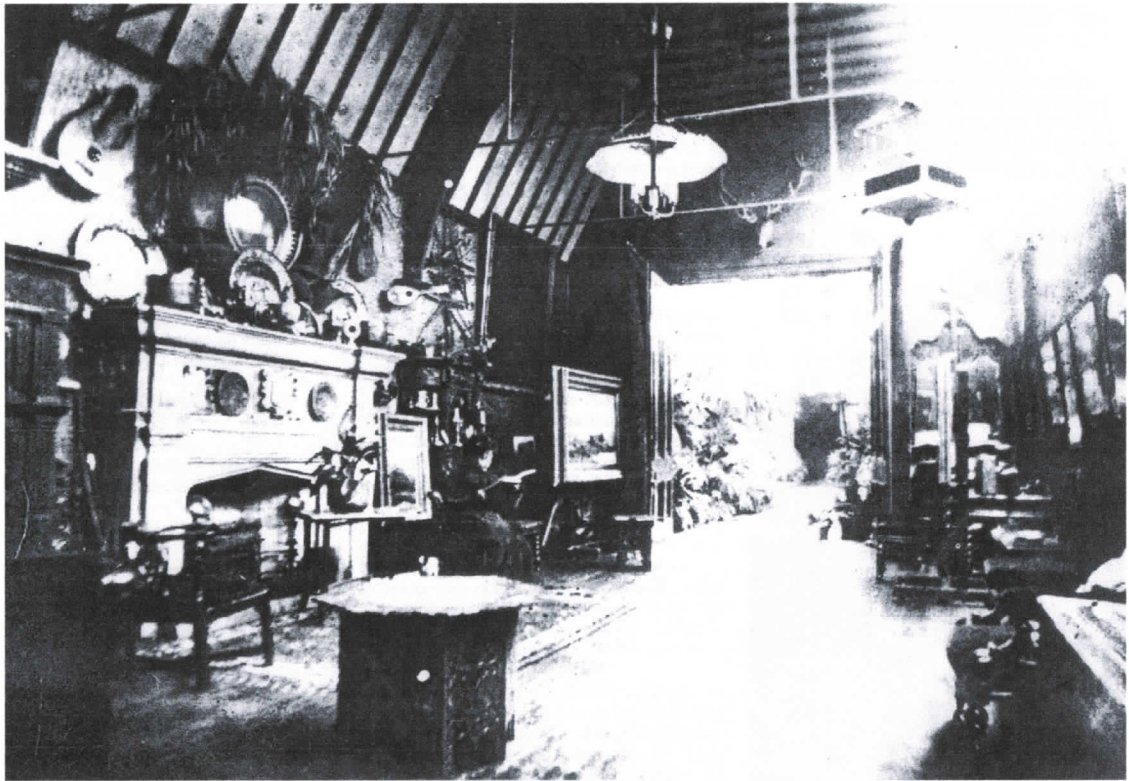


Figure 14. Studio interior, 1 Cleve Road, West Hampstead, n.d.



Figure 15. The Arab Hall, Leighton House Museum, Holland Park.



Figure 16. The Staircase Hall, Leighton House Museum.



Figure 17a. Front view, 8 Melbury Road, Marcus Stone's studio-house.



Figure 17b. Rear view, 8 Melbury Road, Marcus Stone's studio-house.



Figure 18. Jane M. Bowkett, *Love's Young Dream*, n.d.



Figure 19. Marcus Stone, *There is Always Another*, n.d.



Figure 20. Henrietta Rae, *Doubts*, 1887/6.



Figure 21. Marcus Stone, *Asleep*, 1883.



The Studio of Mr. Marcus Stone, A.R.A.

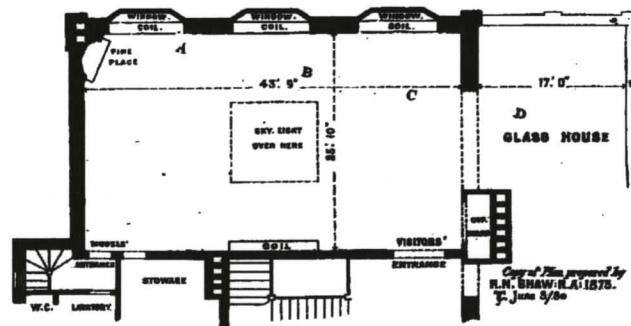


Figure 22. Studio of Mr. Marcus Stone, A.R.A.



Figure 23. Marcus Stone, n.d.



Figure 24. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, n.d.



Figure 25. Louise Jopling, n.d.



Figure 26. Jane Maria Bowkett, n.d.



Figure 27. The Hermitage, 1 Cleve Road, West Hampstead.

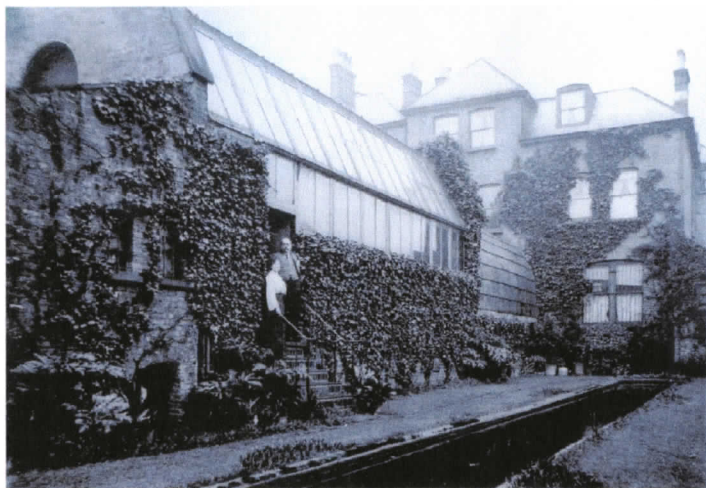


Figure 28. Studio exterior, 1 Cleve Road, West Hampstead.

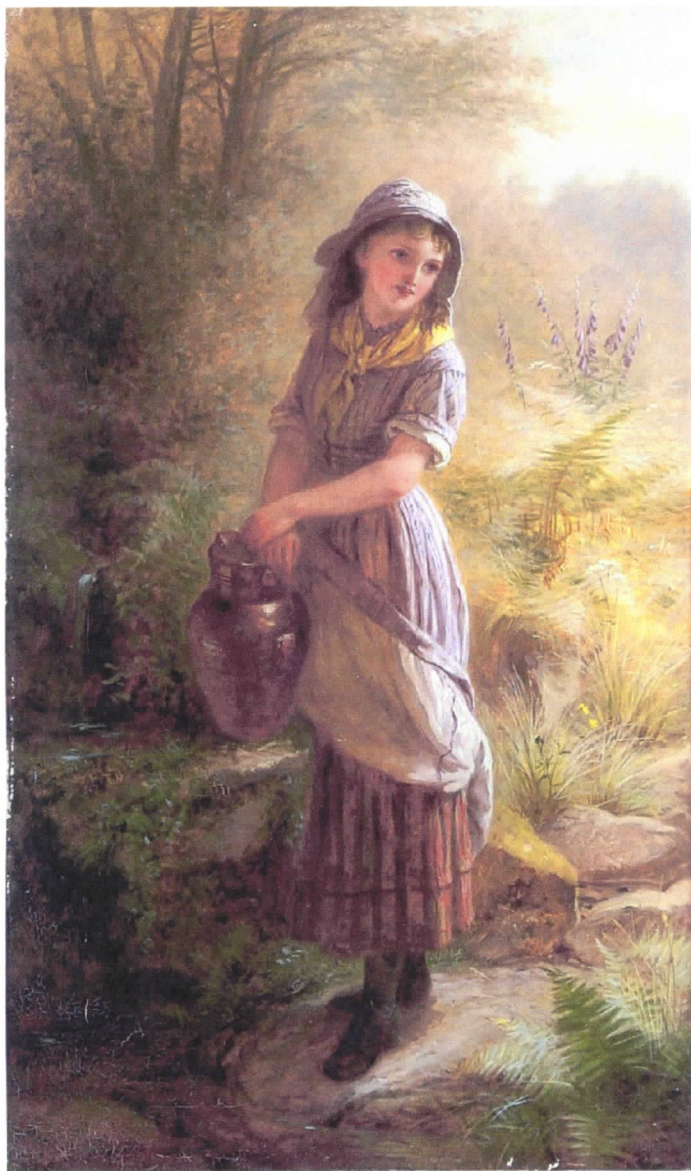


Figure 29. Jane M. Bowkett,
Girl at Well, n.d.



Figure 30. Jane M. Bowkett,
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Figure 31. Helen Allingham,
The Stile, 1883.



Figure 32. Jane M. Bowkett, *A Rest by the Wayside*, 1872.



Figure 33. W.S. Herrick, *Ophelia*, 1874.



Figure 34. James Bertrand, *Ophelia*, 1876.



Figure 35. Jane M. Bowkett, *Ophelia*, n.d.



Figure 36. Jane M. Bowkett, *Lucy Ashton at the Mermaids' Fountain*, 1884.

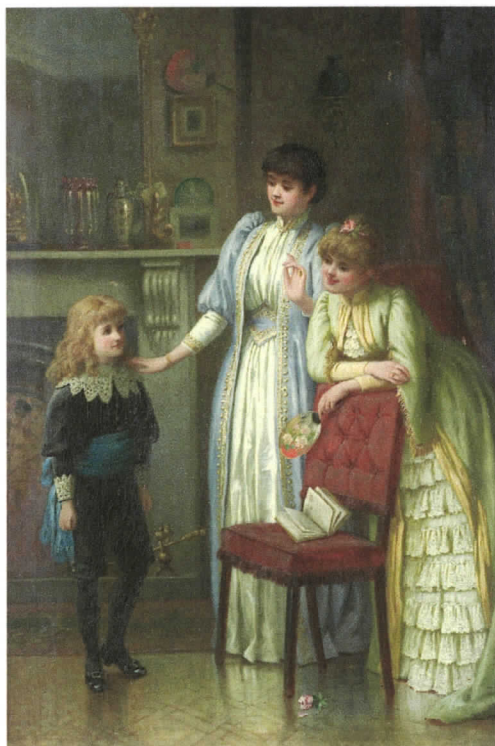


Figure 37. Jane M. Bowkett, *In the Parlor*, n.d.



Figure 38. Jane M. Bowkett, *Young Lady in a Conservatory*, c.1873.

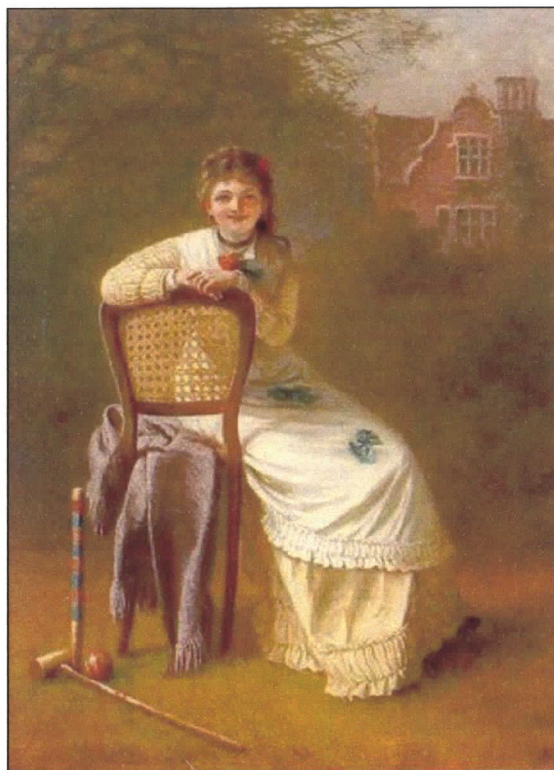


Figure 39. Jane M. Bowkett,
Awfully Jolly, 1877.



Figure 40. Jane M. Bowkett,
Windy Day, n.d.



Figure 41. Jane M. Bowkett, *A Beach Scene*, n.d.



Figure 42. Jane M. Bowkett, *Parade at Brighton (A Sunday Stroll)*, n.d.



Figure 43. Abraham Solomon, *Brighton Front*, n.d.



Figure 44. Jane M. Bowkett,
The Donkey Ride, n.d.



Ready for school
Figure 45. Jane M. Bowkett,
Ready for School, n.d.



Ready for school
Figure 46. Jane M. Bowkett,
Ready for School, n.d.

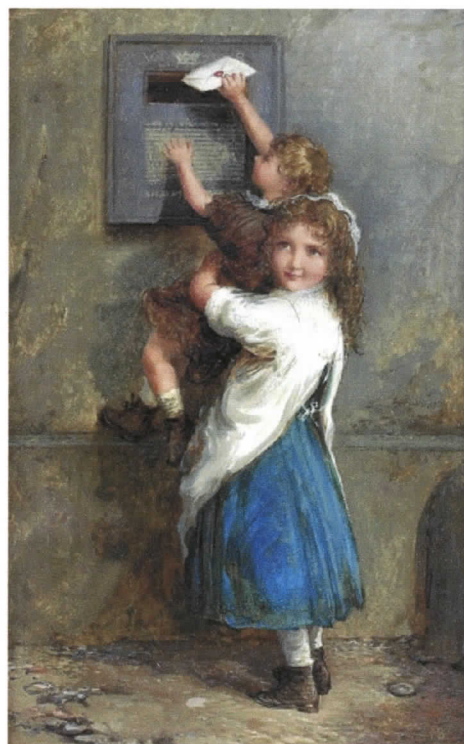


Figure 47. Jane M. Bowkett,
Der Brief, n.d.



Figure 48. Jane M. Bowkett,
Little Dears, n.d.



Figure 49. Jane M. Bowkett,
Preparing for a Garden Party, n.d.



Figure 50. Jane M. Bowkett, *Feeding Baby*, n.d.



Figure 51. Jane M. Bowkett, *An Afternoon in the Nursery*, 1860s.



Figure 52. Charles West Cope, *Life Well Spent*, 1862.

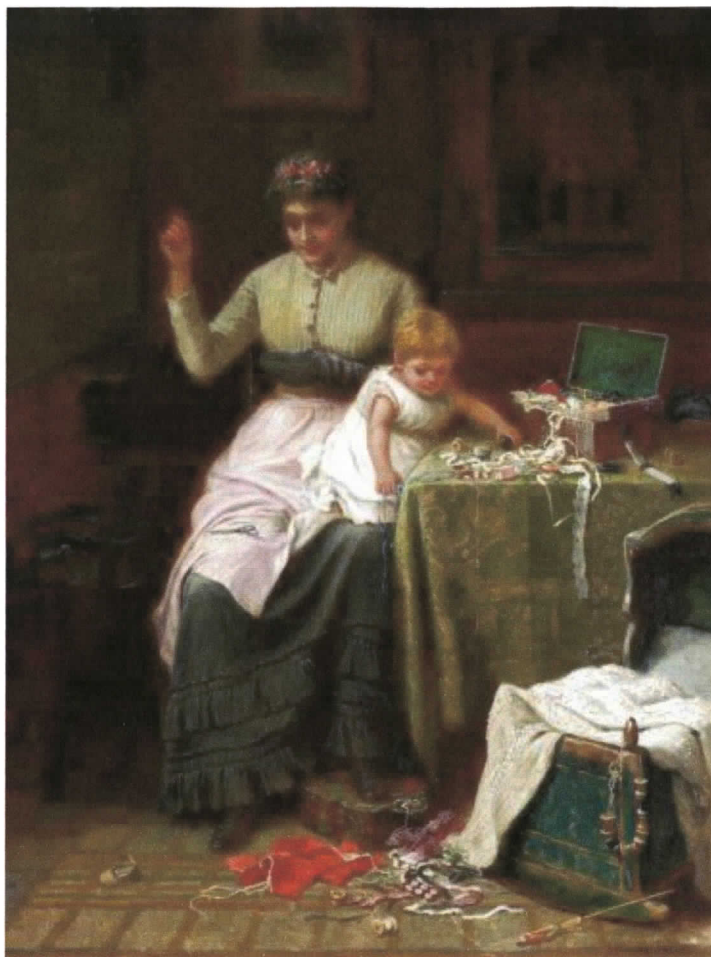


Figure 53. Jane M. Bowkett, *Mischief*, 1882.



Figure 54. Jane Maria Bowkett, n.d.



Figure 55. Jane Maria Bowkett, n.d.



Figure 56. Jane Maria Bowkett and Charles Stuart, late 1880s.

Appendix I

List of Plates

1. George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm.; (30 x 25 in.), Tate Gallery, London. As reproduced in Rosamond Allwood, *George Elgar Hicks: Painter of Victorian Life* (London: Geffrye Museum, 1982), fig. 6.
2. Elizabeth Thompson, *The Roll Call: Calling the Roll After an Engagement, Crimea*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 91 x 182.9 cm.; (35½ x 72 in.), the Royal Collection, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. As reproduced in Christopher Wood, *Victorian Painting* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1999), plate 468.
3. *The Avenue*, 76 Fulham Road, South Kensington. Photograph. As reproduced in Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London, 1764-1914* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Scholar Press, 1994), fig. 105.
4. 16 and 18 Melbury Road. Photograph. As reproduced in Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), fig. 129.
5. Hubert von Herkomer, *Hard Times*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 86.5 x 112 cm.; (33½ x 43½ in.), Manchester City Art Galleries. As reproduced in Wood, *Victorian Painting*, plate 343.
6. Luke Fildes, *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 142.2 x 242.6 cm.; (56 x 97½ in.) Royal Holloway, University of London. As reproduced in Wood, *Victorian Painting*, plate, 341.
7. Raphael, *Madonna of The Chair (Madonna della Seggiola)*, n.d. Galleria Palatina, Florence. As reproduced in *The Complete Works of Raphael* (New York: Harrison House Publisher, 1969), illustration 175.
8. Jane M. Bowkett, *Ophelia*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 76 x 31 cm.; (30 x 12 in.), Christie's, "British and Victorian Pictures," lot 653, London, 15 March 2006.
<<http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/search/lotdetail.asp?intObjectID=4674210>>
9. Jane M. Bowkett, *Girl with Flowers*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 56.9 x 40.7 cm.; (22 x 16 in.), Empire Gallery, Los Angeles, 8 August 2004.
<<http://www.empiregalleryla.com/inventory/10041c.jpg>>
10. Richard Redgrave, *Ophelia Weaving Her Garlands*, 1842. Oil on panel, 76.2 x 63.5 cm.; (30 x 25 in.). As reproduced in Susan P. Casteras and Ronald Parkinson, eds. *Richard Redgrave: 1804-1888* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum; Newhaven, Yale Center for British Art: Yale University Press, 1988), cat. no. 23.
11. John Everett Millais, *The Bride of the Lammermoor*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 151.1 x 108 cm.; (59½ x 42¼ in.), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. As reproduced in Richard Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), fig. 321.
12. Jane M. Bowkett, *Anticipation and Lingering Hope*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 611 x 35.6 cm.; (24 x 14 in.), Walker's, "Important Fine Art and Antiques Auction," lot 81, Ottawa, 26 March 2003.
<http://archives.icollector.com/photos/walkers/2519/2519_0081_2_1g.jpg>

13. Florence Claxton, detail of a page from *The Adventures of a Woman in Search of Her Rights*, London: The Graphotyping Co., 1871. As reproduced in Susan P. Casteras and Linda H. Peterson, *A Struggle for Fame: Victorian Women Artists and Authors* (Connecticut: Yale Center for British Art, 1994), fig. 5.
14. Daniel Gabriel Rossetti, *Writing on the Sand*, 1858-9. Watercolour, © The British Museum. As reproduced in Marcia Werner, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Nineteenth-Century Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), plate 30.
15. William Powell Frith, *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)*, 1854. Oil on Canvas, 76.2 x 153.7 cm.; (30 x 60 ½ in.), Her Majesty the Queen. As reproduced in Christopher Wood, *Victorian Panorama: Paintings of Victorian Life* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976), fig. 200.

Appendix II

Plates



Plate 1. George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood*, 1863.



Plate 2. *The Avenue*, 76 Fulham Road, South Kensington.



Plate 3. Elizabeth Thompson, *The Roll Call: Calling the Roll After an Engagement, Crimea*, 1874.



Plate 4.16 and 18 Melbury Road, Holland Park.



Plate 5. Hubert von Herkomer, *Hard Times*, 1885.



Plate 6. Luke Fildes, *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, 1874.



Plate 7. Raphael, *Madonna of The Chair* (*Madonna della Seggiola*), n.d.

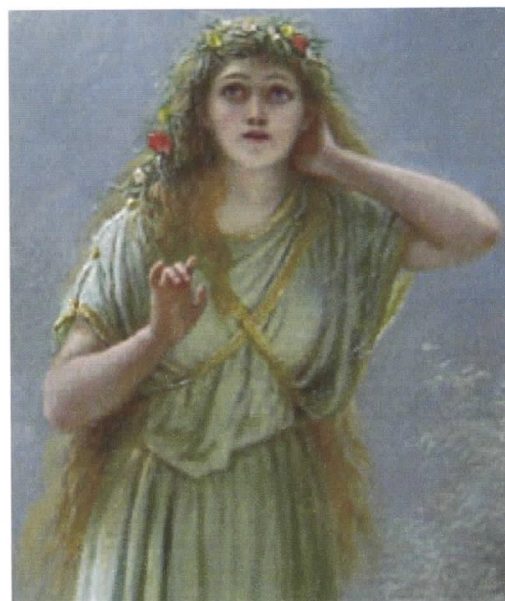
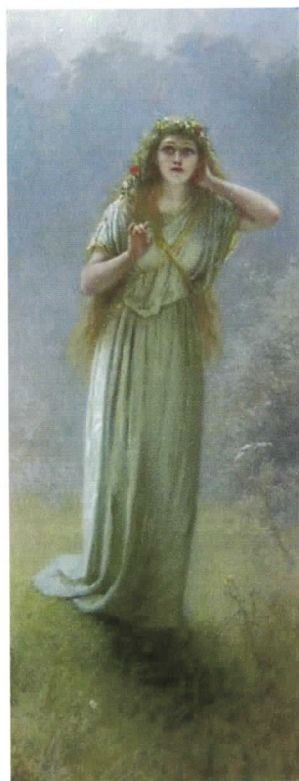


Plate 8. Jane M. Bowkett, *Ophelia*, 1881. (*Ophelia* detail)



Plate 9. Jane M. Bowkett,
Girl with Flowers, n.d.



Plate 10. Richard Redgrave,
Ophelia Weaving Her Garlands, 1842.



Plate 11. John Everett Millais, *The Bride of the Lammermoor*, 1878.



Plate 12a. Jane M. Bowkett,
Anticipation, n.d.

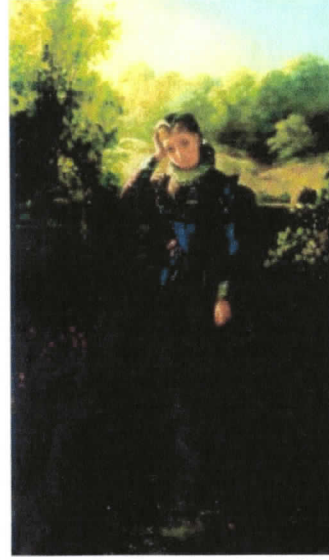


Plate 12b. Jane M. Bowkett,
Lingering Hope, n.d.



What Tomkins said to Jones—
"BOTHER the old masters, look
at the young Miss-esses."

Plate 13. Florence Claxton,
The Adventures of a Woman in Search of Her Rights, 1871.



Plate 14. Daniel Gabriel Rossetti, *Writing on the Sand*, n.d.



Plate 15. William Powell Frith, *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)*, 1854.