A SOCIAL ICONOLOGY

OF THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

IN THOMAS EAKINS' PAINTINGS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the American painter and sculptor, Thomas Eakins, has received greatly increased attention from scholars. To the basic works on Eakins by Lloyd Goodrich, Sylvan Schendler, and Gordon Hendricks, have been added numerous articles by younger art historians. Arts magazine devoted a special May, 1979 issue to recent scholarship on Eakins, and papers on various aspects of Eakins' work have been read at conventions and colloquiums thoughout the country. At least one exhibition of Eakins' works has opened in the past year. "Thomas Eakins: A Personal Collection" and "Eakins at Avondale" are the themes of the joint exhibition at the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. In addition, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Philadelphia Museum of Art have recently published catalogues of their Eakins collections, making these resources more readily available to scholars.

In all this wealth of literature, and although a large portion of the artist's work represents female subjects, until now, no thorough study of Eakins' portrayal of women has been undertaken. For example, Lloyd Goodrich's book of 1933, Thomas Eakins, his Life and Work, is an invaluable source of general information on the artist, for it is based on primary resources including interviews with Eakins' friends, family, sitters and pupils, and excerpts from letters that have since been lost. However, Goodrich made only one general observation about Eakins' portrayal of women, a sound enough

statement, but one that was never supported or pursued by the author:[1]

> Instead of the ideal creatures of light and ether painted by the average portraitist, they were human beings, portrayed as relentlessly as men, but with a penetrating sympathy and a sense of inner life that made his feminine portraits among his most intense works -- documents of the social life of the time, often revealing the frustration and defeat to which society condemned so many women in his day.

Other authors, too, have alluded to the presence of a restrictive nineteenth century atmosphere in Eakins' paintings of women, without analyzing the issue further. Sylvan Schendler, in his 1967 publication, Eakins, seems to have come closest to an understanding of Eakins' portraits of women. Of the Lady and a Setter Dog he commented:[2]

> Eakins has advanced from the portrait of Katherine, where character was plainly an unprotesting product of environment, to a vision of a woman forcefully conscious of its coercive force.

Of the Portrait of Amelia Van Buren Schendler observed:[3]

> Eakins saw a personality in tension with its world, and perhaps subdued by the character it had earned there. Miss Van Buren is graying, disappointed, her dress an elaborate and beautiful statement of unfulfillment.

These statements by Goodrich and Schendler serve as an incentive to study the image of woman painted by Eakins, for they hint at an iconography not yet defined. However, they stand alone as other authors have simply not concerned themselves with this aspect of the

artist's work. In order to gain a more complete understanding of Eakins' paintings as well as his role as an artist in nineteenth century America, it is time to direct serious attention to the portrayal of women in Eakins' art. Thomas Eakins' immense body of paintings, sculpture, and photographs chronicle a period between 1870 and 1910 of rapid social and economic development in America. This was a time when some American women were making great efforts toward overturning the old social order to create new roles for themselves and to change basic opinions about womanhood in the United States. Progress was slow and met much opposition, in the process causing tension, isolation, alienation, and frustration for many women. In his portraits and pictures, Eakins recorded the changes occurring in woman's sphere as well as the effects of those changes on some of the women he knew.

The scholar must proceed through direct study of the works themselves to explore the themes and gain insight into the content of Eakins' paintings. The understanding derived from these observations can be enhanced by an analysis of some of Eakins' personal and professional experiences. A more complete understanding of his female imagery is possible when the pictorial analysis and biographical data are augmented with a history of the duties, capabilities and social position associated with women at the time. Particular attention will be given to the condition of women in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, the cities in which Eakins spent most

of his life. This method of studying Eakins' art derives from advice given by Eakins himself. Believing that an artist's opinions, his visions, and very soul are satisfactorily explained by his art, Eakins generally declined to comment upon himself or his pictures. When he was asked for autobiographical information in 1893 for the publication of a biographical dictionary, Eakins wrote very concisely:[4]

> I have painted many pictures and have done a little sculpture. For the public I believe my life is all in my work.

Because Eakins said so little about himself or his pictures, the scholar must base all research on the paintings in which Eakins claimed his perceptions of art and life might be discovered.

Eakins' male portraits must also be considered in comparison with those of women, for it is in the difference in his manner of portraying men and women that a study of the image of woman derives its validity. Eakins' portraits of men reveal active athletes and outdoorsmen, as well as scientists and thinkers in interiors, while portraits of women include feminine, ideal beauties, rigid matrons, and frustrated, unhappy, young women. Because these images are so far removed from one another, his portrayal of women demands individual attention, as does his portrayal of men.

This thesis begins with a prologue that discusses Eakins' brief treatment of the "true woman" ideal in his early paintings from about 1870 to 1876. As shall be illustrated, these early works incorporate popular ideas of woman's proper appearance and conduct and thus have

much in common with portraits painted by successful society artists of this time such as John Singer Sargent, William Merrit Chase and William Paxton. However, such representations of a popular feminine ideal account for only a small portion of Eakins' paintings of women. He soon moved away from conventional imagery to experiment with new attitudes and ideas current among women of the eighties. His works as a mature artist span the next thirty-five years and comprise the larger area of study for this thesis.

Part One will analyze the characteristics of Eakins' female portraits painted between 1877 and 1910. This analysis reveals numerous similarities of mood and detail, and spotlights three traits that recur most often: isolation, inactivity and absorption in thought. Those aspects of womankind that Eakins did not picture, such as motherhood and spirituality, are also discussed here as important considerations in his characterization of women. When seen in relationship to the feminine ideals extolled in books, magazines, sermons and lectures, it becomes apparent that Eakins saw and painted an unusual view of the female sex. There is, in his mature art, a startling difference between his paintings and those of his more successful contemporaries who chose to portray the popular ideal types.

Part Two will examine more closely the meaning behind Eakins' unconventional characterization of women. By looking at the actual legal and social status of women in Philadelphia between 1880 and 1910, and by reviewing what women wrote about themselves and their position in society, it becomes apparent that the restrictive nature

of woman's world was an increasingly recognized fact and that many felt dissatisfied and ineffectual due to their traditional roles. In his paintings, Eakins recorded and emphasized the inactivity and, in a few portraits, the unhappy discontent of women restrained by their social environment. This is a phenomenon that was written about by novelists and journalists, and spoken of by women's rights advocates, but that rarely found expression in the visual arts. In his paintings of contemporary women, Eakins has recorded his observations of the mental and physical condition of some American women as they began to change their roles and cultural identities toward a more equal position with men.

FOOTNOTES - INTRODUCTION

[1]Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work. (New York, 1933), pp. 114-115.

[2]Sylvan Schendler, Eakins. (Boston, 1967), p. 87.

[3]Ibid., p. 124.

[4]Thomas Eakins, Quoted in Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Memorial Exhibition of the Works of the Late Thomas Eakins. (Philadelphia, 1971), catalogue of the exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, p. 7.

PROLOGUE

The image of woman portrayed in many of Eakins' early paintings to a large extent reflects contemporary attitudes about women, their appearance, manners, and roles. Approaching Eakins' paintings of women within a cultural context provides a means of understanding the ideas from which his visual representation of women originated. An examination of generally accepted attitudes toward woman's "true" nature will reveal factors that influenced Eakins' early outlook and shaped popular pictorial images of women. This chapter begins, then, with a summary description of the state of woman as it developed during Eakins' boyhood and the first years of his career.

The prescribed roles of women in the United States changed rapidly throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. With the industrial revolution, many of their domestic responsibilities such as candle and soap making, spinning, weaving, and the canning of foods, were assumed by factories. Other chores were simplified with the invention and improvement of machines for home use. Better public school systems relieved the housewife of some of the responsibility of educating her children, thus freeing more of her time. As opportunities increased for men to accumulate greater wealth as entrepreneurs, middle class householders could provide servants and other luxuries for their families. Due to this sudden affluence and increased leisure time, a new social strata, the leisure class, had appeared in the cities by mid-century. While men of this class were expected to assert themselves in an aggressive business world, women increasingly became a means of exhibiting their husbands'

wealth. An Englishman traveling in the United States in 1857 observed:[1]

> An American's wife is the peg on which he hangs out his fortune: he dresses her up that men may see his wealth: she is a walking advertisement of his importance, the 'sandwich' announcing to Broadway or Canal-street that her husband is a man of money and station.

Not only did she display his social status by dress and manners, but relaxing in idleness for at least part of each day demonstrated that her husband had attained a position which allowed her to live the genteel life. Around this woman of leisure developed a whole new system of ceremonial duties and responsibilities. Besides her traditional domestic chores she was now required to act in the capacity of social hostess, a job that entailed the acquisition of culture and sophistication and for which she must make the most of her natural beauty.

As marriage was considered "the chief end and aim of woman"[2] throughout the century, the home was her primary sphere and domesticity her greatest virtue. Most people seem to have agreed that the ultimate fulfillment for a woman was motherhood, and she was believed to be divinely suited to instil in her tender young charges the morals and ideals that would mold them into responsible citizens. Her duties to home and family were clearly separated from her husband's role in managing the affairs of the world. Books of etiquette and women's magazines advised that a lady is quiet, demure and self-sacrificing. Above all she must be obedient and submissive to father and husband.

Many nineteenth century women suffered from disorders peculiar to their sex which were commonly referred to as female complaints or hysteria.[3] These included any illness resulting from menstruation, pregnancy or menopause as well as a widespread malaise characterized by despondency, fatigue, and sudden extremes of elation and depression. Lack of air and exercise, constrictive clothing and medical ignorance probably augmented the occurence of female complaints. A delicate constitution signified sensitivity and was much admired.

Sermons and lectures reminded the nineteenth century woman that she was by nature more spiritual and purer than man. She was urged to preserve the chastity and innocence that constituted her blessed natural state no matter what advances man and world might make upon her fortress of purity. As a spiritual being, woman was expected to clothe the poor, nurse the sick, cheer the imprisoned, and generally labor for the salvation of all mankind. This lovely, domestic, paragon of piety was commonly referred to as a "true woman,"[4] an ideal type glorified by authors, poets, and artists, idolized by men, and striven after by women of all ages and social positions.[5] Even working girls who could not hope to have the money or leisure to fulfil the dream, encouraged one another to cultivate the attributes of true womanhood. In 1892 one young working girl wrote:[6]

> Education and wealth help a little to make my ideal woman, but she may be found without either in the working girl that takes pleasure in learning all the household duties that a true woman ought to know, and leaving alone that work which belongs to men...

The ideal of true womanhood in America had reached such heights that the British historian and statesman James Bryce was moved to remark in 1888 that "in no other country are women, and especially young women so much made of. The world is at their feet."[7] Indeed, the true American lady was securely perched on the pedestal of male admiration.

This passage, from one of Eakins' letters home during his student years in Paris, indicates his general admiration of the beauty of the fair sex and his approval of her immortalization on canvas:[8]

> Who that has ever looked in a girl's eyes or run his fingers through her soft hair or smoothed her cheek with his hand or kissed her lips or their corners that plexus of all that is beautiful in modelling but must love Couture for having shown us nature again & beauty on canvas.

This sentiment seems to support Bryce's assertion that American men were brought up to admire, revere and even worship young women.

Eakins' portrait of Katherine (fig. 1), painted soon after he returned from his studies in France, reveals a young girl of the "true woman" ideal type. Katherine Crowell was a younger sister of Eakins' high school friend, Will, and became a close friend of Eakins and his sisters. In Eakins' portrait she sits quietly playing with a kitten in her lap. In her right hand is displayed a spread fan, a feminine badge of elegance and gentility. One slippered foot rests on a footstool while the other is tucked discretely out of sight. The large Victorian armchair, a man's

Fig. 1 Thomas Eakins, Katherine with a Cat, 1872, 62 3/4 x 48 1/4, Yale University Art Gallery

chair, dwarfs her slender figure causing her to appear still more delicate and fragile. She is clad in a ruffled white dress that suggests innocence and purity. A friend remembered her as a good girl, but exclusive, not associating with many.[9] In this painting she shows a relation to the kind of girl so often described in lady's magazines -- passive, gentle, of delicate health and keeping company only with those as well-bred as herself. In the early seventies Eakins planned to marry Katherine but after a seven-year engagement she died of meningitis.

In these early years of his career Eakins also made two pictures of Katherine's sister, Elizabeth. The first shows her as a school girl playing on the floor with her dog. She has discarded her cloak and books but still wears her white hat as if just returned from school. She is attired in a pretty but demure dress and, although seated on the floor, retains a modest pose with her long skirt draped to conceal ankles and feet. In the second picture, painted in 1875, Eakins posed a slightly matured Elizabeth at the piano (fig. 2). Her hair is now piled on top of her head and she is seated sedately on a piano stool. Her whole figure is bathed in soft light. Piano playing was considered a necessary accomplishment for the refinement of young women throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth at the Piano depicts a lovely young lady practicing this genteel art in her leisure time. She is a picture of true womanhood.

Fig. 2 Thomas Eakins, Elizabeth at the Piano, 1875, 72 x 48, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts

Eakins' The Gross Clinic of 1875 (figs. 3, 4) reveals a woman who fits another common social stereotype of the nineteenth century - the hysterical female. There is only one woman in this painting amidst all the male doctors and medical students. She is apparently a relative of the charity patient upon whose leg the doctor is operating. Dr. Gross has just opened an incision in the patient's thigh. He is pictured here still holding the bloody scalpel as he stands aside to speak to the students. Immediately behind him cowers the frightened, sensitive, female spectator. The contrast between them is striking. While the doctor approaches the situation with intelligence and scientific detachment, his face calm and composed, his hand steady, the woman's reaction is irrational and highly emotional. Her terrified fingers curl into claws with which she blocks the scene from her sight. This is the stereotypical woman, one who responds intuitively rather than logically, who is possessed of a fragile nervous system and delicate constitution, and who hides her face when confronted with the unknown.

As a woman was expected to behave in this fashion, it was a man's duty to protect her from the harshness of reality. Some of Eakins' letters from Paris indicate that as a young man he accepted this interpretation of his responsibilities to women. In one letter he attempted to shield his sister Fanny from a wordly knowledge of which a young girl should be innocent. He requested that she discontinue her acquaintance with a particular girl friend who had committed some social solecism. When Fanny challenged the reasons

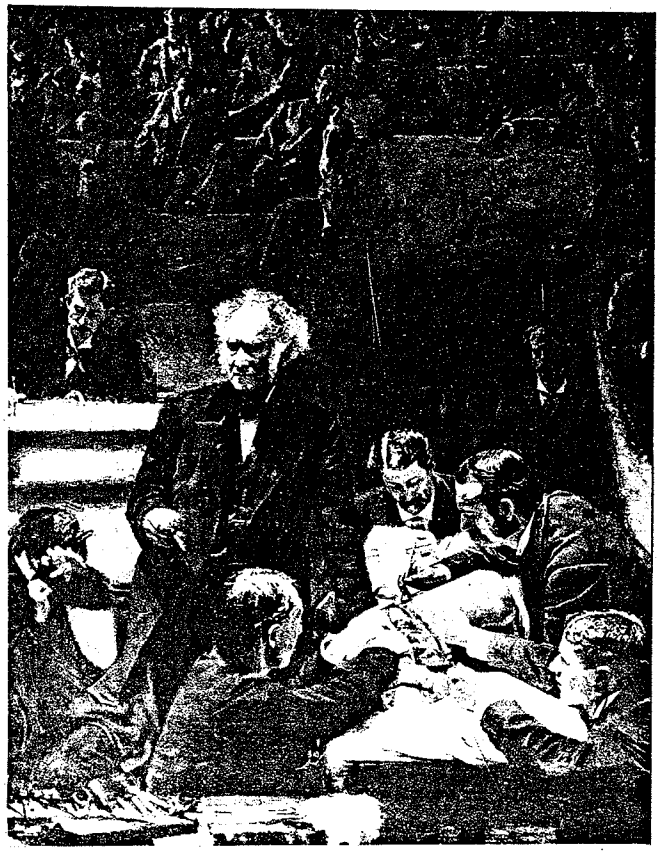


Fig. 3 Thomas Eakins, The Gross Clinic, 1875 96 x 78, Jefferson Medical College

Fig. 4 Thomas Eakins, The Gross Clinic, detail

for his demand he replied:[10]

> These reasons have nothing to do with my friend, his likes or his dislikes, but were medical and as such I do not consider a modest virgin the proper person with whom to enter upon an explanation even if she is my sister, nor will I, and as such again if I preferred a crime she would be totally incapable of investigating or understanding.

He explained that he was afraid the association with this girl would harm Fanny, and he reiterated his request that she not go into the girl's house or spend time with her. In the same vein he told her, "Emily is a noble girl and a good companion for you and you can't see her too often."[11] His presuming to dictate to Fanny whom she could and could not see constituted a natural attitude for a young man to hold toward his sister. By protecting their womenfolk from the dangers of the outside world, the men of the family ensured their continued innocence, purity, and dependence. Only later, when he began teaching, did Eakins stop trying to protect the virginal eyes and ears of young women from the realities of life.

Eakins' early tendency toward romantic representations, as seen in Katherine and The Gross Clinic, is illustrated again in his poetic painting, Hiawatha. It depicts Hiawatha in the middle of a cornfield with his arms raised to a sky filled with animal-shaped clouds. A few years later he penned these lines to a friend concerning the painting:[12]

> It got so poetic at last when Maggy would see it she would make as if it turned her stomach. I got so sick of it myself soon that I gave it up. I guess maybe my hair was getting too long for on

> having it cropped again I could not have been induced to finish it. I used to write poetry when I was a grammar school boy all about sweethearts. I guess they were madrigals. When I had them bad my mother used to give me vermifuge.

This satirical evaluation of his own early efforts indicates the changes that took place in the mood of Eakins' paintings and consequently in his pictorial image of women. Already during this early period, when Eakins' paintings of women were influenced by the ideal of true womanhood, there were indications that he saw other aspects of woman. In spite of the common attitudes toward woman's inferior power of reason and its visual representation in The Gross Clinic, Eakins' letters to Fanny indicate his respect for and approval of her education. By exposing female viewers to the bloody scalpel and naked male thigh in The Gross Clinic, he showed complete disregard for the delicate and sensitive nature true women were supposed to have. Furthermore, Eakins' acknowledged aversion to polite pretense and affectation would make him critical of the notions of false modesty and conscious innocence that were considered requisite in the true woman. Each of these factors foretell the change in his work from the idealistic representation of sweet, helpless, weak-minded females to his later portrayal of independent, intelligent women.

The contrast between the female relative in The Gross Clinic and the woman in The Portrait of Dr. Agnew (fig. 5), painted fourteen years later, illustrates this change in woman imagery very well. Like the earlier painting, The Portrait of Dr. Agnew

Fig. 5 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Dr. Agnew, 1889, 74 1/2 x 130 1/2, University of Pennsylvania

portrays a surgeon surrounded by students, and only one woman besides the patient is present. This woman is as calm and composed as the men. Her white nurse's uniform identifies her professional status and she occupies a place in the inner circle of the operating theater. Unlike the ignorant, unwilling spectator of the decade before, Nurse Clymer watches unflinchingly, apparently understanding the complexities of the medical performance before her. Just as science has progressed from black coats to clinical white in the time between these two paintings, the state of woman as Eakins depicts her has developed from the hysterical to the informed.

This change in Eakins' portrayal of women may be accounted for, in part, by actual changes in the position of women in the United States. For instance, the first school for nursing was opened and the first nurses were trained between 1870 and 1880, the period in which Eakins painted The Gross Clinic. By 1890, there were thirty-five established nursing schools and the number of professional and student nurses had risen above two thousand.[13] Eakins' later paintings reflect such changes by portraying women in their new roles.

Eakins' acquaintance with Rosa Bonheur, while still in Paris, may also have had some influence on his changing portrayal of women. Rosa was an artist and the sister of Tom's friend, Germain Bonheur. Another friend, William Sartain, wrote an account of their first

meeting:[14]

> His [Germain's] sister Rosa Bonheur was there on a visit from her home in Fontainbleau and as she sat at the table she strikingly resembled Henry C. Carey the political economist of Philadelphia. Below she wore skirts but her upper attire resembled that of a man... Tom was speaking of our national mechanical skill and to illustrate his point he pulled out from his pocket a Smith & Wesson revolver. ... Rosa put her hand into her pocket and pulled out one of the same make. She acquired the habit of carrying it during her sketching at Fontainbleau.

Sartain also disclosed that he, Eakins, Rosa, and her family were often together. Although he did not record Eakins' reaction to Rosa, her unconventional behavior presages Eakins' own trespasses on social norms.

These early paintings, such as The Gross Clinic, Katherine, Elizabeth Crowell and her Dog, and several pictures of Eakins' sisters playing the piano, seem to reflect the then commonly-held notions of true womanhood. This prescribed image of woman lasted only about five years in Eakins' work. His paintings of women after 1877 seem to show almost the exact opposite of the "true woman." They ignore major attributes of true womanhood to focus on characteristics antithetic to common ideal types. This new imagery in his art will be explored in Part One.

FOOTNOTES - PROLOGUE

[1]James Stirling, Letters From the Slave States. (London, 1857) p. 159.

[2]Grace H. Dodge, Thoughts of Busy Girls. (New York, 1892) p. 16.

[3]Barbara Welter, "Female Complaints," Dimity Convictions. (Ohio, 1976) pp. 51-71.

[4]For a more complete description of the true woman see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, v. XVIII (Summer, 1966) pp. 151-174.

[5]Thorstein Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class. (New York, 1924) pp. 81-84. According to Veblen, in 1898 the leisure class in America had developed into many levels. The man who was head of a lower middle class household must work hard and, though there were no servants in such a home, the wife was able to spend some obvious leisure and consume as extravagantly as possible for the good name of the family. It was through her efforts that such a household could maintain some of the appearances of the leisure class though they had not the resources to become part of the true leisure class.

[6]Dodge, Thoughts of Busy Girls, pp. 6-7. In 1880 a large group of girls from different branches of industrial work in New York began meeting for what they called 'practical talks' on topics of interest to women. This resulted in several working girls' clubs, one of which wrote this book. Over fifty girls contributed their thoughts on their position in society as women and dedicated the whole to the working girls who had not taken time to think about such things.

[7]James Bryce, Viscount, The American Commonwealth, v. 2 (Chicago, 1890, first published in London in 1888) p. 608.

[8]Thomas Eakins, Letter of April, 1869 to home. Quoted in Gordon Hendricks, Life and Work of Thomas Eakins. (New York, 1974) p. 54.

[9]Margaret McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted. (printed privately, 1946) p. 29.

[10]Thomas Eakins, Letter to Fanny, undated. Archives of American Art -- microfilm.

[11]*Ibid*.

[12]Thomas Eakins, Letter of Jan. 30, 1875 to Earl Shinn. The entire letter is quoted by Gerald Ackerman in "Thomas Eakins and his Parisian Masters Gerome and Bonnat," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*. (April, 1969) p. 241.

[13]United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*. (Washington, D.C., 1975) pp. 75-76.

[14]William Sartain, Letter to his family. Quoted by Hendricks, *Life and Work*, p. 54.

PART ONE

Many of the precepts of the "true woman" continued to be observed into the twentieth century but as time passed, woman's role was debated with increasing fervor in newspapers, magazines, and at women's meetings and lectures throughout America. With the increased attention given to questions of woman's equality the woman ideal was eventually moderated. In literature of the nineties the "true woman" gives way to the "New Woman." Woman's sphere expanded as girls went to work in factories or shops and a small minority pioneered in formerly male professions as doctors, lawyers and architects. Women came to value the ability to support themselves. Many now considered the knowledge of business principles an asset rather than a fault. Swimming, lawn tennis, and bicycling allowed them new freedom of movement. Dress became less prohibitive, educational opportunities increased, and some rules of conduct were relaxed. All of these factors played a part in the creation of the "liberated" woman of the 1890's and early twentieth century.

While she gained a measure of independence, the New Woman did not reject the traditional virtues of the lady. Marriage was still her primary concern and women's magazines were full of conservative housewifely advice. It is estimated that by 1900 about twenty percent of all American women who had attained sixteen years of age, including blacks, were earning wages. However, almost half of these were employed in domestic services as maids, cooks, nannies, and similar positions, all perfectly compatible with their traditional place in the home.[1] Professionals comprised only ten percent of the

total female work force.[2] Of this classification, the largest number were elementary and secondary school teachers whose work was the natural continuation of woman's home duty to her children. Women were still thought of as innately pure, even sexless, and were expected to devote time to charities and cultural pursuits as part of their natural sphere. The most direct opposition to the true woman ideal came from women's suffragist and women's rights groups who advocated woman's entrance into a previously all male politico-economic world and who preached woman's ability to think and act. However, these groups based many of their arguments on the same premises that supported the true woman ideal. For instance, they advocated woman's participation in government on the grounds that her motherhood, her spiritual ties with God, and her abilities in household management made her at least as fit as men to govern. They argued that woman's saintly voice at the polls would ensure peace, for mothers are instinctively protective of their sons and could not send them off to wars. In spite of their basically orthodox attitudes, suffragists met with little success until after 1900 in their fight for a constitutional amendment. This illustrates the degree to which the true woman image was ingrained in American society.

To succeed as a painter of American women of the leisure class, an artist had to portray his subjects in the "true" mode. The genre painter incorporated enough of the characteristics of the ideal woman into his paintings to attract the admiration of his viewers. The

portraitist prettified, romanticized, and idealized as the occasion required. He who refused to bow to these axioms of taste was unlikely to achieve acclaim as a painter of society women. Whitman recognized this as Eakins' condition:[3]

> I never knew of but one artist, and that's Tom Eakins, who could resist the temptation to see what they thought ought to be rather than what is.

As a result the female images Eakins created were often unpopular with the sitters and their families. He was seldom commissioned to paint women's portraits and some of those he produced were left in his studio, returned, or destroyed. He asked many women to pose for him and usually gave these paintings away to friends or to the sitters in appreciation of their time. As we shall see, what men and women of the late nineteenth century expected from female portraits, and what Eakins provided, were two different images.

In late nineteenth century society a woman's identity was still determined by the men around her. She was known as "Mrs. John Smith, wife of the surgeon," or "Mrs. Smith, Tom's widow," and if unmarried, might be referred to as "Mary, Tom Smith's eldest." Philadelphia's city directories listed the men of the city, their businesses and their home addresses, but Philadelphia women were generally excluded. Those females who found their way into the public indexes were either widowed or had attained recognized professional status. Girls were usually supported and protected by their fathers until some young man ventured to take over that

responsibility. Of young women, single working girls living away from their families had the greatest opportunity for independence.

In the vast majority of Eakins' paintings, men and women do not appear together in the same scene, allowing the women identities totally independent of their male guardians. An exception to this rule is The Pathetic Song (fig. 6), a painting that depicts one male and two female musicians. However, the female vocalist is the clear focus of attention here, as the male cellist and the woman at the piano assume positions in a shadowy background. The male figure in this painting does not in any way enhance the viewer's understanding of the women portrayed. Two other paintings in which men and women appear together, Arcadia and The Courtship, do not portray contemporary subjects.

Of the many portraits Eakins painted of husband and wife, only two depict couples together on the same canvas.[4] By portraying her as a singular subject, Eakins forces the viewer to see his female sitter as an individual. For example, Eakins' portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing (fig. 7) shows the tall, spare man in the dress of the Zuni Indians to whom he devoted years of study. He appears to be ruminating on the artifacts spread all around him which he brought back from the Zuni pueblo. Mrs. Frank Hamilton Cushing (fig. 8) is seen in three-quarter length, wearing a fashionable dress and gazing solemnly into the distance. Eakins' student, Samuel Murray, reports that she was a fashion-conscious, socially

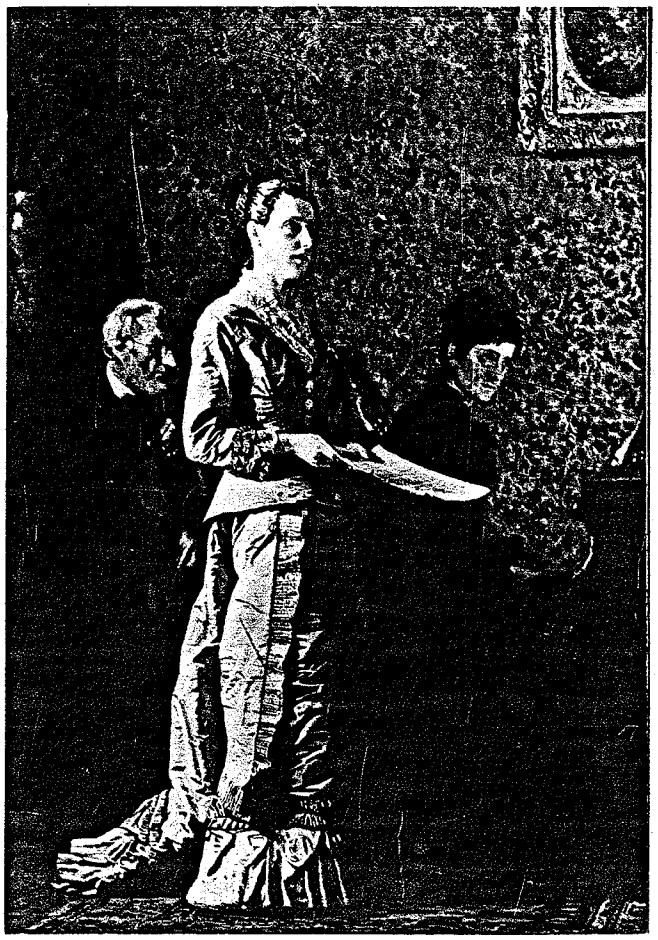


Fig. 6 Thomas Eakins, The Pathetic Song, 1881, 45 x 32 1/2, Corcoran Gallery

Fig. 7 Thomas Eakins, Frank Hamilton Cushing, 1894, 90 x 60, Thomas Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Fig. 8 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. Frank Hamilton Cushing, 1894, 26 x 22, Philadelphia Museum of Art

minded woman who barely tolerated the time spent with her husband among peoples she considered dirty and primitive.[5] Eakins, by creating two separate paintings, has revealed husband and wife's distinct personalities: he engrossed in the science of ethnology, she happiest in the softer light of the social world.

In contrast, Sargent's double portrait of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Field (fig. 9) reveals a more conventional relationship between husband and wife. The artist successfully conveys an impression of a close and loving bond between this elderly man and woman. Mr. Field stands upright, his white beard and kindly eyes giving him a steady, reliable appearance. Mrs. Field leans on his arm, pressing toward him as if seeking shelter behind his body. A frightened look about her eyes reinforces the impression of timidity created by her posture. Mr. Field assumes the husband's traditional role as his wife's sole physical and mental support.

A more complete picture of the widely accepted "true" relationship between husband and wife or man and woman can be grasped by looking at the Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Anson Phelps Stokes by Cecilia Beaux (fig. 10). This is one of several double portraits which brought the artist commissions from fashionable New York and Philadelphia socialites; indeed, she undoubtedly received some of the commissions that would have gone to Eakins had his portrait style been more popular. The full-length format of Beaux's portrait displays to full advantage Mrs. Stoke's beautiful, frilly dress. Mrs. Stokes has apparently paused in the middle of writing a letter

Fig. 9 John Singer Sargent, Mr. and Mrs. John W. Field, ca. 1891, 44 x 32 1/2, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Fig. 10 Cecilia Beaux, Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Anson Phelps Stokes, 1898, 72 x 40, Metropolitan Museum of Art

to smile graciously, if a bit distantly, at the viewer while her husband glances up from his newspaper just behind her. They are clearly a wealthy, refined couple, momentarily interrupted from their normal evening activities. Mrs. Stokes, with her fine dress, gracious manner, and passive occupation, bears all the marks of the true woman.

Sunlight and Shadow, a picture owned by the Joselyn Art Museum in Omaha, was painted by William Merrit Chase in 1884 and reveals still another relationship between man and woman. This picture depicts a stylish young man having breakfast in the garden. Having apparently finished his newspaper, he smokes a cigarette and determinedly studies his tea cup. He appears carelessly unconscious of the pretty young girl peering at him from a nearby hammock. An alternate title, The Tiff, suggests the cause of his aloof dignity and her petulance. Although they appear for the moment to have ceased speaking, the attitudes of both adhere to the conduct of fashionable young couples described in current books and magazines. His studied attitude of nonchalance successfully counters her childish retreat to the hammock.

In contradistinction to this type of byplay, Eakins' method of painting women in individual portraits eliminates any possibility of their being identified with, or made subordinate to, their male kin. The portraits of Dr. John H. Brinton (fig. 11) and Mrs. John H. Brinton (fig. 12) provide another example of this. The two canvases were not conceived of as a pair to be hung together for they are of

Fig. 11 Thomas Eakins, Dr. John H. Brinton, 1876, 78 3/8 x 57 1/8, National Gallery of Art

Fig. 12 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. John H. Brinton, 1878, Private collection

completely different dimensions. A respected surgeon, Dr. Brinton directed the medical operations for Grant's army, edited the Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion, helped establish the Army Medical Museum, and eventually succeeded Dr. Gross as professor of surgery at Jefferson Medical College. Eakins portrayed him seated in his office by his desk with several open books on a bookstand at his side. These are indications of his scholarly and practical achievements in the medical profession. He leans back in a relaxed pose, facing the viewer as if he had just taken off time from his work to sit for this portrait. His wife, on the other hand, is seated in a high-backed Victorian chair, the only apparent indication of her surroundings. Painted in 1878, this is one of the first portraits of a woman in which Eakins incorporated elements alien to the true woman image. Mrs. Brinton gazes thoughtfully down at her hand on which resides a prominently displayed wedding band, and at the fan she holds in her other hand. Although one cannot know what she is thinking, the ring and fan she contemplates might suggest that she is meditating upon her position as wife and social hostess, an occupation recommended to women as a means of self-improvement. In spite of this possible conformity with a precept of true womanhood, her total absorption in thought suggests a seriousness of mind and a capacity for intellectual achievement that are not commonly present in paintings of the "true woman." The light that Eakins

focused on her face and hands, leaving all else in relative darkness, emphasizes this introspective mood. Unlike the portrait of her husband, there is no indication of activity to disrupt the serene mood of the painting. Mrs. Brinton is isolated from her environment by her proximity to the surface plane and by Eakins' use of light. She is isolated from the viewer because her bent head conceals part of her face and her entire attention is focused on her hands. The viewer can in no way enter the private world of her thoughts. Inactive, isolated, meditative, this portrayal is in direct opposition to that of her husband, whose surroundings indicate an active profession and whose gaze acknowledges the viewer's presence.

Eakins' isolation of women from men is noteworthy in a culture that required male protection and care for its women. In a gallery of Eakins' portraits where none were labeled, one would never identify Mrs. Cushing or Mrs. Brinton with their husbands. They are individuals, secluded in their own worlds. Unlike Mrs. Field or Mrs. Stokes, they have identities separate from those of the men around them.

Another characteristic of Eakins' portrayal of women is their isolation from their surroundings. Mrs. Brinton and Mrs. Cushing as well as two portraits of Addie Williams (fig. 13) and many other paintings of women by Eakins, contain no indication of the environment in which the subjects lived. Although this type of portrait is

Fig. 13 Thomas Eakins, Addie, Woman in Black, 1899, 24 x 20, Art Institute of Chicago

not unusual in the history of American art, it is significantly different than Eakins' portraits of men, many of whom, like Dr. Brinton and Frank Hamilton Cushing, are portrayed in a setting that contributes to the viewer's understanding of them. In all but four of Eakins' portraits of women no props give the viewer a clue to their personalities or activities; instead the artist concentrates on expression and pose to convey a sense of their psychological and emotional states. Addie Williams, for instance, was a seamstress and a close friend of the artist. She had grown up near him and as a child he had treated her mother as his own. When Addie was forty-seven, still single, and recently returned to Philadelphia from living with a brother, Eakins and his wife invited her to make her home with them. In this painting of her head against a neutral background, completed shortly before she came to live with them, Eakins explored his friend's personality with sensitivity and compassion. The second portrait of Addie utilizes the same format to reveal a slightly gayer, more probing view of the sitter. In these and similar portraits by Eakins the women cannot be lost in their surroundings or dismissed as picturesque genre figures with no deeper meaning. The limited space and obscurity of the settings reinforce women as focal points of the paintings, beings complete within themselves.

Eakins' isolation of women from their surroundings becomes more sharply apparent when contrasted with the elaborate settings popular

Fig. 14 William Merrit Chase, A Friendly Call, 1895
30 1/4 x 48 1/4, National Gallery of Art

Fig. 15 William Merrit Chase, In the Studio, ca. 1880,
28 1/2 x 40 1/8, The Brooklyn Museum

Fig. 16 William Paxton, The New Necklace, 1910, 35 1/2 x 28 1/8, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

among other artists. William Merrit Chase, with A Friendly Call (fig. 14) and In the Studio (fig. 15), created two of the best examples of this pictorial conception of woman's relationship to her environment. The women in both of these paintings are submerged among a myriad of decorative objects. They are surrounded by paintings, pillows, knicknacks, and mirrors, and merge with these objects as parts of a colorful surface design. As small figures, undistinguished by lighting, color, or facial expression, the women attract no more attention than any other element of the compositions.[6] They simply provide more shapes for an overall pattern.

Another artist who used the cluttered interior settings of the late nineteenth century to describe American women was William Paxton. The New Necklace (fig. 16) of 1910 pictures a woman dressed in exotic finery comparable to the oriental screen, colorful paintings, and gilded writing desk of her surroundings. She is featured as the central fixture in a room full of beautiful, purely decorative objects, which has the effect of transforming her into an article of adornment herself. In real life as well as in paintings, woman was "a living object of art."[7] Indeed, a man's wealth and social position might be judged by how well he kept his wife. Thorstein Veblen, in his classic analysis of social conduct, Theory of the Leisure Class, referred to women as the chief ornaments of the house.[8] A lady could be defined as a refined, lovely creature, as much a part of the decor of a man's home as the glass-encased porcelain doll in The New Necklace that its mistress so nearly resembles.

Both doll and mistress are beautiful, seemingly fragile females, wearing exotic oriental robes. The lavish surroundings of the woman suggest that she lives in a metaphoric glass case and certainly both she and the figurine are intended to be seen and admired.

In removing women from this type of ornamental setting, Eakins rescued them from comparison with inanimate objects and a purely decorative role. In 1891 Eakins exhibited the Portrait of Miss Letitia Wilson Jordan, later Mrs. Bacon (fig. 17), under the title Portrait of a Lady. Eakins had asked Miss Jordan to pose for him after seeing her in this gown at a party. Because it was not a commisssioned work he was at liberty to create the type of image he desired. His picture of "the lady" reveals a young woman of beauty and modish costume comparable to those of the women Chase and Paxton painted, but with this the similarity between their representations and his ends. Eakins brought the figure of Miss Jordan close to the picture plane, thereby minimizing the area of the setting and focusing attention on his subject. By leaving the background in darkness and allowing light to fall on her face and arms, he invited the viewer to explore the real woman beyond any social facade. She is a thinking individual, not merely an appointment in an interior. The viewer is compelled to confront the inner reaches of her psychological being and to ponder the intensity of her gaze. She is not a decorative image to be enjoyed on a purely aesthetic level, but a person who demands a thoughtful response.

One of the few instances in which Eakins portrayed a woman in a more cluttered environment is that of his Portrait of Mrs. Frishmuth

Fig. 17 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of a Lady
1888, 60 x 40, Brooklyn Museum

Fig. 18 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Mrs. Frishmuth, 1900, 96 x 72, Philadelphia Museum of Art

(fig. 18). Mrs. Frishmuth had traveled around the world collecting musical instruments, an accomplishment Eakins considered important enough that he deviated from his usual isolation of women to include her collection in the painting. Even in this expanded setting the woman is the unquestionable focus of attention. Her massive form, in a voluminous black gown, dominates the composition and the stern, stoic expression of her face detaches her emotionally from the musical instruments around her.[9] Her right hand, in an unusual pose, depresses one key of the piano. In spite of the objects surrounding her, the force of this woman's personality dominates the painting.

In formal portraiture during Eakins' time, it was customary for artists to idealize their sitters' features according to the image of the "true woman." A survey of Sargent's female portraits reveals a group of ladies who appear to have been stamped from the same mold (figs. 19, 20). The women sit or stand erect and gaze at the viewer as if from a great height. They are dressed in the latest gowns and impeccably coiffured. Should there be the least flaw in their physical persons, it is minimized. Miss Ada Rehan (fig. 21) apparently has a drooping eyelid, but Sargent does not allow it to detract in any way from her entirely correct appearance. Her elegant carriage, beautiful dress, and aristocratic air offset the minor annoyance of a feature that does not fit canons of conventional beauty. Chase also showed a facility for flattering his female subjects. Whether intentional or not, he seems to impart the same poise and refinement of visage to his wife, the Lady in Pink, (fig. 22) as Sargent did to

Fig. 19 John Singer Sargent, Portrait of Mrs. William C. Endicott, 1901, private collection

Fig. 20 John Singer Sargent, Portrait of Mrs. A. Lawrence Rotch, 1903, private collection

Fig. 21 John Singer Sargent, Miss Ada Rehan, 1894-1895, 93 1/3 x 50 1/2, private collection

Fig. 22 William Merrit Chase, Lady in Pink, 1886, 69 x 39

many of his portraits of women.

The concept of ideal beauty in late nineteenth-century America would not be complete without mention of the nationally known illustrator of the American girl, Charles Dana Gibson. His illustrations (fig. 23) became so popular an image in the nineties that society girls from New York, Boston, and Philadelphia are reported to have come in droves for a chance to model for the young artist.[10] Whether or not all these girls were real beauties, the resulting Gibson Girls represented the height of fashion and may even have established new trends in dress and hair style.[11] Looking at the illustrations now, it is difficult to tell one from the next. All are poised, coy, fresh, young women with delicate features and willowy figures. They are often surrounded by admiring male companions from whom one expects they will eventually choose husbands. While Gibson turned out these popular images for Collier's Weekly Magazine at $1000 per drawing,[12] Eakins, throughout most of his career, did not receive more than a few hundred dollars for his full-length oil portraits of women.

Eakins appears to have had no concept of standardized beauty. He advised his students:[13]

> ... do not try to improve on the model, ... do not try to make it pretty, if it is pretty it will be so, if you do good work. If your model is not attractive, your study will not be attractive if you do good work.

He applied this principle faithfully in his own art. An early painting of his sister Margaret, called Margaret in Skating Costume

Fig. 23 Charles Dana Gibson, Illustrations for "Scribner's Magazine" (above) and "Life" (below) ca. 1901

Fig. 24 Thomas Eakins, Margaret in Skating Costume, 1871, 24 x 20 1/2, Philadelphia Museum of Art

(fig. 24), exemplifies Eakins' fidelity to nature. In this picture he faithfully recorded her too-large red nose and square jaw, giving her a homely appearance. The sullen saturnine expression on her face is also seen in several of Eakins' photographs of her. While a snapshot might easily catch such an expression in an unguarded moment, an artist was generally expected to paint a more pleasing image for a portrait. It is not only with members of his family that Eakins demonstrated his determination to paint what he saw. His Portrait of Mrs. William Shaw Ward (fig. 25) and The Old-Fashioned Dress (fig. 26) portray two plain women as unattractive subjects. Although The Old-Fashioned Dress was not a commissioned work, the sitter, Helen Parker, begged Eakins to make her "just a little pretty." She apparently wanted the oil painting, an image that might easily outlive her, to conform to an ideal standard of beauty. However, Eakins depicted her in an attitude of wide-eyed bewilderment and she later complained that, far from improving her appearance, his portrait made her "really small and dainty nose more and more bulbous."[14] In painting a picture of Signora Gomez D'Arza (fig. 27), Eakins carefully recorded the long, beak nose and worry-lined face of his friend. Nor did he make any attempt to gloss over Clara's unfashionably long, thin neck in the portrait he painted of her in 1900 (fig. 28). The tilt of her face and the placement of the light focus attention on her neck, which is almost as long again as her head.

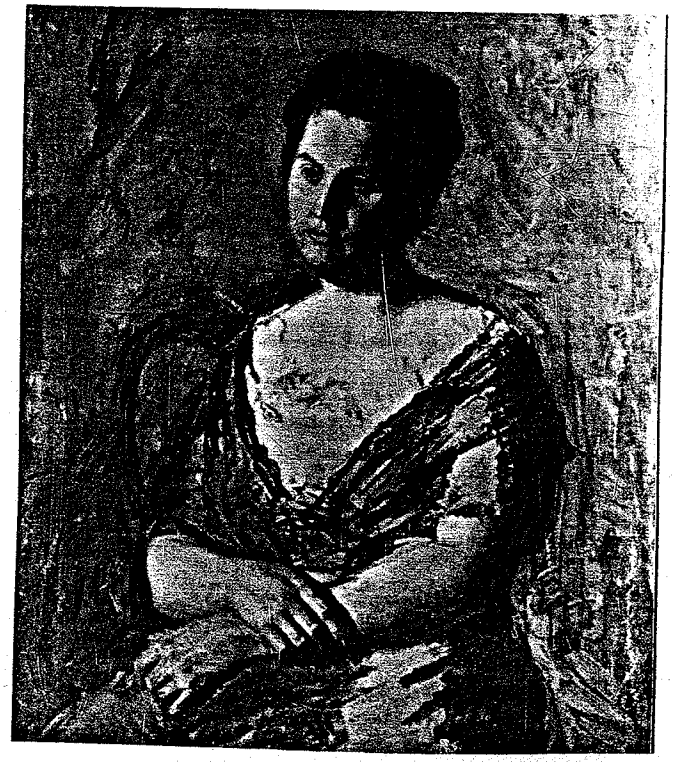


Fig. 25 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Mrs. William Shaw Ward, 1884, 40 x 30, private collection

Fig. 26 Thomas Eakins, The Old-Fashioned Dress, 1907, 60 1/8 x 40 1/4, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fig. 27 Thomas Eakins, Signora Gomez D'Arza, 1902 30 x 24, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 28 Thomas Eakins, Clara, 1900, 24 x 20, Philadelphia Museum of Art

In all of these cases Eakins paid particular attention to anatomy, as he did throughout his career. One might suspect that he sometimes exaggerated bone structure, musculature, or physical abnormalities in his enthusiasm for the study of the physical body. This attention to corporeal structure, rather than social veneer, accounts in part for the feeling of solidity and substance in his portraits. Unfortunately for Eakins, good portraiture was judged by the artist's ability to communicate the wealth and social standing of the subject in an aesthetically pleasing likeness, not by how well one could reproduce the individual's skeleton, muscles and anatomical details. As one astute writer observed, "While his contemporaries worked from culture and taste in toward art, Eakins worked from the core of reality out into art."[15]

An anecdote related by Fairfield Porter in his book on the artist suggests that Eakins simply did not think of beauty as a desirable quality in a painting. When asked his opinion of a painting by Whistler of a little girl he replied, "I think it is a very cowardly way to paint." His companion pressed him further inquiring whether Eakins did not think it had "charm and beauty." The artist then took another look admitting that he had not considered it from that point of view.[16]

Eakins' palette and technique further separate the image of woman found in his paintings from that of many other artists. Though fainting and bouts of weeping were no longer the vogue by

the time Eakins was established as a portraitist, a white complexion and delicate pale hands were still part of the total appearance affected by the true woman.[17] They imparted to the owner an ethereal air suggestive of her spirituality and sensitivity. This feminine color was preserved through the extensive use of parasols and long gloves, and was aided by home treatments such as milk baths, palm oil, and lemon juice by ladies who wished to present a countenance as far removed from that of the sunburned, chapped skin of rural laboring women as possible. The almost unhealthy pallor of some of the women portrayed by Whistler, Sargent and Paxton conforms to this ideal. Sargent's Portrait of Frances Sherborne Ridley Watts, from 1877, is an example of the soft color and facile brushwork popular in women's portraits. The skin tones are composed of white and pale pink, finely blended to attain a perfect complexion. No small blotch or blemish mars the smooth texture of her subtly modeled face. The background is light pink, and a red ribbon and a bit of turquoise in the chair add the only bright notes. The artist's use of pale hues indicates a fashionably delicate constitution and feminine lack of vitality quite in keeping with woman's decorative role. Sargent's refined brushwork is especially suited to describe the sharp, aristocratic nose and haughty air of the model. She is a pretty woman whose beauty is enhanced by the artist's choice of feminine pastels and his highly finished technique.

In contrast, Eakins' painting of The Actress, Suzanne Santje, reveals a swarthy lady of German descent whose real name was Keyser. She was either possessed of unusually dark skin or Eakins emphasized the dark tones to give that appearance because in this portrait she looks as Spanish as her stage name sounds. The artist composed the skin tones of her face with separate strokes of olive drab, grey, and pink, and her arms, too, are built up with thick green and grey pigments. While this creates a splotchy, mottled effect at close range, from a distance it takes on the natural look of a dark complexion. Grey, drab brown, and a few dark red tones comprise the background.

Eakins was sometimes criticized for the dullness of his compositions. He was unaffected by the high key hues of the impressionists and never used color as an end in itself. His palette of earthy tones and relatively unrefined technique were not particularly flattering to women who wished to be portrayed as fashionable ladies. Many times his use of pink, deep red and brown in the flesh areas lend the women he painted an unwanted sense of wholesomeness and vitality. His Portrait of Alice Kurtz (fig. 29), a banker's daughter, reveals a woman at rest yet alive in the richness of the skin tones. She appears to be composed of real flesh and blood, not a waxen replica of living humanity. Eakins gave special attention to her eyes by using dark red around the lids and faithfully reproducing the moist pink tissue and glands of the eye socket, a practice resulting

Fig. 29 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Alice Kurtz, 1903, 23 5/8 x 19 1/4, Fogg Art Museum

from his interest in anatomy. However, this use of color and attention to anatomical detail was not expected or appreciated in portraits of society women. Another artist might have given Miss Kurtz a more fashionable, lighter complexion and used prettier colors to describe her person; Eakins rejected the merely decorative palette as being artificial like the social pretense and affectation he hated. His brownish, warm colors and a somewhat heavy handed application of the paint reinforced his objection to the ideal of unnaturally fragile femininity.

The Black Fan (fig. 30) is a full-length portrait of Mrs. Talcott Williams, wife of a well-known Philadelphia journalist. The painting was not commissioned, but was undertaken at Eakins' request which gave him some artistic license. Mrs. Williams stands, in formal evening attire, holding a black fan and looking directly at the viewer. This portrait, more than any of his others, seems to represent the conventional good looks of an upper middle class socialite, yet Mrs. Williams was not pleased with the results. According to Goodrich, she objected to Eakins' portrayal of her appearance, and refused to continue the sittings so the painting was never finished.[18]

In Eakins' paintings of women one characteristic stands out above all the rest -- a pervasive air of cerebral absorption. A second look at a few portraits already discussed, Mrs. Frank Hamilton Cushing, Portrait of Alice Kurtz, Margaret in Skating

Fig. 30 Thomas Eakins, The Black Fan, 1891, 80 1/4 x 40, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Costume, and Portrait of Miss Letitia Wilson Jordan, serve to illustrate this common mood. Each of the women is engrossed in deep thought. By gazing inward rather than toward the viewer they isolate themselves from the world around them. In each of these portraits Eakins concerned himself with the psychological character of the women, resulting in probing studies of the thoughts and feelings of the subjects. The Portrait of Maud Cook (fig. 31) is another example of Eakins' interest in the thinking woman. Miss Cook is an attractive young girl made even prettier by the unusually flattering light that models her face and neck in soft shadows. She, too, with eyes downcast, remains preoccupied with private rumination. Mrs. Richard Day (fig. 32) was the wife of a partner in the Day Brothers, iron and steel merchants of Philadelphia. She, like Miss Kurtz, was a member of the leisure class and Eakins' portrait of her is characterized by the same meditative quality seen in the others.

Thought becomes the explicit theme of at least two of Eakins' paintings, Retrospection (fig. 33), and Young Girl Meditating (fig. 34), also called Reminiscence. There are few props and no action to distract one's attention from the pensive mood of the subjects.

This characterization of women as rational beings contradicts a popular understanding of women's mental capacities. In the eighteen-sixties, colleges were just opening their doors to women and there was a great deal of controversy over the idea of coeducation throughout the next two decades. College men and

Fig. 31 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Maud Cook, 1895, 24 x 20, Yale University Art Gallery

Fig. 32 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. Richard Day, 1903, 24 x 20, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Fig. 33 Thomas Eakins, Retrospection, 1880, 14 1/2 x 10 1/8, Yale University Art Gallery

Fig. 34 Thomas Eakins, Young Girl Meditating, watercolor, 1877, 8 3/4 x 5 1/2, Metropolitan Museum of Art

educators worried that standards would be lowered and the dignity of a college education lessened if women were allowed to enroll.[19] This attitude grew out of the long-standing 'knowledge' that woman's mind functioned on a different level than man's and was best fit for her own areas of activity. One book of etiquette of 1882 suggested:[20]

> If you are a gentleman, never lower the intellectual standard of your conversation in addressing ladies. Pay them the compliment of seeming to consider them capable of an equal understanding with gentlemen.

Others advised men to avoid political, scientific, and commercial discussions with women in favor of topics that would interest them. Women were told that "ladies" do not speak on such subjects, but listen in attentive silence.[21] It was generally agreed that whereas man was a rational being who relied on a slow-methodical process of logic, woman was gifted with intuition. She could seldom reason out the answer to a difficult math or business problem, but knew instinctively the best way to care for her children and handle philanthropic and cultural matters.

Contrary to this common notion, letters between Eakins and his sister Fanny affirm Eakins' belief in equal intelligence among women and men as revealed in his paintings. These letters from his student days in Paris disclose a relationship of high intellectual quality. He wrote to Fanny about contemporary political events, Gerome's art theories, and the books he was

reading or had read, particularly Dante. The two discussed grammar in detail, arguing for pages about the derivation of words and their forms and uses in numerous languages. An excerpt from one of these letters indicates Eakins' opinion of Fanny's intellect:[22]

> Dear Fanny,
> I have received your learned letter of June the second which I will try to answer. ... You are now getting too deep for me and I confess to not understanding the meaning of two or three words in your last letter as for instance where you speak of a Gothic asperate corresponding always with a Sanskrit tenuis ... this kind of knowledge you are getting will never desert you but will I am sure be some day of great service to you.

This kind of intellectual rapport, though certainly not unheard of, was unusual between men and women, even brothers and sisters.

Most women still passed the time before marriage by teaching or clerking in a shop; few went to college.[23] Penelope (fig. 35), by Gari Melchers, illustrates the more genteel education, thought for a long time to be especially suited to women. Penelope sits in a calico dress and pink, oriental jacket in a beautifully appointed room doing fancy needlework at her sewing frame while a maid untangles threads for her use. Sewing, singing, and water-colors were the accepted accomplishments of ladies of leisure. Descending through the social strata, young girls were taught less to entertain and more to wash, cook, sew, and iron, but in all cases the woman's education was traditionally a training for her place in the home with only a rudimentary knowledge of math, perhaps a foreign language, and basic writing, and reading skills. A good

Fig. 35 Gari Melchers, Penelope, 1910

pictorial example of the unthinking, wealthy woman is Sargent's portrait, The Wyndham Sisters (fig. 36). The three girls, equally delicate and untouchable, do not look as if a noteworthy thought had ever crossed their minds. These passive, vacuous women draped about the sofa are the image of femininity. The purity of their all-concealing white dresses refers to the innocence and virtuosity of the wearers who contrast strongly with Eakins' thinkers.

There are many paintings of this period in which women are shown in sitting rooms, quietly perusing picture books. L'Edition de Luxe (fig. 37), by Lilian Westcott Hale, reveals a lady with a large volume of illustrations spread on the table before her. Rarely before the twentieth century were women depicted reading a newspaper or book more intellectually stimulating than a romantic novel.[24] In this way artists continued to cater to the popular ideal of true woman. A rather mindless, passive figment of femininity was quite in keeping with woman's decorative function. The aura of mystery surrounding such unfathomable traits as woman's intuition added to the intrigue of the true woman image and placed her more firmly on her pedestal. The general belief in male superiority of intellect allowed man to continue to idolize woman as a beautiful object in need of his masculine protection. In view of this popular conception of the intuitive, irrational woman, Eakins' concern with woman as an intelligent force is exceptional.

Fig. 36 John Singer Sargent, The Wyndham Sisters, 1900, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 37 Lilian Westcott Hale, L'Edition de Luxe, 1910, 23 x 15 1/8, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Perhaps a lady was not supposed to reveal an unfeminine, worldly knowledge or the ability to reason, but Eakins found a capacity for deep mental activity in nearly every woman he painted.

There is no qualitative difference between Eakins' female thinkers and his portraits of men who are deep in thought. The Veteran (fig. 38), a painting of his student George Reynolds, is very similar in mood and theme to portraits of Maud Cook, Alice Kurtz, Mrs. Brinton or any number of other women. The Thinker (fig. 39) and Young Girl Meditating (fig. 34) are engaged in an equivalence of mental activity.

Eakins' depictions of women depart from the true woman ideal in still another matter of cultural concern -- spiritual purity and innocence. Along with her intuitive, emotional nature, woman was popularly supposed to have a closer relationship to God than did man. She was believed to be more spiritual and chaste. One of Gibson's most successful series was about a young widow who became ill from grief over the loss of her husband. He illustrated her decision to die a tragic and romantic death, followed by her boredom with mourning and subsequent reappearance in society where she found herself overwhelmed by male admirers and proposals. In the end she remained true to her marriage vows and, after weeping over her wedding gown, dedicated herself to the pure, chaste life of the nun. The reader leaves her peacefully reading to little children in the convent garden, true to the highest moral ideals and nearer to God.

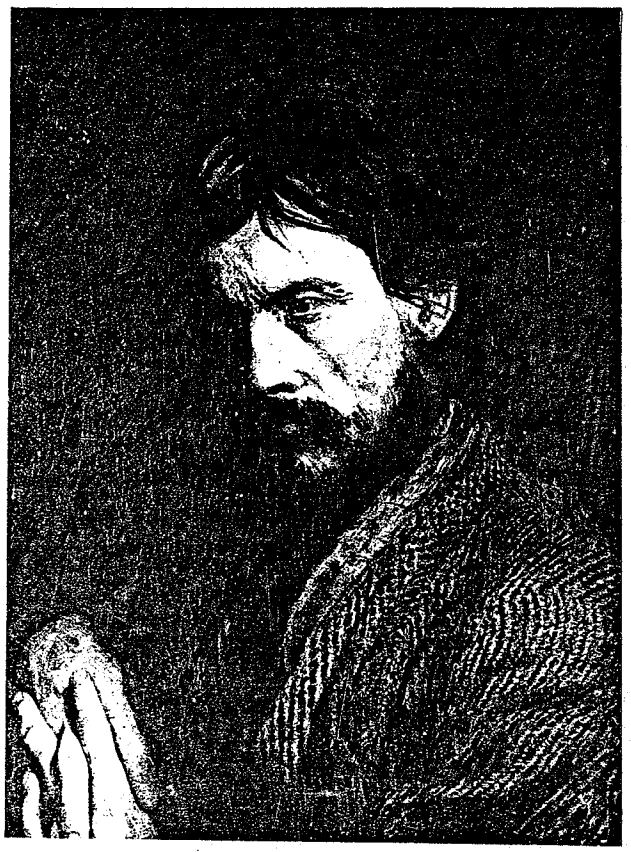


Fig. 38 Thomas Eakins, The Veteran, 1884, 22 1/4 x 15, Yale University Art Gallery

Fig. 39 Thomas Eakins, The Thinker, 1900, 82 x 42, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Other artists' paintings convey similar ideas of the sexlessness and spirituality of women. Abbott Thayer's Virgin (fig. 40) presents an ethereal vision of perfection -- the American girl as she should be. Thayer often represented women as angels or even godesses. His Young Woman of 1898 (fig. 41) portrays a rosy cheeked damsel dressed in layers of white gauze drawn together with ribbons. She is only distinguishable from a Thayer work entitled Angel by the absence of wings. George Fuller's portrait of one Miss Bradley, entitled Maidenhood (fig. 42), also takes up this theme. He once wrote about a painting of an Italian lady:[25]

> How many has her innocence reproved! how many inspired to nobler life by her beauty! how many made to feel in the presence of those beautiful eyes, raised from the littleness of ordinary life and sent on their way humbled, yet proud; proud of the art that preserves to us the expression of that nature to whose teaching we must come in humility or not at all.

It is evident that Fuller has tried to recapture these same qualities in his portrait of Miss Bradley.

The ideals embodied in these artists' conceptions of the American woman are upheld in contemporary literature for and about women. Woman's love was thought of as pure and passionless, man's as an aggressive animal instinct. Therefore, sex was, for woman, a necessary evil endured only for the sake of the husband and procreation. She who failed to preserve her virginity, "who descended from the pedestal of her maidenly or wifely purity,"[26] was forever ruined, a fallen woman. The mention of anything

Fig. 40 Abbott H. Thayer, The Virgin, 1893, Freer Gallery, Smithsonian Institute

Fig. 41 Abbott H. Thayer, Young Woman, 1898, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 42 George Fuller, Maidenhood, 1881, 42 x 31

concerning sex was taboo for fear of altering that naive ignorance of evil, characteristic of all well-bred young ladies. One book of deportment cautioned women on the subject of indelicate conversation:[27]

> A lady will always fail to hear that which she should not hear or having unmistakably heard, she will not understand.

Another suggested that when a true woman heard a rough word her face would register shock. Working girls, who had of necessity grown accustomed to a harsher, less ideal existence, lamented their loss of modesty and vowed to protect the hearts and minds of their younger sisters.[28] From the Civil War to the end of the century the truly passionate woman did not even exist in the pages of American fiction.[29] More common was the image Louisa Mae Alcott created in Little Women, of four sweet, innocent, remarkably unselfish sisters and their long-suffering, godly mother. This novel, a succession of lessons in proper, ladylike conduct and Christian motivation, became a widely read moral guide for young women.

Continuing in the same vein, it was thought that woman's innocence and piety made her especially suited to be a reformer. After all, it was a woman whom God chose as the vessel to carry salvation to the world. Women were urged by magazines and sermons to win their husbands over to love religion and to temper man's harsher nature with her gentle ministrations. She was to feed the

hungry, clothe the poor, tend the sick and aging, and reclaim the wicked. A story in the magazine, The Arena, told of the good example of a beautiful, cultured, young Christian girl who came to teach school in a poor rural area.[30] Here the girl's eyes were opened and she became a ministering angel for the parents of a large family who had lost all hope of rising above the abject poverty and drudgery of their life. She begged the wife to return to her duties for the sake of Christ and the dignity of their sex, and admonished the husband to treat his wife more tenderly. Thus the youthful American girl, with spiritual insight and purity of soul, restored domestic tranquility. This is just one of many short stories that cast a woman of virtuous character in the role of heroine-savior. The large painting The Strike (fig. 43), by Robert Koehler, describes a group of angry men facing their employer. A lone woman, with singular disregard for her own safety, remonstrates with the strikers in an attempt to point out the immorality of their demonstration. The tattered woman, babe in arms and child in skirts, who appears in the lower corner of the painting is a reminder of man's moral obligation to provide for his family. This scene, like the story in The Arena, is an expression of the popular belief in woman's religious and moral superiority.

The belief that women were innately qualified to be reformers was encouraged by the fact that major social reforms of the time were indeed being carried out by females. The Hull House settlement

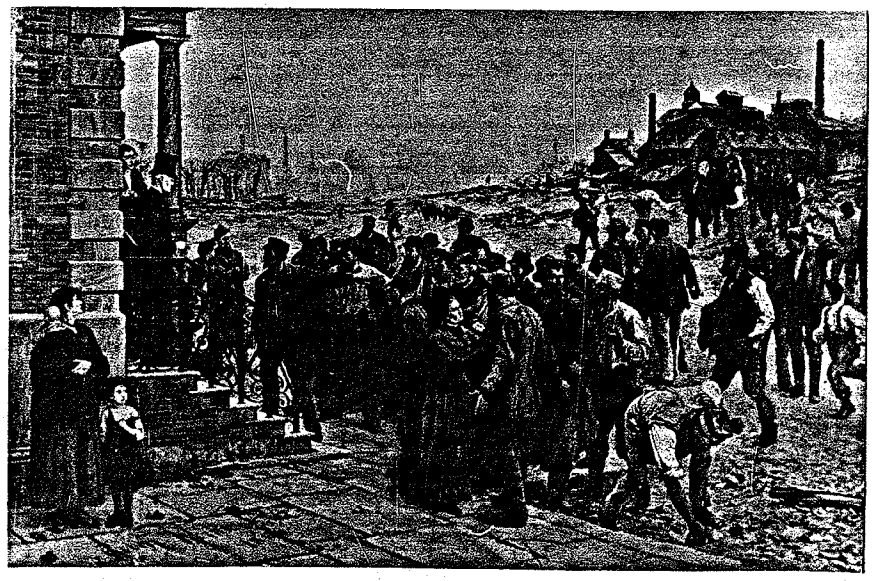


Fig. 43 Robert Koehler, The Strike, 1886, 71 1/2 x 108 1/2, private collection

established in Chicago by Jane Addams in 1889, inspired wide-spread reforms in American city slums. Each new settlement was created and staffed by women. Women led the fight for child labor laws and industrial safety regulations, and women were the principal force behind the temperance movement of the 1880's. It was assumed that, as naturally faithful, pure, spiritual beings, they had a duty to redeem the rest of the world.

Eakins' paintings give no hint of this common attitude. His quiet, thoughtful women could perhaps be seen as virtuous and modest, but there is no cause to believe that such was Eakins' intention. He once wrote to Fanny saying:[31]

> Of all religions the christian is the most intolerant and inconsistent and no one without living here can know what a frightful war it wages against everything that is good.

It is no wonder with an attitude like this, that Eakins did not portray women as religious visions cum Abott Thayer. In fact, he was not at all impressed with the spiritual duties of women. On another occasion he wrote:[32]

> When I see genuflexions [sic] & crossings & clap trap & wood virgins gilt & statues in clay with gold crowns all jewelled on their heads I want to laugh always and I pity those who believe in them and I look down on them as my inferiors. ... My God. Fanny, if you ever will make a habit of going to church I'll think less of you for it.

In these anti-religious opinions he moved even further from any popular concept of woman.

Another trait of Eakins' image of woman is his categorical exclusion of a universally female characteristic, her ability to bear children. Motherhood is a natural way of defining woman on a physical as well as emotional level, yet to my knowledge, Eakins never represented a woman and child together on the same canvas. His only baby picture is that of his niece, Ella Crowell, playing on the brick walk in Baby at Play (fig. 44), and her mother is nowhere in sight. Eakins also created one composition entitled Mother (fig. 45)[33]. This is an unusual painting in view of similarly labeled compositions by other artists. The subject of the portrait is Mrs. Dallas T. Gandy, sister of the Eakins' close friend Addie Williams. Mrs. Gandy looks down to her right, seemingly lost in thought. Her solemnly composed features reveal no glimpse of the joy, awe, or gentleness traditionally evoked by motherhood. There is nothing about this painting to distinguish it from his other portraits of single or married women.

The profundity of Eakins' omission is not apparent until one realizes that woman's role as mother was a facet of womanhood that was glorified, if not idolized, in Eakins' day. According to nineteenth century literature on the subject, the ability to bear children was one of woman's most important functions and artists frequently portrayed this theme. The work of Mary Cassatt, for example, is primarily a celebration of motherhood. In many intimate scenes she emphasized the tender love and spiritual

Fig. 44 Thomas Eakins, Baby at Play, 1876, private collection

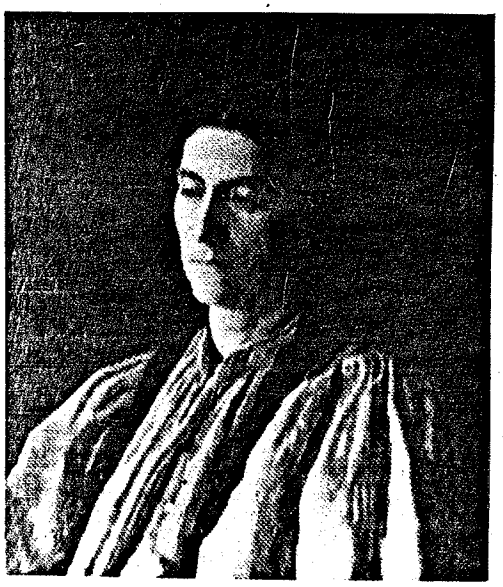


Fig. 45 Thomas Eakins, Mother, 1903, 24 1/8 x 20 1/4, National Collection of Fine Arts

communion of mother and child by portraying them in close physical relationships. Affectionate gestures and the expression of warm compassion seen in Baby's First Caress (fig. 46), are typical of her depiction of woman's proper attitude toward her child. Such rosy, loving scenes were the popular way of picturing motherhood. William Henry Lippincott created an image of the leisure class mother in his 1887 painting, Infantry in Arms, now part of the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Mother and children have apparently just finished a meal and a little girl has pushed back her chair to come lean against her mother's lap while the nurse holds the baby. A woman with this financial status could leave the more exhausting care of her children to the servants, taking over herself when she wished to play the role of adoring mother.

Philosophers and theologians of the day impressed upon their contemporaries the sacred duty of women to bear children. Marriage meant motherhood for anyone who was physically capable. Woman's role as mother was the major factor in her traditional restriction to a home sphere, but even feminists of the time felt that this was a special gift given her by God. They turned the argument around to work for their cause. Francis Cobbe felt that woman should play a part in government because "it is 'the potential Motherhood' in women which has, through the ages, restrained the baseness of humanity and softened the rough edges of the savage."[34] Elizabeth Cady Stanton was more outspoken in her admiration of this female

Fig. 46 Mary Cassatt, Baby's First Caress, pastel on paper, 1891, 30 x 24, New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, Conn.

characteristic:[35]

> We are, as a sex, infinitely superior to men, and if we were free and developed, healthy in body and mind, as we should be under natural conditions, our motherhood would be our glory. That function gives women such wisdom and power as no male ever can possess...

In the eyes of nineteenth century society, woman's ability to bear a man's sons was next to godliness. She was often praised as the "mother of the race."[36] Only woman and God could create life, her love for her children being a reflection of His divine love for His children. This adulatory attitude finds the height of visual expression in the madonna images of George de Forest Brush. Some felt that through motherhood woman's position was restored from the fallen state of Eve. It was the Virgin Mary, they reasoned, who brought redemption to the world by bearing Jesus. The Madonna image symbolized the piety, purity, and superior capacity of women for love. By using a modern setting and his own wife and children for models, Brush contemporized the Renaissance madonna and child image. A tondo of 1895 called Mother and Child (fig. 47) is one of many such intimate scenes. The wide-eyed innocence of the naked little girl and serene expression on the delicately structured face of the mother convey an idea of the sanctity of their relationship. The huge leg of mutton sleeves, popular in the nineties, place the image in nineteenth century America. Brush's madonna paintings and portraits of women were much in demand and Mother and Child received the seal of approval at the Pan American Exposition when a gold medal was

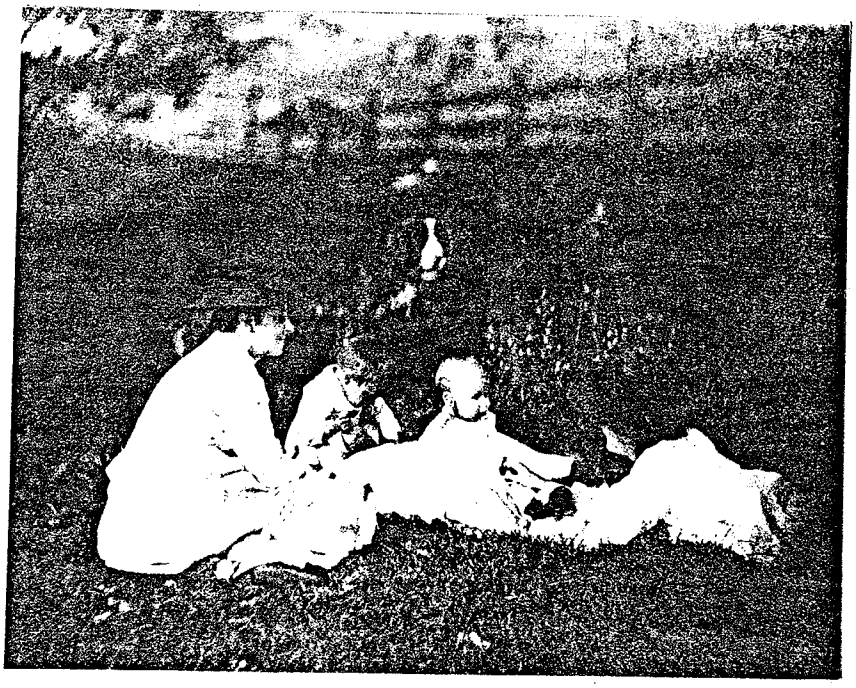
Fig. 47 George DeForest Brush, Mother and Child, 1895, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

conferred upon it. Motherhood continued to be glorified or even deified by writers, speakers, and artists until it was finally enshrined in 1915 with its own special day of recognition. President Wilson explained at the first national celebration of Mother's Day that this was a day set aside, "to express our love and reverence for the mothers of our country."[37]

It would appear that Eakins made a conscious decision not to include motherhood in his paintings of women as precedent and inspiration for that theme existed in abundance. Not only was it a very popular subject in the visual arts, but Eakins was a frequent visitor to his sister Fanny's farm in Avondale where he often played with her children. Though Eakins and his wife had no children of their own, Goodrich notes that their house on Mount Vernon Street was often filled with nieces and nephews.[38] It is evident from the photographs he took, that Eakins saw pictorial possibilities in these family scenes. Gordon Hendricks has reproduced several of these pictures in his books on Thomas Eakins, including one of Eakins' little nieces and nephews wading in the pond with Susan, another of them huddled against their mother (fig. 48), and a third of both Susan and Fanny playing in the grass with two of the babies (fig. 49).[39] Eakins' omission of similar subjects in his paintings, his categorical exclusion of a mother image, is his final phase of isolating women from their traditional roles and giving them an identity in and of themselves.

Fig. 48 Thomas Eakins, Frances Crowell and three of her children, photo. 1890.

Fig. 49 Thomas Eakins, Frances Crowell, two of her children, and Susan Eakins, photograph.



An overview of Eakins' paintings of women has found them to be representations of thoughtful, intelligent individuals removed from their sacred role as mothers, stripped bare of their carefully guarded social veneer, separated from the decorative environment that would compliment their ornamental function, and isolated from men, the source of their financial, legal and social identity. This image deviated from the most socially acceptable ideas of woman's abilities and duties, and was therefore unacceptable to prospective clients. Upper class women of Philadelphia, New York and Boston patronized artists such as William Merrit Chase, Joseph DeCamp, William Tarbell and John Singer Sargent, who created visions of the true woman. Eakins' paintings might be seen more accurately as visions of the contemporary woman trapped between traditional social expectations and ideas of equality and freedom.

FOOTNOTES - PART I

[1]Anne Firor Scott, The American Woman: Who Was She? (New Jersey, 1971) pp. 13, 16.

[2]William L. O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave. (Chicago, 1969) p. 148.

[3]Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work. (New York, 1933) p. 123.

[4]A friend of Thomas Eakins, Fairman Rogers, commissioned the artist to make a picture of his new carriage, the first four-in-hand in Philadelphia. Goodrich states in his catalogue that three couples appear on the box of the carriage in this painting known as A May Morning in the Park. Of these six tiny figures, one is clearly distinguishable as a woman, Mrs. Fairman Rogers. The others are less distinct. This is without question primarily a painting of four horses and a carriage. Next to nothing can be gathered about the figures, who are the secondary subjects. Also, Eakins' portrait of J. Carroll Beckwith included Beckwith's wife in a painting within the painting. In this manner her image is carefully separated from his and there can be no interaction between the figures.

[5]Margaret McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted. (printed privately, 1946) pp. 112-113.

[6]Jacqueline Zaro, The Anonymous Young Woman In American Painting, 1880-1963, unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1966, pp. 8-10.

[7]Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle, Nancy Schrom Dye, Women In American Society. (Massachusetts, 1972) p. 26.

[8]Thorstein Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class. (New York, 1924) p. 180.

[9]This is not to imply that there is no relationship between Mrs. Frishmuth and the setting. There is an amusing analogy between the old matron in black and her ancient musical instruments rendered in muted tones of brown and grey. For biographical information on Mrs. Frishmuth and a catalogue of the musical instruments in this portrait see Haughon Synnove, "Thomas Eakins' Portrait of Mrs. William D. Frishmuth," Antiques (November, 1973) pp. 836-839.

[10]Fairfax Downey, Portrait of an Era as Drawn by C. D. Gibson. (New York, 1936) p. 110.

[11]Ibid., p. 269.

[12]Ibid., p. 132.

[13]Susan Eakins, Letter to Alfred Mitchell answering his request for information about Thomas Eakins. Archives of American Art - microfilm.

[14]McHenry, Thomas Eakins, p. 130.

[15]Regina Schulte, "Tom Eakins - Painter," We Women (July, 1944) p. 4.

[16]Fairfield Porter, Thomas Eakins. (New York, 1959) p. 18.

[17]Robert E. Riegel, American Women: A Story of Social Change. (New Jersey, 1970) p. 36. By 1900 and thereafter women were much less concerned with preserving a white complexion.

[18]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 183, CL. 259.

[19]Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class, pp. 375-376.

[20]S. L. Louis, Decorum: A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress. (New York, 1882) p. 68.

[21]Ibid., pp. 54, 60-62, 68.

[22]Thomas Eakins, Letter to Frances Eakins. (June 19, 1867) Mailed from Paris. Archives of American Art - microfilm.

[23]Riegel, American Women, p. 182.

[24]Patricia Hills, The Painters America, Rural and Urban Life, 1810-1910. (New York, 1974) pp. 108-110.

[25]Augustus Tack, Centennial Exhibition of the Works of George Fuller (New York, 1923) Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. pp. xv, xvi.

[26]Francis Cobbe, The Duties of Women. (Boston, 1881) p. 60.

[27]John H. Young, Our Deportment. (Michigan, 1882) p. 98.

[28]Grace H. Dodge, Thoughts of Busy Girls. (New York, 1892) pp. 12-13.

[29]Ronald W. Hogeland, Women and Womanhood in America. (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1973) p 146.

[30]Hamlin Garland, "A Prairie Heroine," Arena (July, 1891) pp. 223-246.

[31]Thomas Eakins, Letter to Frances Eakins, (Good Friday, 1868) Archives of American Art - microfilm.

[32]Thomas Eakins, Letter to Frances Eakins, April 1, 1869. Archives of American Art - microfilm.

[33]There is one other painting that is now called Mother. It is a portrait of Mrs. Helen MacKnight and apparently received the title Mother while in the possession of Charles Bregler, Eakins' student. There is no evidence that Eakins intended it as a painting of motherhood.

[34]Cobbe, Duties of Women, p. 18.

[35]Corcoran Gallery of Art, From Milady to Ms., a Universe '78 Calendar (Washington D.C., 1977) June 5 page.

[36]For examples of the use of this phrase see Florence Howe Hall, Julia Ward Howe and the Woman Suffrage Movement. (Boston, 1913) p. 158; and Transactions of the National Council of Women of the United States. (Philadelphia, 1891) p. 220.

[37]Quoted by Vern L. Bullough, The Subordinate Sex. (Chicago, 1973) p. 312. Julia Ward Howe first suggested a mothers day be observed in the United States in 1872 and in 1904 a Frank Hering began campaigning for such a day in Indiana. The first actual Mother's Day took place in Philadelphia in 1907 at the instigation of Anna Jarvis, where it was celebrated each year thereafter. It was not until 1915 that congress authorized President Wilson to proclaim Mother's Day an annual national observance. Father's Day received national recognition in 1936.

[38]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 97.

[39]Gordon Hendricks, The Photographs of Thomas Eakins. (New York, 1972).

PART TWO

The preceding portion of this thesis examined Eakins' paintings in a context of contemporaneous American paintings portraying women. It revealed basic differences between the image of woman conveyed through his works and the "true woman" image that was so popular in literature and the visual arts at that time. An understanding of woman's social position and environment in the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century will help clarify the seemingly unusual view of woman in Eakins' paintings. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he recorded more than just his sitters' physical appearances, economic status, or an ideal of fashionable femininity. Eakins' portraits and pictures reveal a mental and emotional state common among American women who were at this time becoming increasingly conscious of the restrictions placed on them by society. The restrictive settings in Eakins' paintings of women seem to echo their stifled position in society. The isolation, introspection, inactivity and discontent expressed by women in one painting after another correspond closely to the effects of their subordinate social position and of their new awareness of this inequality. Just as Eakins recorded in his paintings new inventions, medical advances and important events or figures in sports, science, and the fine arts, so too he recorded the process of change occurring in woman's world.

There is no doubt that Eakins used his intellect to investigate and capture character as much as he used his eye to record the physical presence of his sitters. Eakins advised his students:[1]

> Strain your brain more than your eye. ... You can copy a thing to a certain limit. Then you must use intellect.

A friend once described Eakins as "sincere, unaffected and a thinker."[2] He continued, "one felt him to be a man of originality and convictions and apart from the mass of his contemporaries." Eakins' ability to use his intellect to analyze, interpret and delve deeper into the character of his subject does cause the imagery of women in his works to stand out as uniquely representative of a generation of silent, frustrated, helplessly inactive women.

To analyze more fully the meaning behind Eakins' unconventional representation of women, it will be necessary to examine some of the characteristics of his paintings in relationship to the realities of woman's position at that time. First, the background settings in Eakins' paintings of contemporary women generally remain quite restrictive. In his works the female form is, with few exceptions, relegated to interiors. Even when the setting is ill-defined, the limited space of the portrait and dark background give the impression of an interior. In the two cases where contemporary women are portrayed outdoors, Shad Fishing at Gloucester and A May Morning in the Park, the ladies are not central to the subjects of the paintings, but passive bystanders to the activity of the men involved.[3] The watercolor version of the shad fishing scene, called Taking up the Net, was painted in the same year and shows just the fishermen working; all women have been removed from the picture. Katherine, Lady and a Setter Dog, and The Actress (fig. 50) are all paintings of women in masculine

interiors. The actress, Suzanne Santje, is seated in a gentleman's easy chair under a portrait of her father in a dark room that could be a parlor or a man's study.[4] The whole atmosphere is heavy, as if the room were filled with cigar smoke. Dark red curtains and a somber-colored carpet add to the slightly oppressive quality of the setting. In this painting Miss Santje occupies a man's space; in reality she inhabited a man's world.

The chair the actress sits in deserves special attention. It is an Elizabethan, spool-style, upholstered armchair, an inexpensive style of furniture popular throughout the United States in the fifties and sixties. Due to its massive shape, heavy appearance and the dark wood and fabric, this particular chair was more suited to a man's taste than to that of a woman, yet after 1876 Eakins only posed women in it. Earlier it had appeared in two of his paintings of men, a portrait of Dr. Rand of 1874 and The Zither Player, a watercolor of 1876.[5] After this time Eakins began painting the portraits of confined, thinking women in which the chair plays a prominent part. In the portrait of Katherine (fig. 1, p. 13), the first in which the artist employed the chair, its rigid, tall back and high, encompassing arms completely contain the young girl's figure. Although she is not dwarfed by it, only one foot extends beyond the boundaries of the chair's contours into the open space of the room. Later Mrs. Brinton, Mrs. Mahon, Miss Amelia Van Buren, and Suzanne Santje were all posed in this seat. Helen Parker was portrayed beside,

Fig. 50 Thomas Eakins, The Actress, 1903, 80 x 59 1/2, Philadelphia Museum of Art

and Elizabeth Crowell in front of it. The size of the Victorian chair and its seemingly immovable weight contribute to a restrictive character in the settings of these paintings.

Although little is known about the individual circumstances of most of Eakins' sitters, a general look at the legal, economic, and social condition of women living in Pennsylvania between 1860 and 1910 reveals a comparatively restrictive environment common to all his sitters that parallels the confining settings of Eakins' paintings.[6] For example, no woman could vote in an election at any level of government,as full suffrage for women was not adopted in an eastern state until after Eakins' death. Nor could any woman sit on a jury, and married women were not allowed to sue in court to protect their rights. At least until 1872 it was illegal for Pennsylvania women to serve the audience in theaters, operas, or licensed places of entertainment. Because married women could not make legally binding contracts, except to contract for a sewing machine or the improvement of their own property, they could not easily engage in business.

By common law when a woman married, her husband gained custody of her person, her property, and their future children. Although such property was not liable for his debts, she could neither sell it, lease it, loan it, or give it away without his consent. Should she obtain a divorce on the grounds of her husband's adultery she

forfeited half the money and property she had brought to the marriage and received no compensation from his property. Even if her husband died and left no will or children the wife received only half of their joint estate.

Social restrictions binding nineteenth century American women were often more confining than the legal strictures. The first law of a woman's conduct was the expectation that she would submit entirely to her husband's authority, or at least give that appearance in public. Even as children, girls were taught to repress excessive behavior and physical activity in favor of quiet, ladylike conduct. Although working girls and business women generally travelled to and from work unchaperoned, as late as 1904 a book of etiquette counseled its readers to engage a companion for extensive travel and all social occasions until they were married or had enough years experience of society to be past their youth and above reproach.[7] In the event of a death in the family, the women withdrew from social affairs and donned black mourning apparel for a respectable period ranging from three months to two years depending on the relationship with the deceased.[8] This custom severely curtailed women's activities whenever a death occurred.

The social atmosphere of Eakins' lifelong home, Philadelphia, was perhaps more confining than that of other eastern cities. A strong Quaker heritage was partly responsible for its conservative

moral atmosphere. Agnes Replier wrote about her city in 1899 that here tradition seemed to be unmoved by logic. She observed in contemporary Philadelphians a reticence that she believed descended from the decorous mental attitude that had provided for much prudery in years past, and she pointed out Quakerism as its source.[9] Added to this was the influence of a strong Irish Catholic community. The Irish started migrating to Philadelphia in significant numbers in the forties, due to a potato famine in Ireland. They were the largest group of foreign-born people in the city each year between 1860 and 1910 and accounted for ten to fifteen percent of the city's total population.[10] The Irish Catholic had strict attitudes toward sex and propriety that were on a par with Victorian Protestant mores.[11] They reinforced the conservative Quaker atmosphere already well-established in Philadelphia. Not only was Eakins' idea of woman's place shaped in this city, but most of his female subjects were Philadelphians, living in its strict, tradition-bound atmosphere.

Dress provided another, more physical restraint for women. Tight corsets were worn throughout the century and into the early 1900's, making it difficult to breathe naturally and impossible to engage in any strenuous activity (fig. 51). Eakins' portrait of his student, Elizabeth L. Burton (fig. 52), reveals the effects of this confining contraption. She is posed in a three-quarter

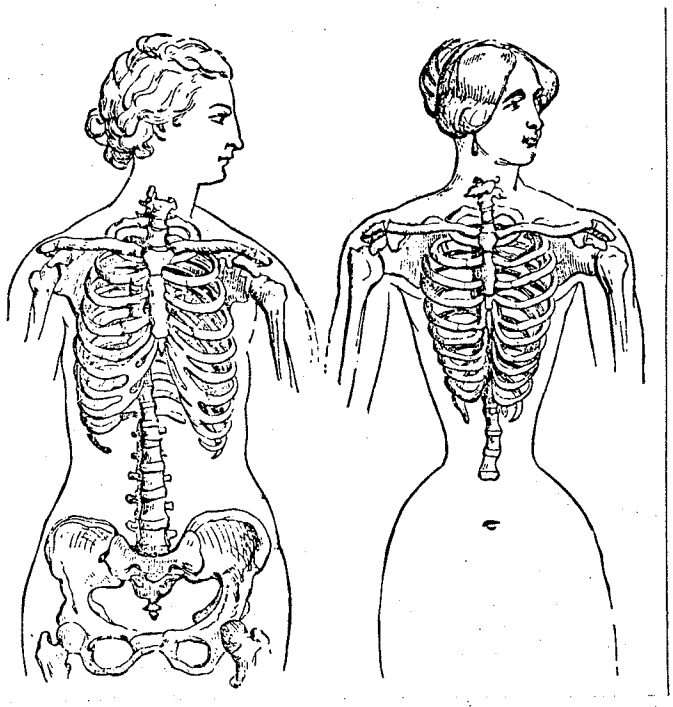


Fig. 51 Illustration of the effects of corset wearing on human anatomy

Fig. 52 Thomas Eakins, Elizabeth L. Burton, 1906, 30 x 25, Minneapolis Institute of Arts

length portrait with one hand on a chair back, the other on her hip above which her tightly-bound waist gives way to the satiny folds of a gathered bodice. This is another portrait in which Eakins probes the thoughtful character of his subject who is isolated from the viewer by her introspective gaze. A raking light from the left that leaves much of her face in shadow adds a dramatic quality to the painting. This portrait, painted in 1906, documents the use of corsets into the twentieth century, even by women who might have freed themselves of other social conventions. In the sixties the hoop skirt added to the perils of the corset, making even simple movements a test of ingenuity. To dance, sit, move through narrow doorways or squeeze into a carriage required careful strategy and maneuvering on the part of the wearer. From 1870 to 1875, fashionable ladies struggled with large bustles and cumbersome trains, and in the second half of the decade, with a dress called the tie-back. The female vocalist in Eakins' painting, The Pathetic Song (fig. 6, p. 30), wears apparel of this type, which consisted of a tight bodice, long train, and floor-length, narrow skirt that prohibited the wearer taking a full step. In the eighties, the pull-back replaced the tie-back in popularity (fig. 53). This dress had a skirt as tight as that of the previous decade and a large bustle to compound one's tribulations. The lady in a pull-back had to take tiny steps to keep her legs from being outlined against her skirt at every move. Woman's dress throughout the nineties

Fig. 53 Pull-Back Dress, illus. from fashion magazine, 1880's.

Fig. 54 Thomas Eakins, Jane Kershaw, photograph

consisted of long, heavy outer garments, high collars, tightly-laced corsets, and ballooning sleeves (fig. 54). Many doctors cited constrictive clothing and lack of exercise as a major cause of illness and mental stress among women. Thorstein Veblen theorized that these fashions were popular with men because they made it nearly impossible for the wearer to do any useful task and they were expensive due to the sheer quantity of material involved. In his terms, women were forced by their dress to remain idle and consume conspicuously, thereby advertising their masters' wealth.[12] In any terms, woman's dress created a constrictive and potentially harmful personal environment.

The restraints placed on women by dress, religion, social customs and the law, created a restrictive environment around them, an environment which I suggest is reflected in the restrictive, dark interiors of Eakins' paintings. Had Eakins painted outdoor settings, as did many of his colleagues, he might have described feminine attributes in terms of nature. Winslow Homer juxtaposed hardy, sturdy fishwives with the roaring ocean[13] and personified the seasons as female figures. Childe Hassam placed his subject outside, in The Flower Garden, allowing the viewer to draw analogies between beautiful, sweet, tender woman and fragrant, decorative, fragile blossoms. Robert Reid compared a pretty woman to the delicate, pale petals that surround her in The Iris

(fig. 55). While these artists alluded to ideal qualities by reference to nature, Eakins, through the absence of a light, airy setting in his paintings, expressed woman's confined state in real life.

The spatial imagery employed in short stories by Kate Chopin, a late nineteenth century feminist fiction writer, is similar to settings in Eakins' paintings. She was concerned in many of her publications with the mental and physical state of women in relation to the role society built for them. Her short stories are strewn with women who became aware of their inner selves and fought to preserve their newfound identities in the face of what they had been told they should be. Her characters are caged by tradition and social expectations, symbolized by Edna Pontellier's pigeon house.[14] Edna, the heroine of The Awakening, found it impossible to escape her suppressive environment, even in the little house she decorated and moved into. She did not find spiritual freedom until she discovered the sea. Then she merged her own body with this infinitely large space, releasing herself finally from the bonds of society. Women in Eakins' paintings never attain freedom or release in the outdoors, either physically or spiritually. They remain forever lost in thought as if in Edna's pigeon house -- the confining space of a male-oriented society.

Eakins' restriction of the figure of woman to an interior

Fig. 55 Robert Reid, The Iris, ca. 1899, 44 1/8 x 42 3/4, Metropolitan Museum of Art

setting denies her the activity of the great outdoors. When he painted men outside they were often reveling in physical activity. He portrayed nude males swimming in a pond (fig. 56), scullers straining at the oars of their boats (fig. 57), friends sailing, sportsmen hunting for rail and plover, and athletes playing baseball (fig. 58), boxing and wrestling. Women enjoy no such freedom of movement in Eakins' paintings. This situation is closely paralleled by a contemporary woman's observations of the difference, even as children, in male and female activities:[15]

> ... while the similar pleasures of boys are usually amply studied and provided for even at their schools, it is not very often, except in the happiest families and among the wisest parents and teachers, that little girls are encouraged or permitted to take their full of the delights of air and exercise. ... But even for them senseless fashions of dress often interfere with health and pleasure; while, as they grow older, the lesson is too often enforced by their parents and governesses and all their teachers and elder relations, that they must put a curb ... on their physical and mental energy, their harmless animal spirits.

Restraints placed on the activities of little girls carried over into adulthood where the true lady of leisure was expected to remain idle or occupy herself with relatively simple domestic and social duties. Limited education and career opportunities helped ensure her passivity, and to become a lawyer or doctor, an architect or engineer, she would have had to go against long-standing traditions and brave the disapproval of friends and

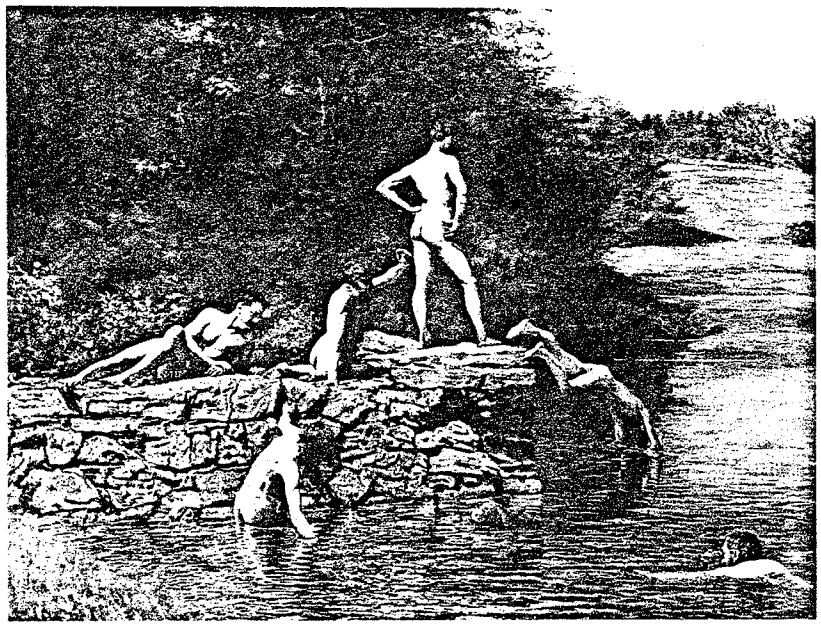


Fig. 56 Thomas Eakins, The Swimming Hole, 1883, 27 x 36, Collection of the Fort Worth Art Association

Fig. 57 Thomas Eakins, John Biglin in a Single Scull, watercolor, 1874, 16 3/4 x 23, Metropolitan Museum of Art

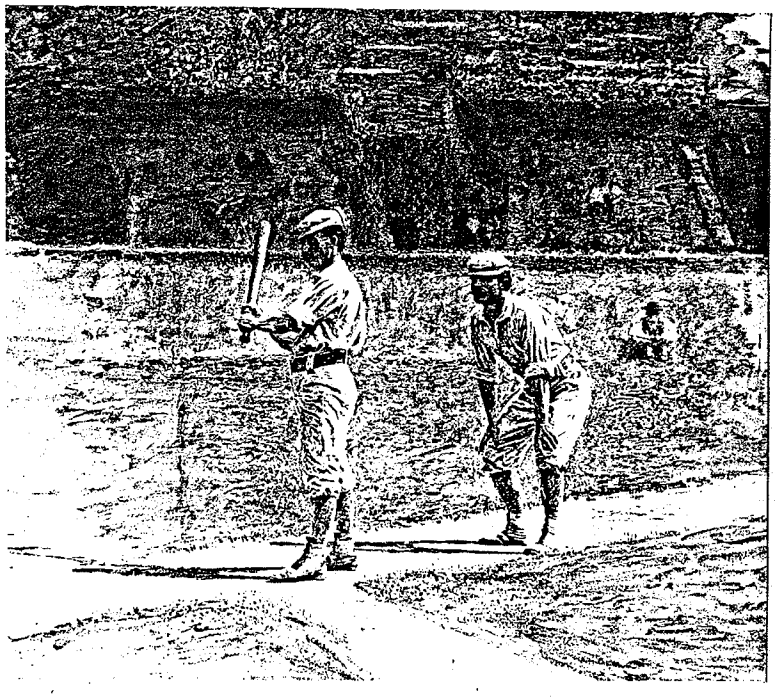


Fig. 58 Thomas Eakins, Baseball Practice, watercolor, 1875, 9 3/8 x 10 1/2, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

relatives.[16] Once she had the qualifications for these positions, public hostility often made it impossible to practice successfully. Thus, in 1886, only forty-eight women were practicing law in the United States and most practicing women doctors specialized in the care of children.[17] This quote from an 1869 publication on women's rights and responsibilities exemplifies the type of sentiment that kept women in their traditional sphere:[18]

> ... to the married lady who understands her duties and has the will and ability to perform them, there is no occasion and indeed no opportunity for other employments ... the superintendence of her household, the care and nurture of her children ... and the claims of society occupy all her time not devoted to moral and religious duty.

Inactivity is a major characteristic of Eakins' paintings of contemporary women. His sitters do not even engage in the mild activities considered suitable for ladies of leisure: writing letters, discussing jewelry, having tea, combing hair, or doing embroidery. All of the preceding were popular subjects with other artists such as Frank Benson, Eastman Johnson, William Paxton, Irving Wiles, Joseph DeCamp and Edmund Tarbell. Eakins, by not portraying these passive activities and by including elements that allude to the limitations of woman's world, has emphasized the resultant inability of most women to act and achieve.

Although a majority of women restricted their activities to

traditional female roles, many of the women Eakins painted were actually active professionals, including pianists, painters, school principals, an actress, and a nurse. Most of these women had undoubtedly faced difficulties in attaining their professional goals and although they were active at the time he painted them, the pursuit of a career often caused a certain amount of isolation and social censure which may have been a factor in Eakins' repeated decision to portray professional women in quiet attitudes while frequently depicting their male counterparts in action.

In several of his paintings of professional women, Eakins emphasized their inactivity through lighting and posture. He chose a three-quarter length format for his portrait of Mrs. Mary Hallock Greenewalt (fig. 59), a concert pianist who revolutionized musical performances by introducing her own patented accompaniment of colored lights.[19] Her hands, by which she earned a living entertaining large audiences, lie palms up in her lap, empty and still. The awkward positioning of her arms and fingers makes them conspicuous in their immobility. Beatrice Fenton, the subject of The Coral Necklace (fig. 60), was a successful sculptress. She, too, is completely idle in Eakins' depiction of her. She is seated, wearing a pretty dress and long string of coral beads. Instead of a hammer and chisel or a lump of modeling clay, she holds a spread fan in her hands and stares away from the viewer into oblivion.

Fig. 59 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. Mary Hallock Greenewalt, 1903, 36 x 24, Wichita Art Museum

Fig. 60 Thomas Eakins, The Coral Necklace, 1904, 43 x 31, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio

Her fixed stare increases the impression of inaction created by the painting. Lady and a Setter Dog (fig. 61) portrays Eakins' wife, Susan, in the studio with their Irish setter. Her inactivity is accentuated by her bent back, drooping shoulders and the open, inert hand resting in her lap. Although she was an active artist at this time, she is shown here in an attitude of immobility. Miss Amelia Van Buren (fig. 62), another of Eakins' art students, is an equally unlikely looking professional artist. Nothing about her person suggests any past productivity. She is slumped into a chair with her head resting against her arm, a traditional gesture of melancholy. She makes for a sharp contrast to Irving Wiles' concept of the female artist. The Student (fig. 63) of 1910 reveals a well-dressed, pretty young woman mixing paints on her palette. She is engrossed in the task at hand and the expression on her face suggests pleasure and contentment. In contrast, Miss Van Buren appears broodingly glum. In all of these examples Eakins accented the inactivity of the women.

Including those just mentioned, Eakins produced at least eight portraits of women artists, most of them his own students. Their apparent responses to life are varied -- Lilian Hammit (fig. 64) and Elizabeth Coffin confront the viewer in a straightforward fashion while Elizabeth Burton and Beatrice Fenton withdraw into an introspective state of consciousness and Amelia Van Buren and

Fig. 61 Thomas Eakins, Lady and a Setter Dog, ca. 1885, 30 x 23, Metropolitan Museum of Art

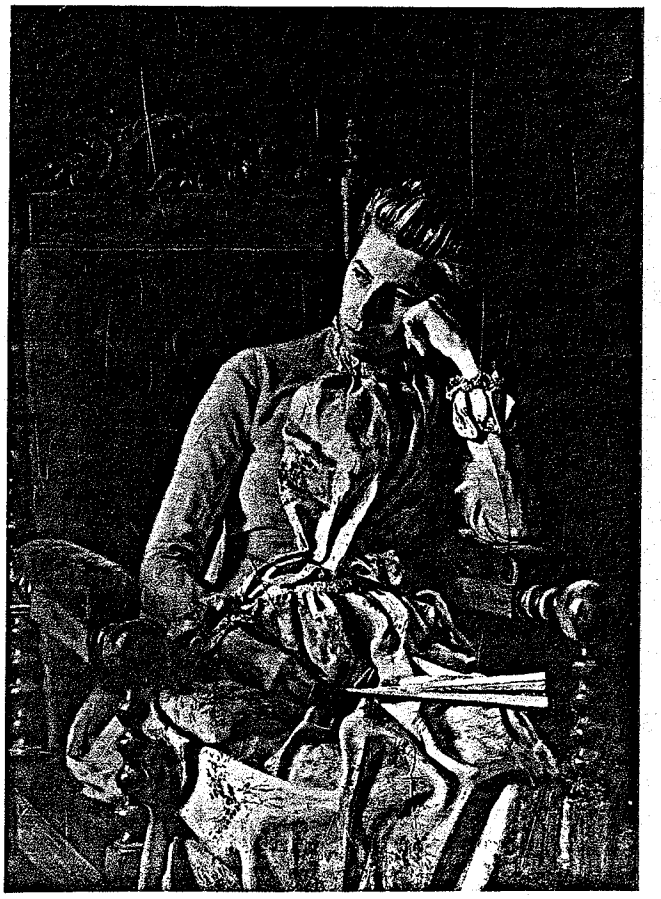


Fig. 62 Thomas Eakins, Miss Amelia Van Buren, 1891, 45 x 32, The Phillips Collection

Fig. 63 Irving Wiles, The Student, 1910

Fig. 64 Thomas Eakins, Lilian Hammit, 1888, 24 x 20, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Susan Eakins, his best students, seem to add disappointment or discouragement to introspection. Eakins captured the individuality of their characters while ignoring the part of their lives with which he was most familiar -- their work. He watched over their progress each week, criticizing and encouraging, yet chose not to portray that aspect of their lives.

Eakins made several portraits of male artists as well. Some of these are just heads or busts, but three depict the men working.[20] The Portrait of J. Carroll Beckwith (fig. 65), for example, pictures the artist standing full-length in his studio. On the easel beside him sits an almost completed painting of his wife. He has his palette and brush in hand and has turned to study the sitter before applying the next stroke of color. His wife passively regards the viewer from her separate canvas. She pokes one finger into her cheek in an awkward fashion. Beckwith seems to concentrate on the sitter, absorbed by his work. This is Eakins' interpretation of the male artist. His representation of female artists, as we have seen, reveals total inactivity.

As has already been suggested, Eakins' tendency to portray women in attitudes of deep thought indicates an awareness of woman's intellectual capacities and her potential to actively contribute to society. In other words, the relative inactivity of the women in his paintings does not indicate acceptance of the belief that women were incapable of important activity outside the home..

Fig. 65 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of J. Carroll Beckwith,

Rather, they are idle in response to the expectations of society. In fact, Eakins painted many of his portraits specifically to honor the achievements in science, math, art and literature of his fellow Americans, both men and women. His Portrait of Mrs. Frishmuth with the collection of musical instruments she donated to the museum of the University of Pennsylvania is one such tribute. He also began a painting of Mrs. Drexel (fig. 66), a collector of fans who did not wish to continue the sittings, and it remains unfinished. Eakins wrote to her concerning the portrait:[21]

> The commission was sought by me because even long before I was presented to you I felt that a worthy and beautiful composition picture could be made of the giver of fans to the Museum, but a portrait of you that did not resemble you, would be false, have no historic value, and would not enhance my reputation.

The last part of this statement was made because Mrs. Drexel offered her maid to pose in her place. It is evident that Eakins felt her contribution to culture was important enough to be recorded for history and he sought her out, as he sought out many of his male subjects, to perform that duty. The Concert Singer (fig. 67) is one more painting that may have been undertaken out of respect for the accomplishments of the singer, Weda Cook. Since few American women, between the Civil War and the turn of the century, made many contributions outside the home, Eakins painted fewer portraits to commemorate worthy women than he painted to honor men. However, he did honor these women whose accomplishments he

Fig. 66 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. Joseph H. Drexel, 1900, 47 x 37, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Fig. 67 Thomas Eakins, The Concert Singer, 1892, 75 x 54, Philadelphia Museum of Art

recognized in a few individual portraits, and most of the other women he painted are shown deep in thought, suggesting a capacity for intelligent action.

The major difference between Eakins' paintings of thinking men and women lies in the large number of male portraits in which the men are engaged in activities or are surrounded by objects that attest to the product of their thought. The education of Dr. Gross manifests itself in his ability to save lives on the operating table as evidenced in The Gross Clinic. The research of Professor Rowland (fig. 68) has resulted in the invention of the diffraction grating he holds on his lap and the development of scientific formulas, some of which Eakins included on the frame. Professor William Smith Forbes (fig. 69) was instrumental in creating the Anatomy Act of Pennsylvania, a copy of which he holds in his portrait. This law served as a model for similar acts in other states. Dr. Wood (fig. 70), a well-known physician, therapeutist, and naturalist is pictured at his desk with pen in hand, where stacks of books and a wastebasket of crumpled papers testify to his productive life.

The contrast in productivity between Eakins' paintings of men and those of women is clear. The intellectual energy of the men he portrays has been directed through socially acceptable channels to find release in a profession. The intensely thoughtful gaze of the women, on the other hand, is usually concentrated on

Fig. 68 Thomas Eakins, Professor Henry A. Rowland, 1891, 80 x 54, Addison Gallery of Art

Fig. 69 Thomas Eakins, Professor William Smith Forbes, 1905, 84 x 48, Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia

Fig. 70 Thomas Eakins, Dr. Horatio C. Wood, 1889, 64 x 50, The Detroit Institute of Arts

nothing more significant than a fan or cat and more often on empty space. There is no activity or anything in the settings to suggest that their mental processes, whose very existence was denied by society, found acceptable outlets. Eakins' portraits, then, show women to have been confined to their thoughts while men found release in activity.

Though most of the contemporary women he painted are idle, Eakins did create a series between 1876 and 1881 of women knitting and spinning. These are historical pictures of the activities of colonial women. Each is shown busy with a task that was vital to her pioneer family but which had become the business of machines and factory workers by Eakins' day. Eakins' sister Margaret learned to operate a spinning wheel and posed for two versions of Spinning (fig. 71). She wore an old-fashioned dress for the picture and Eakins created a colonial kitchen setting around her industrious figure. The nude model from William Rush Carving his Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River posed again for Eakins' painting of The Courtship and the chaperone from the Rush picture knits busily in Seventy Years Ago (fig. 72). These scenes provide a look into the past and even remind one that women were capable of contributing significantly to the economy when given the opportunity as they were in colonial America. In Eakins' art only these women of a past age are shown occupied with productive work; his contemporaries, regardless of their professions, are associated

Fig. 71 Thomas Eakins, Spinning, watercolor 1881, 14 x 10 7/8, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 72 Thomas Eakins, Seventy Years Ago, 1877, watercolor, 15 5/8 x 11, Art Museum of Princeton University

with inactivity.

Near the end of the century, the restrictions on woman's activity slackened somewhat. Roller-skating became a popular activity, bicycles with equal-sized tires and girl's frames were invented, and bloomers, knickerbockers and divided skirts allowed women to participate in these sports. Eakins encouraged his sisters to skate, swim, boat, and sail. He made photos of Margaret in her bathing costume of trousers, short skirt, and blouse (fig. 73). He went biking with his friend Helen Parker down Chestnut Hill.[22] Yet while Gibson and others were portraying this new, more active woman in the great outdoors (fig. 74), Eakins ignored her existence in his paintings to concentrate on the isolation of women in a restrictive environment. He continued, throughout his career, to convey the message of his contemporaries' inability to develop their talents fully and their consequent escape into thought.

The association of restrictive settings with inactivity, isolation, and ponderous thought is compounded in some portraits by an air of discontent and possible unhappiness. The artist painted Lady and a Setter Dog (fig. 61, p.117) in 1885, a year of tension and uncertainty for the artist and his wife, and Eakins' last year at the Academy. In this picture Eakins broke every rule of formal portraiture. Susan's slumped posture makes it seem as if she

Fig. 73 Thomas Eakins, Margaret in Swimming Costume, photograph

Fig. 74 Charles Dana Gibson, Picturesque America, 1900, "Life" illustration

carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. Her head is cocked and she regards the viewer with a quizzical expression that is scarcely becoming. One ankle extends immodestly from beneath the hem of her unstylish old dress. This foot is clad in a bright red stocking which immediately draws attention to the impertinent appendage. Her whole attitude, here, constitutes a break from the posture and facial expression customary in portraiture, just as her lifestyle broke away from the rules of acceptable ladylike conduct. Susan Macdowell Eakins was an artist from an aetheist family of free-thinkers. While one of Eakins' students she had not only submitted herself to the indiscretions of his art program, but as a student spokesperson at the Academy she had demanded increased life study for the female pupils. She freely admitted that she had never had any training in household affairs.[23] When they married, Susan lessened the time spent on her own work, though Eakins apparently felt "she was a better painter than he was -- if only she kept at it more often,"[24] and took over the business arrangements for her husband. Her admiration of his work was a great moral support to him and she played an active part in promoting his career, but continued to paint as well. Each had a studio on the fourth floor and a maid relieved Susan of her household duties until the early nineties when financial pressures forced them to economize. The Eakins' account books show the sale of several portraits by Susan during their marriage and she

also exhibited during this time. After Eakins' death Susan devoted all her spare time to painting.[25] Just as she stood apart, in many ways, from the mass of her contemporaries, in this portrait her figure in its cool blue gown stands out jarringly from the warm hues of her environment. Eakins portrayed her seated in their studio with several of his works in the background and a Japanese picture book resting unsteadily on her sloping lap as if about to slide off. She takes no interest in this genteel means of leisure activity approved by society even though it would seemingly have had special meaning for an artist. Friends described Susan as gay, witty, and humorous, yet her face and posture, as Eakins portrayed her, deny that characterization.[26] Rather, he seems to have recorded the hardships brought about by her unconventional approach to life and perhaps even more, the toll exacted by the anxiety and disappointments of her husband's battle-scarred career.

Lady and a Setter Dog bears a marked resemblance to the Portrait of Dora Wheeler (fig. 75) by William Merrit Chase.[27] This is an unusual image for Chase who has made more of a character study than he did in his paintings of bits of femininity lost in cluttered interiors. Dora Wheeler was a successful artist and had been one of his students. Miss Wheeler assumes an unconventional pose, more assertive than that of Susan Eakins. The sole of one foot is turned toward the viewer and she pokes her cheek with an index finger. In

Fig. 75 William Merrit Chase, Portrait of Miss Dora Wheeler, 1883, 62 1/2 x 65 1/4, Cleveland Museum of Art

these details Chase departs from the norms of posture usually found in acceptable female portraiture, recalling, as Karal Ann Marling has established, a whole group of portraits of American artists painted in the eighties that deviate from the conventions of portraiture.[28] Lady and a Setter Dog also seems to fit into this category; however, taken in the context of Eakins' whole body of works, Lady and a Setter Dog reveals much more than an artist depicted in a new style of portraiture. As mentioned, it was at this time that elements of Philadelphia society were becoming increasingly hostile toward Susan's husband because of the beliefs he held, and she shared, about the value of the nude model and professional studies for female artists. This painting portrays a woman who responds to that contemporary Victorian environment with questioning and a subdued spirit.

In 1891 with the Portrait of Amelia Van Buren (fig. 62, p.118), Eakins created another unconventional image. It should be remembered that although this painting is known by the sitter's name it was not a commissioned portrait; rather, Eakins asked one of his students to model for a picture he wanted to make, a picture he may already have had formulated in his mind. In any case, her pose and facial expression exude discontent. She is slumped over in the confining area of the straight-backed Victorian chair: weary, greying, discouraged. Eakins aged her in this portrait, as he did in paintings of several other sitters, causing her to look even more disconsolate.

Her pretty, bright dress strikes a discordant note with her general attitude. She holds a fan with the very tips of her fingers, as if she had no desire to retain it but kept it for the sake of appearance. The fan, here, and the picture book in Lady and a Setter Dog are emblems of the traditional life these women and many others of the time attempted to escape. The beautiful gown and fan represent one of a woman's social functions -- that she be sweet, ornamental, and demur. Miss Van Buren's apparent reaction to life is altogether contrary to the ideal. Eakins' many photographs of her portray a happy, very attractive, young woman. Yet he has chosen to record for all time her unhappy, dissatisfied demeanor.

Lady and a Setter Dog and Portrait of Amelia Van Buren are two of the best examples of Eakins' pictures of downcast females who experienced the constraints of their environment, but several other portraits reveal a similar response to life. A portrait of Mrs. Eakins (fig. 76) of 1899 is the most revealing psychological study of all. It is a painting of her head only. Her large eyes and lined skin show the strain of hard years and bitter experiences, yet there is deep compassion and kindness mixed with the sorrow. Eakins' perception of human experience and character were remarkably deep and especially in this painting of one he knew and loved so well. Henry James suggested that the great artist:[29]

> ... sees deep into his subject, undergoes it, absorbs it, discovers in it new things that were not on the surface, becomes patient with it, and almost reverent, and in short, enlarges and humanizes the technical problem.

Fig. 76 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. Thomas Eakins, 1899, 20 x 16, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

This is what Eakins has done with this painting of his wife and many of his other portraits, as well.

At the same time that Eakins was painting these portraits of seemingly discontented and self-aware females there was a growing trend among American women toward an awareness of their subordinate position in society. Increasing numbers of women experienced confusion and uncertainty about their goals and values and rebelled at the expectations of society which bound them to a limited role. A few women spoke out about their struggles against tradition. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading first generation suffragist, was one of these.[30]

> The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic conditions into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women impressed me with a strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general, and of women in particular.

Other women such as Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote short stories expressing their dissatisfaction with the old order. Their heroines question traditional values and the housewife/mother role. They explore professional careers, allow themselves to experience sexual feelings, and gain spatial freedom. What Diantha Did, by Gilman, while placing primary emphasis on the honorable position of housework, acknowledges that many women

are not fitted for it and should not be burdened with it. Diantha created a solution to the problem by forming a housekeeping corporation that freed other women to pursue their professional activities. She fought for the right to continue her business after marriage in the face of strong opposition from her fiance and his family. La Folle, heroine of Chopin's short story Beyond the Bayou, conquered her lifelong fear of the bayou and left her own feminine domain to cross into the unknown territory of the master's plantation house. Her physical move across the barrier of the bayou symbolizes the escape of some nineteenth century women from the traditional woman's sphere into a male business and professional world. Gilman's The Crux is a fictive novel which quite frankly discusses the problems of venereal disease. The author defended her position in the preface:[31]

> Some will hold that the painful facts disclosed are unfit for young girls to know. Young girls are precisely the ones who must know them, in order that they may protect themselves and their children to come. The time to know of danger is before it is too late to avoid it.
>
> If some say "Innocence is the greatest charm of young girls, " the answer is, "What good does it do them?"

The small but growing feeling of injustice and discontent among American women had reached its first landmark in 1848 with the meeting at Seneca Falls and the writing of the Declaration

of Sentiments. Based on the Declaration of Independence, this document attempted to expose the social, economic and political inequalities of the American woman. From that moment, a movement of social awareness and positive action toward liberation was launched among women and to a lesser extent, among men.

The campaign for awareness and change touched every facet of the American woman. The abolitionist, Gerrit Smith, wrote to his cousin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in 1855:[32]

> I am amazed that the intelligent women engaged in the "Woman's Rights Movement" see not the relation between their dress and the oppressive evils which they are striving to throw off.

The pro-feminist magazine, The Arena, included a diatribe against the nature of women's apparel in the 1891 editorial called "Fashion's Slaves."[33]

In 1871 a Philadelphia woman, Carrie S. Burnham, having fulfilled all the requirements to vote, attempted to register her ballot. When she was refused she presented her grievance to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court where she gained publicity for woman suffrage, but lost her case.[34]

In 1876 after a long, disappointing search, Susan B. Anthony leased a building in Philadephia from another woman with the intention of forming a national headquarters for the woman's rights movement. When the husband of the leaser discovered the planned

arrangement, he refused to give his consent and Susan Anthony had great difficulty in finding another landlord who would allow his property to be used for her purposes.[35] These situations illustrate the intent of women's rights advocates to inform everyone of the unequal, confined state of women.

Important figures in the woman movement came to Philadelphia to spread the message. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and other leaders joined Susan B. Anthony there to write the Woman's Declaration of 1876. This document demanded women be given places on juries, equal benefits for women in divorce settlements, no more taxation without representation and the elimination of the qualifying term "male" in state constitutions and statutes. They distributed hundreds of copies at the Fourth of July ceremonies on the centennial exhibition grounds.[36] The exhibition itself included a building dedicated to women. It boasted a variety of crafts, inventions, artwork, and professional displays, all created and arranged by women. When the United States Commissioners for the centennial exhibition, three years earlier, had run into financial difficulties, they had enlisted the aid of thirteen women to raise money and promote interest in the exhibition. These women, headed by one of Eakins' sitters, Mrs. Duane Gillespie, formed a complex organization, spread out over

many states, which collected enough subscriptions to finance their own building and a considerable portion of the rest of the exhibition as well. They saw their efforts as a positive step toward raising the level of woman's work and showing the world what she could do.[37]

By the 1890's the woman movement had become a respectable cause and thousands of women joined clubs of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. These clubs were generally more socially than politically oriented and were composed of leisure and semi-leisure class women who participated in its cultural, civic, and philanthropic activities. The NAWSA embraced a wide variety of creeds and philosophies concerning the rights of the American woman.

This provides some evidence of the number of women of Eakins' time who perceived their condition to be too limited by male prescribed tradition and took measures to free themselves in some way. This general mood of discontent and self-awareness is recorded in his paintings.

The Portrait of Anna Lewis (fig. 77) from 1897 represents a young Philadelphia woman who was aware of, and concerned about women's rights and who was active in the Philadelphia branch of the women's rights movement.[38] In this portrait she appears solemn and detached, with no expression of the bright, sunny

Fig. 77 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Anna Lewis, 1897, 28 x 33, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

personality her friends remembered.[39] According to them, she and her sister Lucy were full of fun and held musical afternoons to entertain their friends. She is pictured here in a gay party dress which, along with her reputed personality, is contradicted by the sad expression on her face. Eakins portrayed her as an isolated, thoughtful, and introverted individual, similar in mood to his portraits of Susan Eakins and Amelia Van Buren.

Each of these portraits may be interpreted as a reflection of the frustrations and sorrows faced by women living in a man's world. The type of discontent expressed by female characters in the short stories of Chopin, Gilman and others, also finds expression on the faces of women in Eakins' paintings. The dejected, careworn visages of Amelia Van Buren, Suzanne Santje, Anna Lewis and Susan Eakins suggest a deep malaise that they do not fight. Eakins recorded only the results of the social climate; unlike Chopin, he did not explore solutions or suggest action.

The relationship between Eakins' paintings of introspective, isolated women and a national movement toward woman's awareness does not seem to be coincidental. The questions of women's rights, her capabilities and her responsibilities were discussed in newspapers and magazines, around dinner tables, at lectures, and in clubs. Although Eakins is said to have read little, his wife read "everything she could get her hands on"[40] and very likely

the two discussed current events. As stated earlier, two of Eakins' friends, Anna Lewis and her sister Lucy, both of whom he painted, were actively involved in Philadelphia's women's rights movement. Eakins was a member of more than one intellectual club that met weekly for conversation on all manner of topics.[41] His circle of friends included authors, scientists, doctors, clergymen, engineers, and journalists as well as rural and laboring class people. Talcott Williams, editor of the Philadelphia Press, had introduced Eakins to Whitman, one of the few authors we know Eakins read.[42] In Whitman, Eakins found a kindred spirit and the two talked together while Eakins painted Whitman's portrait. After that Eakins often visited the poet and sometimes attended dinner gatherings at Whitman's on Sundays.[43] Whitman observed in 1882:[44]

> The day is coming when the deep questions of woman's entrance amid the arenas of practical life, politics, the suffrage, etc., will not only be argued all around us, but may be put to decision, and real experiment.

In a milieu such as this, it is inconceivable that Eakins was oblivious of the question of woman's true nature and whether existing laws and customs preserved or smothered it.

Evidence of Eakins' concern with the woman question is not restricted to his paintings and social environment but may also be found in his professional and personal life. Some of the women with whom he associated most closely were testing the con-

ventions concerning their role. He confronted their silent frustrations in both his professional and private life. Not only was he aware of some of the difficulties of their position but he seems to have been of a sympathetic frame of mind.

One indication of Eakins' sympathy for the unpretentious, intelligent, independent woman is his choice of Susan Macdowell for his wife. Though far from society's definition of the ideal, true woman, she was the woman Eakins most loved and admired and whom he chose to marry.

Other evidence that Eakins was sympathetic toward women who were experiencing frustration and discontent with their traditional social position can be found in his teaching career. As an instructor he worked with young women who were determined to become professional artists, and encouraged them to develop qualities traditionally considered unladylike. In the nineteenth century the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where Eakins began teaching in 1876, was considered one of the most progressive art schools in the United States. It had opened its doors to female artists in 1844 by establishing a woman's class to draw from the antique. By 1856 the Academy had attached discreetly placed fig leaves to the antique casts so women were able to work alongside male students. In 1860 a group of female students began meeting to draw from the clothed figure and took turns modeling for one another. Finally, a woman' life class was formed to draw from the naked female figure in 1868.[45] In spite of this liberal attitude, the

course of instruction was far from meeting Eakins' idea of suitable conditions for the study of art. Eakins firmly believed that the nude figure must be the basis of instruction and began expanding the Academy's program accordingly. Shortly after his arrival at the Academy, male models were hired for the first time on a regular basis for the women's life class. Although the study of the nude figure is hardly compatible with the innocence expected of a modest young lady, Eakins encouraged women at the Academy who wished to make a serious study of art to avail themselves of every opportunity to study and draw the human body. Under his supervision a program of extensive anatomy lectures and dissection was advanced for both male and female students. The distasteful chore of dissection is completely at odds with the model of feminine delicacy declared by society to be woman's nature, but Eakins ignored the notion of characteristically female sensibilities as if it did not exist. The only concession made to propriety was that specimens were apparently castrated by the male pupils before use in the women's class.[46] Eakins was also the first to mix classes of men and women at the Academy. He exposed women to the same rigorous training as his male students in order to improve the quality of their education and of their work.

Eakins' teaching practices encouraged young women to a mode of behavior unacceptable to much of society. He recognized and promoted the talents of some of his female pupils. He was most sympathetic with those who wished to break away from tradition to

develop their talents without regard for the conventional concept of ladylike conduct. Because his conduct at the Academy constituted a serious breach of social law, he was often reprimanded by his employers, students' parents, and the community. These chastisements must have made it plain to Eakins just how strong the restrictions on women, and on a man's conduct toward women, were.

Eakins' emphasis on the nude as the basis of study and his unorthodox teaching methods began to draw adverse criticism almost immediately after he started teaching, and early the next year the Directors decided to remove this threat to their authority. They issued a notice requiring Christian Schussele, the official instructor at that time, to supervise Eakins' evening night classes. This move caused Eakins to withdraw his services from the Academy and begin teaching at the Art Students' Union. In March of the next year he was again allowed to teach at the Academy, and when Schussele died in 1879, Eakins became the Academy's professor of drawing and painting. Once again most of his attempts to expand the program to a more liberal study of art for women met with the censure of the Academy's Board of Directors and of the community at large, until he was forced to resign a second time in 1886.

Eakins' policy of providing the same course of instruction for male and female students was the most common source of controversy. Many people agreed with John Young's book of deportment that:[47]

> There is an education appropriate to each sex. Identical education for the two sexes is so unnatural, that physiology protests against it and experience weeps over it.

By 1883 there were as many women as men enrolled in the school and many of these were there to perfect the ladylike accomplishments of drawing and watercolors, not to submit themselves to the rigors of Eakins' course of study. The sentiments of Cecilia Beaux's uncle, who kept her from going to the Academy, were typical of many parents' expectations for their daughters' art education. Beaux remembers his attitude in her autobiography:[48]

> There was no reason to suppose that my trend was to be serious or lasting ... I was a seemly girl and would probably marry. Why should I be thrown into a rabble of untidy and indiscriminate art students and no one knew what influence? So reasoned his chivalrous and also Quaker soul which revolted against the life-class and everything pertaining to it.

It may have been partly to calm such worries that Eakins' students illustrated an article about the art school with scenes from their classes (fig. 78). The article was one of a series in "Scribners" that investigated major art schools but is the only one that included pictures of the course of instruction done by the students themselves.[49] This effort was not sufficient, if that was the intention, to lay to rest the fears of the entire community.

One mother did not hesitate to specify the exact nature of her objections to Mr. Eakins' method of instructing female pupils.

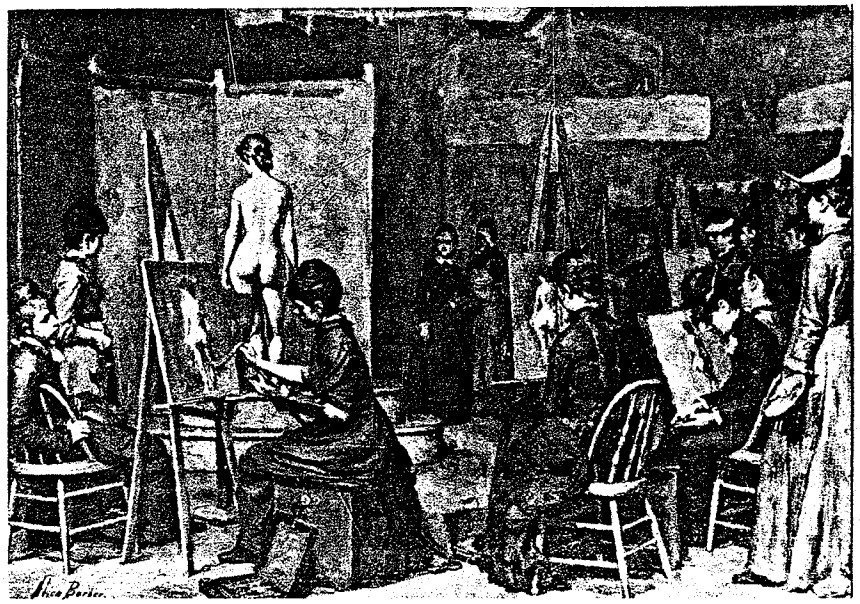


Fig. 78 Alice Barber, Female Life Class, 1879, 12 x 14, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

In a letter to the president of the Academy, in 1882, she questioned:[50]

> Does it pay, for a young lady of a refined, godly household to be urged as the only way of obtaining a knowledge of true art, to enter a class where every feeling of maidenly delicacy is violated, where she becomes so hardened to indelicate sights & words, so familiar with the persons of degraded women & the sight of nude males, that no possible art can restore her lost treasure of chaste & delicate thoughts? There is no use in saying that she must look upon the study as she would that of a wooden figure! That is an utter impossibility. Living, moving flesh & blood, is not, & cannot, be studied thus. The stifling heat of the room adds to the excitement, & what might be a cool unimpassioned study in a room at 35°, at 85° or even higher is dreadful.

Through letters such as this Eakins was kept informed of the community's expectations of his female students and of his duty to preserve the womanly qualities so carefully cultivated in them by society.

The issue of female models became a matter of controversy from another point of view as well. The reluctance of women to model at the Academy had often necessitated the procural of models from brothels. Eakins deplored the use of prostitutes in the life classes because their bodies were, in his terms, "coarse, flabby, ill-formed, and unfit in everyway for the requirements of a school."[51] In an attempt to improve the quality of female models, he proposed that the Committee on Instruction advertise in a city newspaper for models of "respectable" families who might, of course, be chaperoned by their mothers and wear masks if they wished. This

request was denied unequivocally by an academy that wished to promote the good will of the community and was well aware of the horrified response such an advertisement would elicit. Eakins felt so strongly that there was nothing whatsoever demeaning about a woman modeling nude for a work of art, no matter what her social standing might be, that on many occasions he asked the women who sat for him to pose nude. Although they were generally his friends or friends of the family, all of the ladies he asked, declined. Lloyd Goodrich, who interviewed some of the women, states that Eakins even spoke to a few of their mothers in his attempt to persuade them that their modesty was unnatural.[52]

It was partly his unorthodox attitude toward the nude that motivated Eakins to paint William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River (fig. 79).[53] In 1804 Rush carved a statue for the new Philadelphia waterworks, of a young lady in a revealingly thin, damply clinging dress holding a bittern. It was commonly supposed by Eakins' generation that she posed nude and that a great scandal had ensued due to her father's position in the city.[54] Eakins pictures her modeling in Rush's studio with her back to the viewer and a chaperone quietly sewing by her side. In the background of the painting stands Rush's sculpture of George Washington. Eakins wrote a short passage explaining the situation, from which is extracted the following:[55]

> Rush was a personal friend of George Washington, and served in the Revolution, ... Rush chose for

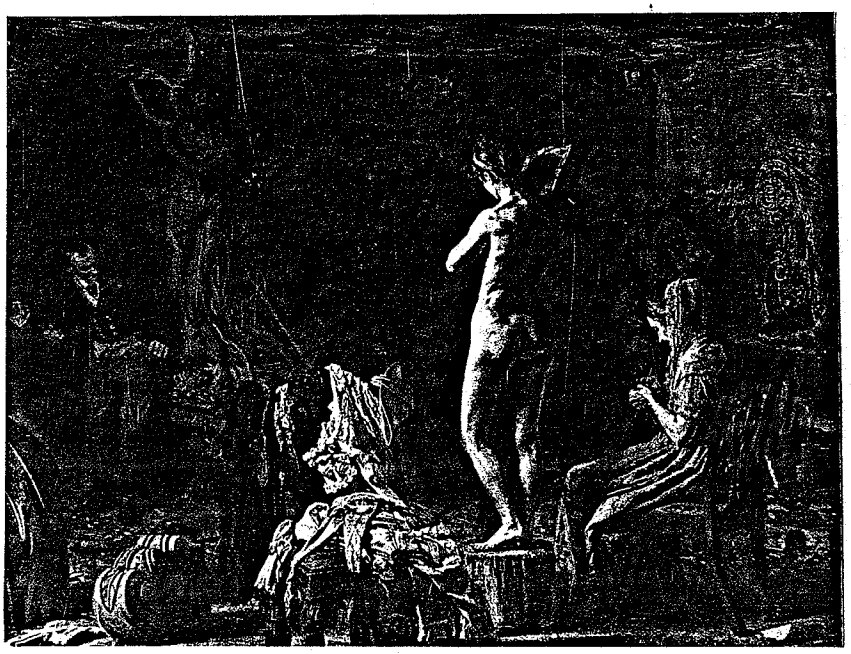


Fig. 79 Thomas Eakins, William Rush Carving his Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill, 1877, 20 1/8 x 26 1/8, Philadelphia Museum of Art

> his model, the daughter of his friend and colleague in the water committee, Mr. James Vanuxem, an esteemed merchant.

The careful wording of this statement, the presence of a chaperone and the father of the country, as well as the model's modest pose lend Eakins' interpretation every possible element of respectability. Even so, the painting received some unfavorable criticism and the Times pointed out that the heap of clothes in the foreground made one think about the nudity of the model which in turn tainted the whole painting with impropriety.[56] Eakins manipulated the light in his picture in such a way that Rush and his studio are in deep shadow and seem to be shrouded in the mists of time. The chaperone and model, on the other hand, stand out from the Rush scene as well-lighted, timeless figures. They might easily be interpreted as a reference to the chaperoned models of 1878. The original Rush scandal is analogous to the prudery of Eakins' own time which forbade any woman with a sense of decency to pose nude. Eakins returned to this theme in 1908, with William Rush and his Model (fig. 80), a strong statement of Eakins' own feeling about the respectability of the female model. Several scholars have suggested that in his later picture of the sculptor handing down the model, Eakins meant to represent himself. Certainly he illustrated the respect, in this case almost exaggerated to reverence, that he held for those women who were able to put art before outward social forms.

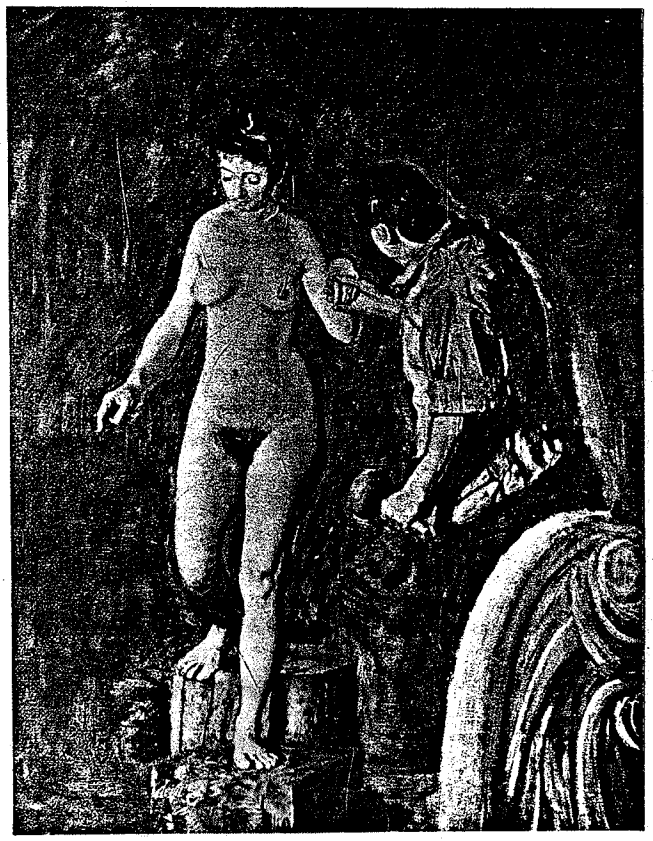


Fig. 80 Thomas Eakins, William Rush and his Model, 35 1/4 x 47 1/4, Honolulu Academy of the Fine Arts

Although Eakins' efforts to change public opinion regarding models were mostly unsuccessful, he allowed his pupils in the women's life class to draw from each others' naked figures and sometimes criticized the results. This situation was a direct result of the scarcity of female models, but was denounced as unfeminine behavior on the part of the girls and immorality on Eakins' part. When a sketchbook was left behind, revealing to the male students which girls had done the modeling, it caused another disturbance in the school.[57] The problem was compounded when photographs were made of some of the women pupils holding poses for their life class.[58]

Eakins' attitudes toward nudity probably earned him a less than desirable reputation among upper class patrons who were aware of the activities of the school. In fact, one of his students, Charles Bregler, confirmed:[59]

> It was not long before we heard rumors and whisperings about Eakins because he was having male and female models pose side by side for some of the life classes. This he did in order that the student would get a better understanding, by comparison, of the construction and movement of spine and pelvis in walking.

These incidents and Eakins' habit of asking female sitters and students to pose nude for him, eventually caused him to justify his actions in a statement which he hoped would allay some of the rumors and accusations concerning his flagrant disregard of the conventions.[60] Unfortunately, Eakins' ideas of suitable conduct in the presence of women never coincided with the behavioral code

adopted by society. Further incidents at the Academy culminating in the removal of a male model's loin cloth in the women's class eventually led the Directors of the Academy to request Eakins' resignation.

The Evening Bulletin deemed it inevitable that the women of the Academy School, "with a few abnormal exceptions," should revolt at the conditions Eakins forced on them.[61] They had only followed their womanly instinct to preserve that innocence which Eakins felt incompatible with the study of art. In reality, all but twelve of the women drew up a petition to get Eakins back, but the forces against him were too strong.[62] He was replaced first by Joseph De Camp and then by William Merrit Chase, sociable men who would not ruffle parents or museum patrons. When Harrison Morris became Director of the Academy in the nineties, he attempted to reconcile the differences between the Academy and Eakins but not to restore Eakins to his old teaching position for "prejudice and superior virtue were too thick for that."[63] Upon his resignation a group of Eakins' students, about forty men and women, seceded from the Academy and formed their own school, the Art Students' League of Philadelphia, where Eakins taught for the next seven years.

Not only in his efforts as a teacher, but also throughout his career as an artist, Eakins was faced with the restrictions placed on women, met criticism for his conduct toward women, and, in spite

of the criticism, continued to thwart public sentiment. As an exhibiting artist, Eakins was expected to create inoffensive, genteel pictures that could be viewed with pleasure by women as well as men. Because he ignored special consideration of the female sex, he was confronted by the disapproval of society. His first important large portrait, The Gross Clinic (fig.3, p.17), was severely criticized on the grounds that it was unfit to be seen by women. The New York Times enumerated its faults thus:[64]

> The ugly, naked unreal thigh, the pincers and lancets, the spurting blood, and the blood on the hands of the Professor and his assistant are bad enough, but Mr. Eakins has introduced, quite unnecessarily, an additional element of horror in the shape of the woman, apparently the mother of the patient, who covers her face and by the motion of her hands expresses a scream of horror.

Another critic added:[65]

> The more we study it the more our wonder grows that it was ever painted in the first place, and that it was ever exhibited, in the second... This is the subject of a picture of heroic size ... that a society thinks it proper to hang in a room where ladies, young and old, young girls and boys and little children, are expected to be visitors. It is a picture that even strong men find it difficult to look at long, if they can look at it at all; and as for people with nerves and stomachs, the scene is so real that they might as well go to a dissecting-room and have done with it.

In his characterization of the mother's reaction at seeing this operation, Eakins inadvertently caricatured the reception it got from, or on behalf of, the women in the community.[66] The realities of the operation, the blood, the horror of the mother,

and the exposure of a male thigh made the painting unacceptable to genteel viewers. For the centennial exhibition, The Gross Clinic was not hung in the main exhibition hall with the other paintings but was hidden away among displays of medical technology.[67] This was a great blow to the young artist's pride; however, he paid no more attention to women's sensibilities in successive works.

In 1891, Eakins' second clinic painting, the Portrait of Dr. Agnew (fig.5, p.20), suffered a similar fate. When the artists' jury for the annual exhibition at the Academy requested this painting of Eakins for their show, the Directors of the Academy stepped in and asked them not to hang it. It was explained privately that it was "not cheerful for ladies to look at."[68] The painting revealed a woman's bare breast in a most natural manner. In this painting, however, Eakins' female observer is calm and collected and serves in a professional capacity. This indicates a change, since The Gross Clinic, in Eakins' perception of woman's true nature. The poor public reception of both The Gross Clinic and the Portrait of Dr. Agnew reinforced, for Eakins, the general public's understanding of woman's true nature and his own differences of opinion with that concept.

Eakins was quite unconcerned with social conventions meant to protect and pay homage to the female sex. He seems to have treated his female sitters as casually as he would male subjects and succeeded in offending several of the ladies. In 1901 he

began the Portrait of Mrs. Duane Gillespie (fig. 81). As the great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, Mrs. Gillespie was an important member of an old and respected Philadelphia family. She was a widow of adequate means who did a great deal of traveling with her children and was very active in cultural and philanthropic affairs. It was a hot summer day when this matriarch climbed several flights of stairs to Eakins' studio to find him waiting for her in an old pair of pants and his undershirt. She was so much offended by his offhand manner that she refused to come for any more sittings and demanded that the portrait be destroyed. Eakins' appearance would have been acceptable to most male sitters but was certainly not proper for a woman of social prominence. When the artist Anna Lea Merrit sat for her portrait, she too was "a bit shocked" to find Eakins wearing blue overalls and a wool undershirt.[69] Every man, but especially one who dealt with the social elite, was expected to show due respect for the female sex.

In the case of Mrs. Talcott Williams, Eakins' offense was one of manners rather than dress. One day while she was posing for The Black Fan, a leader of the Delsarte movement entered the room. Mrs. Williams automatically pulled in her stomach and stood a little taller. Eakins wanted to get on with the work at hand so he tapped her middle and told her to stop holding it in.[70] It is difficult to say which was more to blame for her halting work on the portrait, this disconcerting incident or her dislike of the painting itself.

Fig. 81 Thomas Eakins, Portrait of Mrs. Elizabeth Duane Gillespie, 1901, 45 x 30, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fashionable portrait painters dressed formally and treated their sitters with utmost respect. William Merrit Chase, for instance, always wore elegantly tailored clothes and had impeccable manners. Even on a long ship cruise to Europe he arranged to have a fresh carnation preserved on ice for each day of the voyage.[71] While Eakins' sitters were posing in his sparse, disorganized, fourth floor studio, Chase entertained his subjects in a comfortable chamber full of curios, oriental carpets and Japonica. The open houses he held at his tenth street studio on Saturday evenings were well attended, genteel social gatherings. Eakins summed up his own feelings with the comment, "Chase's studio is an atelier; this is a workshop."[72] It was the shop of a frank, work-oriented man who made no pretense of fashionability and had little respect for it. The sloppy appearance of his person and studio contrast with the fine clothes and luxurious surroundings of more fashionable portrait painters in much the same way as his often unflattering portraits of women contrast with their glamorous ones. His dislike of fine manners and pretentious apparel is equally visible in his life style and in his paintings.

Eakins' trials with the position of women extended to his private life as well as his professional endeavors. In 1886, his youngest sister Caroline married one of Eakins' detractors, Frank Stephens, who convinced her of the gravity of her brother's transgressions and until her death three years later, communication

between Caroline and Eakins was almost nonexistent. The final blow came with the death of his niece Ella Crowell, who had been one of his pupils at the Art Students' League. A girl of questionable mental stability, Ella went completely insane and shot herself in 1897 after her release from a mental institution. Rumors indicate that Eakins' general disregard of feminine sensibilities at the school and his freedom with the nude body caused Ella's overbalance into insanity.[73] Whatever the reasons for her illness, her father blamed Eakins and would not allow his name to be spoken within his hearing. Eakins' frequent trips to the Crowell farm came to an abrupt halt and it was three years before he again made contact with his sister.

As these scenes from his professional and private life indicate, the Victorian code of respectability played a major role in Eakins' life. His unwillingness to conform to social standards that required women remain passive and innocent and his lack of gentlemanly deference to the weaker sex contributed to his being rebuked and ostracized by much of Philadelphia's fashionable society. His refusal to accept traditional standards of conduct led to the dismissal from his job and complete banishment from his family. No one could have been more aware than he of the limitations nineteenth century society placed on women's activities and on the conduct of men toward women. A lady could under no circumstances reveal more of her body than the dictates of

decorum allowed; she must not taint her innocence with knowledge of the nude body; she was to devote herself to home and husband; and men must make every effort to spare her delicate feelings. Eakins was fully cognizant of the isolation and ridicule incurred by individuals who refused to fit themselves into the mold of proper, well-bred ladies and gentlemen. He knew the difficulties faced by his female students in attempting to become professional artists, and he experienced the unfortunate consequences of his own efforts to treat woman as a being different than society said she should be.

Eakins' awareness of the restrictive nature of nineteenth century woman's environment, as demonstrated by these passages from his personal life, manifests itself in his paintings in limitative, dark, often masculine interiors. The inactivity and deep introspective attitudes of women in the majority of his paintings attest to his awareness of the woman movement, or at least the general self-searching and isolation of women. In the paintings, Lady and a Setter Dog, Amelia Van Buren, and Anna Lewis, Eakins revealed the discontent and frustration some women of the time were expressing with their place in life.

The Actress (fig. 50, p.99, fig. 82), a portrait mentioned earlier, might now be considered at greater length as an example of this aspect of Eakins' woman imagery. Painted in 1903, it is another picture of a contemporary, professional woman confined to a dark, predominantly male space, as defined by the masculine room and gentleman's chair in which she sits. Her reaction is one of

Fig. 82 Thomas Eakins, The Actress, detail, 1903, Philadelphia Museum of Art

inactivity and unhappiness. Her head rests against the back of the chair in resignation. Her tired eyes do not meet those of the viewer. Part of her down-trodden countenance can be accounted for by physical exhaustion. She was very busy and Eakins had difficulty persuading her to sit for her portrait between rehearsals. However, her activity is not apparent in her posture or facial expression in this painting. On the floor, a letter addressed to the city where she headed a stock company and a dog-eared copy of the play, Camille by Alexandre Dumas, fils, are the only clues to her professional life. Her person is detached from the background by the fiery pink of her long gown whose color was, perhaps, symbolic of her social position. The theater was not a respectable occupation for a woman of the upper class and it was commonly assumed that loose morals accompanied the profession. Although she was not playing in Camille when Eakins saw her, her gown and expression might also reflect something of the character of Marguerite, the leading courtesan in Camille. Everett Shinn expressed a very different view of the actress in Revue (fig. 83). Here the lovely star is radiant in the footlights of the stage as she takes her bows. One can almost hear the applause in the auditorium. She is lauded, happy, and in control. This is a picture that more easily fits the popular idea of an actress's life. In contrast, Suzanne Santje appears quiet, chastened, and secluded. Eakins chose to portray an unusual side of the actress's life, intimating fatigue, disillusion and unfulfillment.

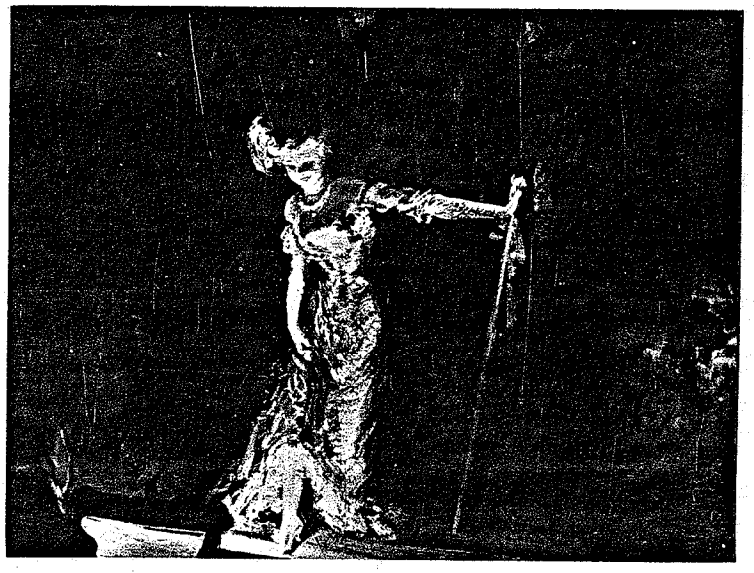


Fig. 83 Everett Shinn, Revue, 1908, 18 x 24, Whitney Museum of American Art

This image of isolation, inactivity, intense thought and melancholy which has evolved as Eakins' pictorial image of women, dominated his female portraits. It changed little throughout the thirty-five years of his mature art. Even in the nineties and early twentieth century when women's roles were changing rapidly, Eakins continued to paint the confined, introspective image of woman he had developed in the early eighties.

In these works, Eakins revealed a page in the history of the American woman. While ignoring other, more common attributes of the female, he recognized, and his paintings record, a condition that women were only slowly becoming aware of. These portraits reveal the limitations placed on women by a rigid, tradition-bound social environment. They depict the isolation, inactivity and introspection of the subjects who had apparently transcended some of these limitations, for they continued to live with social restrictions, self-searching, and isolation. Eakins portrayed these women with sympathy and genuine feeling.

FOOTNOTES -- PART II

[1]Charles Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher, Part One," The Arts 17 (March, 1931) pp. 383, 385.

[2]William Sartain, Manuscript for an article in the Art World. Archives of American Art.

[3]There are two other paintings of women outside, Arcadia and An Arcadian. These are not relevant to the immediate discussion because they do not portray contemporary women. There are also two sketches from 1858 while Eakins was still in high school, of Spanish peasant women outside. The subjects were probably taken from a book.

[4]This portrait has only recently been positively identified as her father. For more information see The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Thomas Eakins Collection (Philadelphia, 1978), p. 159.

[5]It may be significant that when Eakins repainted this theme in 1883 under the title Professionals at Rehearsal, he portrayed two younger men in almost the same poses, seated at the same table holding the same bottle, glasses and zither but with a stool substituted for the original armchair.

[6]Information on the legal standing of Pennsylvania women in these three paragraphs was taken from three sources: Carrie Burnham, Argument on the Elective Franchise. (Philadelpha, 1873) pp. 103-107. Anne Firor Scott, The American Woman: Who Was She? (New Jersey, 1971) p. 134. Annie G. Porritt, Laws Affecting Women and Children. (New York, 1917).

[7]Agnes Morton, Etiquette. (Philadelphia, 1904) p. 132.

[8]Ibid. pp. 184-185.

[9]Agnes Repplier, Philadelphia: The Place and the People. (New York, 1899) pp. 376, 389.

[10]Irwin Sears, Growth of Population in Philadelphia: 1860-1910. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1960) p. 66.

[11]Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller, eds., The Peoples of Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, 1973), "The Philadelphia Irish: Persistent Presence," by Dennis J. Clark, p. 140.

[12]Thorstein Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class. (New York, 1924) p. 171.

[13]For an analysis of this concept see Kathy Orzech, Woman and the Sea: A Metaphoric Identification in Winslow Homer's Mature Art. (Unpublished master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1978).

[14]In discussing bird images in The Awakening, Leary points out that the pigeon is a domestic bird, found often in captivity. This makes Chopin's choice of words for the title of the house especially descriptive of Edna's situation. Lewis Leary, The Awakening and Other Stories by Kate Chopin (New York, 1970) p. xiv.

[15]Francis Cobbe, The Duties of Women. (Boston, 1881) pp. 14-15.

[16]Women were barred from different jobs in different states. In Pennsylvania in the seventies, women were not allowed to wait on an audience in any place of entertainment. In the early twentieth century Pennsylvania women were legally excluded from employment in mines and collieries, except in a secretarial capacity.

[17]Robert E. Riegel, American Women: A Story of Social Change. (New Jersey, 1970) p. 275.

[18]L. P. Brockett, M.D., Woman: Her Rights, Wrongs, Privileges, and Responsibilities. (Freeport, New York, 1869) p. 127.

[19]Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work. (New York, 1933), p. 196, CL 380.

[20]Besides the Portrait of J. Carroll Beckwith discussed here, the Portrait of the Architect John Joseph Borie at Hopkins Center Art Galleries, Hanover, New Hampshire shows the artist leaning on his drawing board to which an indistinct drawing is attached, and The Writing Master in the Metropolitan Museum of Art portrays Eakins' father practicing his artistic profession.

[21]Quoted by Gordon Hendricks, The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins. (New York,1974) p. 248.

[22]McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted, (printed privately, 1946) p. 130.

[23]McHenry relates a story told by a student of Eakins, Charles Bregler. Bregler and Susan were walking in the park and she told him she was troubled because she had had no domestic training -- she had learned to be an artist only. She could not keep money budgeted and was feeling a failure as a wife. McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted, p. 58.

[24]This sentiment was related to Susan P. Casteras by Susan Eakins' nephew, Walter G. Macdowell. It is unlikely that Eakins actually said Susan's work was better than his, but he did say she was the best woman painter in America and Macdowell also records that Eakins said she had a better command of color than he did. This may be all that was meant by the statement "she was a better painter than he was." Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Susan Macdowell Eakins. (Philadelphia, 1978) p. 24.

[25]Ibid. pp. 24, 26.

[26]Ibid. p. 29.

[27]For a complete discussion of this painting see Karal Ann Marling, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Miss Dora Wheeler," The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art. (February, 1978) pp. 46-57.

[28]Ibid. p. 48.

[29]Sylvan Schendler, Eakins. (Boston, 1967) p. 11.

[30]From the autobiography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Quoted in From Milady to Ms., May 29 page.

[31]Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Crux. (New York, 1911) preface.

[32]Quoted in Aileen Kraditor, Up From the Pedestal. (Chicago, 1968) p. 127.

[33]B. O. Flower, "Fashion's Slaves," The Arena. (September, 1891) pp. 401-430.

[34]Carrie Burnham's Argument on the Elective Franchise (6) is a detailed account of her court battle.

[35]For more information see Bill Severn, Free But Not Equal. (New York, 1967) pp. 110-112.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Mrs. Elizabeth Duane Gillespie gives a full account of the women's activities in the Centennial Exhibition in A Book of Remembrance. (Philadelphia, 1901)p. 269-277.

[38]Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. (Washington D.C., 1977) p. 166.

[39]Ibid.

[40]PAFA, Susan Eakins p. 12.

[41]Eakins was a member of the University of Pennsylvania Club and of informal groups that met at Fairman Rogers' home (Goodrich, Thomas Eakins p. 65) and at the James Mapes Dodge residence (McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted pp. 114-115).

[42]Schendler, Eakins p. 111.

[43]Lewis Mumford, The Brown Decades. (New York, 1955) p. 215.

[44]An excerpt from Democratic Vistas by Walt Whitman, quoted in Rex Burbank and Jack B. Moore, eds., The Literature of the American Realistic Period. (Columbus, Ohio, 1970) p. 31.

[45]Christine Huber, The Pennsylvania Academy and its Women: 1850-1920. (Philadelphia, 1974) pp. 12-16.

[46]Hendricks, Life and Work p. 132. Hendricks relates an incident recorded by Adam Emory Albright, the demonstrator, in which the male students had prepared a corpse for the ladies' class and placed "the part that made a man a man" in a smock pocket as a practical joke.

[47]John Young, Our Deportment. (Detroit, 1882) p. 235.

[48]Cecelia Beaux, Background with Figures. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1930) pp. 86-87.

[49]For more information see Elward C. Perry and Maria Chamberlin-Hellman, "Thomas Eakins as an Illustrator, 1878-1881," American Art Journal 5 (May, 1973) pp. 20-45.

[50]R. S. to Jim Claghorn, April 11, 1882. The entire letter is quoted in Schendler, Eakins pp. 90-92.

[51]Eakins to Academy Directors, Jan. 8, 1877. Academy Archives. Quoted in Hendricks, Life and Work pp. 104-105.

[52]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 110.

[53]Susan Eakins wrote in a letter to William Sartain, (Sept. 15, 1917): "Tom painted the picture actuated by the desire to honor the old sculptor, W. Rush, whose attitude in art he greatly respected."

[54]William Sartain wrote this statement showing his own belief that the girl posed nude and indicating that Eakins thought so too. Whether she actually did is inconsequential. "For this statue a well known young lady of Philadelphia consented to pose nude and Eakins so represents her with her mother sitting alongside knitting." Sartain, Manuscript for an article in Art World. Archives of American Art -- microfilm.

[55]Eakins' statement is quoted at length in Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 170.

[56]"The Times" (March 28, 1878). This review is quoted by Gordon Hendricks, "Eakins' William Rush Carving His Allegorical Statue of the Schuylkill," The Art Quarterly (Winter, 1968) p. 394.

[57]Hendricks, Life and Work, p. 142.

[58]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 86.

[59]Bregler, "Eakins as a Teacher," p. 380.

[60]Quoted in Hendricks, Life and Work, pp. 141-2.

[61]The Evening Bulletin, February, 1886. Quoted in Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 89.

[62]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 87. Financial problems also figured into the decision to let Eakins go. The Directors apparently felt he was keeping prospective students and patrons away and they abolished his post in favor of a multi-instructor system.

[63]Morris, Confessions in Art, p. 31.

[64]The New York Times, March 8, 1879. Quoted in Hendricks, Life and Works, p. 99.

[65]Quoted in Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, pp. 51-2.

[66]Schendler, Eakins, p. 56.

[67]This same painting was later spoken of as "one of the most important paintings ever made in the United States." Art critics now deplored the fact that it was not on loan to the Carnegie Exhibition and that so few people could see it at Jefferson Medical College. But the Dean of the College explained that "no amount of money could ever replace that painting. We regard it as so valuable that the board has agreed never to lend it to any one under any circumstances." Undated, unlabeled newspaper clipping in the collection of the Archives of American Art.

[68]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 127.

[69]Harrison S. Morris, Confessions in Art. (New York, 1930), p. 32. There seems to be no other record of this portrait. Neither Goodrich nor Hendricks list it in their catalogue.

[70]McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted, p. 130.

[71]Morris, Confessions, p. 71.

[72]Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, p. 101.

[73]Hendricks, Life and Work, p. 236.

CONCLUSION

Thomas Eakins painted more than seventy portraits of women during his career. As has been demonstrated, the few of these that were painted in the seventies have aspects that reflect widely-held contemporary notions of certain feminine stereotypes. The "true woman" ideal is exemplified in the portraits of Katherine and Elizabeth at the Piano, while the hysterical female type occurs in The Gross Clinic.

> By the end of the nineteenth century, it was becoming increasingly difficult to contain real women within the myth of the feminine ideal.[1]

This statement by an American historian describes a situation which seems to have affected Eakins' portrayal of women. After 1877, Eakins no longer portrayed his sitters within the context of an ideal myth, but stripped them of the trappings of that myth -- fragile, flawless beauty and frivolous, feminine settings. He also began to include traits foreign to popular nineteenth century ideals, traits that reveal that many women did not adapt themselves to the ideal woman image. All of these later portraits indicate the intelligence of the sitters by their attitudes of deep thought, to which there is often an introspective quality. Inactivity, leisure as it was called then, accompanies the thoughtful demeanor of the women in their confined settings. The isolation of his women echoes a condition that occurred in nineteenth century America due to concentrated emphasis on woman's familial and

social duties and such customs as confinement during pregnancy and chaperonage. The inward directed thoughtfulness of his portraits of women simulates the situation of those women who desired an outlet in higher education or career, but were confined to the traditional sphere of women. These are not conditions associated with the ideal myth but with women who had discovered the limitations and fallacies of the feminine ideal. The portraits of Amelia Van Buren, Suzanne Santje, Anna Lewis, and Susan Eakins reveal women whom society was unable to contain within strict traditional roles. All four seem to display dissatisfaction with their condition through posture and facial expression.

It might be questioned whether the revelations in Eakins' paintings are due more to the way individual women presented themselves to Eakins or the way he perceived the state of American women as a whole. The most revealing portraits are those of the women Eakins knew best. He certainly knew his wife well enough to have judged her actual response to her environment. Amelia Van Buren was a close friend who, according to Murray, often stayed at the Eakins' home[2] and they were also well acquainted with Anna Lewis. Eakins might have seen, in any of these women, the attitudes he captured on canvas. He also may have recorded in their portraits, a general condition and response that he perceived as the state of women around him, but that was not necessarily the response of any one of these individuals. It is questionable, for instance, whether he knew Suzanne Santje well enough to portray such an

attitude as peculiarly her own. He had asked her to sit for her portrait immediately after seeing her perform in Beau Brummel and this request seems to have been his first contact with her. It should be remembered that most of Eakins' portraits, particularly those discussed in Part Two, were sought by the artist which gave him more artistic license than he might have had had they been commissioned. Eakins may have been responding to a general feeling of discontent expressed through women's writings, women's rights and suffrage activities, and the anxiety written in many women's faces, when he painted his wife, friends, students, and an actress in states of mental and physical unease.

Further evidence of Eakins' awareness of the physical and mental condition of women and his correlation of this condition with their socio-cultural environment is provided by a letter to his father about the women of Zermat, Switzerland:[3]

> ...the women aforesaid are not contented no more than the men. Their minds are not even capable of this sentiment. I mean to say their ancestors were contented to be as dirty as possible and they are as dirty as possible only because their ancestors were and they never would think of a change even if no trouble to make...When a woman comes along leading a cow or a sheep of ordinary intelligence you ought to see how intellectual looking and spiritual the animal is alongside the woman by contrast,..

From this passage it is apparent that Eakins attributed the sorry spiritual character of the Zermat women to their mindless following of tradition. It was out-moded tradition and the unthinking compliance of contemporary men and women that Eakins

fought throughout his career as teacher and artist. Eakins made the same association between mental attitudes and social environment in his paintings of contemporary American women as he made in the letter to his father about the women of Zermat. The widespread discontent, confusion, physical weakness and nervous condition of late nineteenth century women was directly related to the limited roles society expected them to assume, just as the dull-witted complacence of the Zermat women was directly related to a social order that tolerated their filthy environment and centuries of inbreeding.

Although the majority of Eakins' paintings from 1880 until he stopped painting about 1910, portray the confined, basically despondent condition of many women, a noticeable development in his later paintings is the appearance of professional women such as Agnew's nurse, and of self-assured, independent characters like Emily Sartain (fig.84) and Mrs. James Mapes Dodge (fig.85). Mrs. Dodge was the wife of a prominent Philadelphia businessman to whom Eakins gave this portrait as a gift. Unlike the women in many of Eakins' portraits, she holds her head up with apparent self-assurance and looks straight ahead, a slight smile on her lips. She carries herself with a certain rigidity and confidence, and does not appear to be submerged in contemplative introspection. The portrait study of Emily Sartain reveals a friend of Eakins whom he once characterized as one...[4]

Fig. 84 Thomas Eakins, Emily Sartain, 1890's, private collection

Fig. 85 Thomas Eakins, Mrs. James Mapes Dodge, 24 1/4 x 20 1/4, Philadelphia Museum of Art

> who want[s] to rule over everything and especially over men and especially those who are weak and incapable of running themselves. ... [she] lays her plans and thinks of others as belonging to her, as her personal tools for her success and not as people who have a good idea.

Her imperious stance, chin held high, shoulders thrown back, indicates the determined and capable character of a woman who became a successful portrait painter and mezzotint engraver, and was long the principal of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. This is one of Eakins' few full-length portraits of a woman and the format helps suggest the assertive nature of the subject. These portraits exemplify the change taking place at the end of the century in woman's move from the home sphere and husband's protection into the male professional world.

Eakins' only specific comment about the position of American women was made in the sixties, in response to a letter from Emily Sartain:[5]

> There is one thing though very funny in your letter [--] I insist that the duties & responsibilities of men & women are equal etc. Tell me truly how hard did you set down your pretty little foot after writing that. You never learned that from yourself Emily or my mother or your mother or next door at your sister Helen's.

This statement was made before Eakins' career was begun and seems to fit in well with his apparent opinions about women in those early years. The attitude expressed in this letter may well have changed, even as the representation of women in his paintings

changed after the seventies. Throughout his life work we find Eakins treating female pupils and sitters very much as he did male students and sitters. Yet liberal and chauvinist attitudes are often not clearly distinguished in any one personality and while Eakins promoted hard work and equality for women in the arts, he did not necessarily advocate woman's entrance into all traditionally male concerns. Because he said so little about the position of women, Eakins' personal attitudes may never be known, but his paintings reveal an understanding of the restrictions placed on women and a sympathetic treatment of women who were uncomfortable with the "true woman" role. Eakins' canvases are an illustration of the cultural position of some American women in the late nineteenth century. The images he preserved in his mature works reveal on the one hand, the isolation, inactivity, confinement and introspection of women living in a socially and morally repressive climate, and on the other hand, the independent, self-assured, professional women of the emerging new age.

Footnotes -- Conclusion

[1]Ronald W. Hogeland, Woman and Womanhood in America. (Massachusettes, 1973), p. 150.

[2]Margaret McHenry, Thomas Eakins Who Painted. (printed privately, 1946), p. 126.

[3]Thomas Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, undated. Quoted in McHenry, Thomas Eakins, pp. 13-14.

[4]Thomas Eakins to Fanny Eakins, 1868. Quoted in Gordon Hendricks, The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins. (New York, 1979), p. 37.

[5]Thomas Eakins to Emily Sartain, 1867. Quoted in Hendricks, Life and Work, p. 46.

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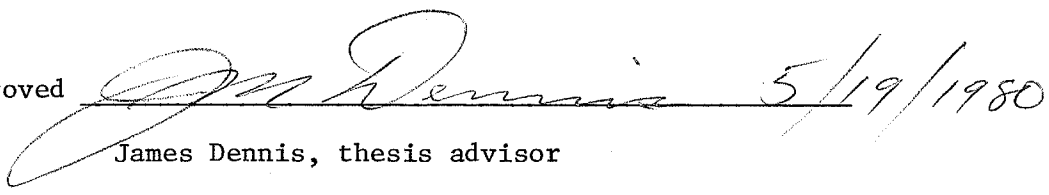
Approved  5/19/1980

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