

## Flower-Girls and Fictions: Selling on the Streets

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### Résumé de l'article

Les ouvrières, les pauvres et les femmes en milieu urbain ont souvent été considérés comme le paradigme de l'Autre. Par contre, la marchande de fleurs des périodes victorienne tardive et édouardienne a servi de figure de contact et de liaison entre les deux classes. Oeuvrant dans un vaste champ discursif, les écrivains et les artistes ont librement façonné un type de représentation qui correspondait aux conceptions dominantes de la complémentarité et de la disponibilité sexuelle féminine. La première était obtenue en mettant en évidence les interactions charitables entre les classes, la seconde, par l'alliance commode des fleurs et de la sexualité féminine. Même si les rudes réalités de l'environnement urbain semblaient aller à l'encontre des sensibilités délicates et passives, la féminité s'affirmait de nouveau par des références à la maternité et au monde naturel. Adaptée aux idéologies dominantes des rôles sexuels, la marchande de fleurs était ainsi intégrée à une économie moderne de consommation. Une mini-capitaliste, ne comptant que sur elle-même pour faire un profit, elle devenait un témoin rassurant de la capacité de l'ordre économique bourgeois à saisir tout ce qui était à sa portée.

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# Flower-Girls and Fictions: Selling on the Streets

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## Résumé

Les ouvrières, les pauvres et les femmes en milieu urbain ont souvent été considérés comme le paradigme de l'Autre. Par contre, la marchande de fleurs des périodes victorienne tardive et édouardienne a servi de figure de contact et de liaison entre les deux classes. Ouvrant dans un vaste champ discursif, les écrivains et les artistes ont librement façonné un type de représentation qui correspondait aux conceptions dominantes de la complémentarité et de la disponibilité sexuelle féminine. La première était obtenue en mettant en évidence les interactions charitables entre les classes, la se-

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She stands in the Circus day after day, hail, rain, snow  
or fine, amidst a very welter of motors, cabs, omnibuses,  
and the flotsam and jetsam of a London thoroughfare.  
My flower girl. Well, although she belongs to London,  
yet I always feel she is mine in particular.<sup>1</sup>

Somewhere towards the margins of art historical discourse on the Victorian and Edwardian eras are situated the manifold, heterogeneous and largely anonymous figures of women workers. They are by no means absent – how could they be, when so many artists' models were working women – but in comparison with the prominence accorded to women's employment by other areas of feminist scholarship, their presence in the history of visual culture has been limited. Those who have addressed their representation have, quite rightly and crucially, called attention to their frequent construction within a paradigm of otherness, according to which women workers were marked as "perceptibly different."<sup>2</sup> For many Victorian commentators, "working women signified social disorder."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we might well ask how it could have been otherwise when, as active and productive participants in the national economy, these subjects diverged so markedly from a dominant bourgeois construction of femininity as passive, reproductive and domestic.

A similar dynamic of difference is at play within the history of urban spaces. With the exception of prostitutes, women have been positioned as outsiders to the masculine spaces of city streets, particularly as they exist within representation.<sup>4</sup> If work by Judith Walkowitz, Lynne Walker and Deborah Epstein Nord has demonstrated that women were not *in fact* excluded from the metropolis, that same scholarship has confirmed that important *symbolic* proscriptions remained.<sup>5</sup> Women were the others against whom the discursive norms of bourgeois urban organization were established and maintained.

In this article, however, I will argue that for at least one category of urban working women accession to representation was *not* primarily marked by difference, otherness and distanciation. Rather, as the opening quotation indicates, the language applied to flower-girls was one of belonging, immersion and possession. Following this logic through visual and verbal texts, I will propose that the flower-girl served as a figure of connection and proximity. Easily contained within prevailing patterns of socio-sexual and economic power, the flower-girl was, above all else, an *insider*. This, more than anything, accounts for her perennial popularity across a broad field of representation, in countless paintings and prints, in novels, chap-books, illustrated magazines and guidebooks of London, as well as on theatre stages across the country.<sup>6</sup> This, also, makes her a prime example of how artists safely negotiated the potential disruptions to gender and economic hierarchies posed by working women.

## A London Type: Mapping Urban Space

Little is known about the women who sold flowers for a living on British streets. Though described and depicted constantly from the 1870s up to the 1914-18 war, there is no reliable record of their numbers, nor of their average age, wage, family status or standard of living. At a time when social investigators such as Edward Cadbury and Clara Collet were entering homes and workplaces to document women's conditions of employment, flower-sellers remained hidden in plain view. It is precisely this lack of factual information which facilitated their entry into artistic and literary culture. In a real sense, the flower-seller was a blank page upon which artists could exercise full creative vision and authority. The primary marker of this process of acculturation is the designation *flower-girl*. The term was all-per-

vasive, even though the scant available historical evidence indicates that it was doubly inaccurate, suggesting a falsely comprehensive occupational identification with flowers, and a belittling immaturity. Yet as early as 1851 Henry Mayhew had acknowledged that none of the London vendors could “be said to devote themselves entirely to the sale of flowers in the street,” and it was generally admitted that the London “flower-girl” was “more often a woman than a girl.”<sup>7</sup> In these very inaccuracies, however, resides the term’s utility. In one respect, its insistence on the ability of employment status and merchandise (flowers) to categorize individuals contributed to a broader circumscription of people within the cycle of production and exchange of material goods. In this sense it was entirely appropriate to the commodity culture of turn-of-the-century London. In another respect, the persistent reiteration of girlhood was equally well-suited to the infantilizing requirements of a patriarchal culture. Rather than providing an epistemic framework which took its lead from the real economic and working conditions it aimed to describe, the term furnished a normative structure according to which a certain group of working women could be safely located within prevailing social formations. The flower-girl was not an historical personage, but a discursive category.

The most vivid instance of this process is the prominent inclusion of flower-girls within social typologies, such as W.E. Henley and William Nicholson’s 1898 collaborative book of verse and illustration, *London Types*. Using simple and static visual conventions to categorize the working population, such projects performed political as well as aesthetic work: conceptually transforming the *Lumpenproletariat* into an orderly line-up of individuals, divided on traditional grounds (employment, gender) and re-grouped into “a mosaic of colourful democracy.”<sup>8</sup> In *London Types* the images’ titles further delimited workers within specific geographical areas – the coster in Hammersmith, the sandwich-man in Trafalgar Square, and so forth. In the case of the flower-girl, however, this pattern of confinement collapsed, and she was located only nebulously, on “any corner.” Typologically distinct and divided, she was yet topographically immersed and connected. Within the metropolis, it would seem, the flower-girl was omnipresent.

This pervasive enmeshing of flower-girls within the geographic fabric of London is particularly apparent if one attempts to juxtapose an historical mapping of the trade against patterns of visual representation. The most thorough account of the physical dispersion of the flower-selling trade is provided by William Ryan in *Living London* (1902).<sup>9</sup> Commencing his journalistic tour in Piccadilly Circus, Ryan soon branches out to a range of locations

Figure 1. George Clausen, *Flower-Seller, Trafalgar Square*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 60 x 38 cm. Private Collection (Photo: Courtesy of Sotheby’s, London).



across the city. Prominent thoroughfares, such as Ludgate Hill, Oxford Circus and St Giles’ Circus are identified as important areas for business, as are Fleet Street and the Strand. Shopping districts such as Westbourne Grove in Bayswater were said to be good for the sale of loose flowers, while buttonholes sold best in the City or by smaller railway stations. Predictably, Covent Garden market when the morning stock was being purchased was the best place to find a flower-seller. Vendors were not confined to these locales, however. Ryan reports that it was also common practice to tour residential areas, calling at likely houses. Furthermore, an itinerant night trade was conducted in public houses throughout the city.

Within visual representations, the breadth of these areas is reiterated and extended. While Piccadilly is often highlighted, most famously in Charles Ginner’s 1912 canvas *Piccadilly Circus*, it is but one of many sites.<sup>10</sup> Among others, Trafalgar Square features in George Clausen’s *Flower-*

Figure 2. William Logsdail, *St Martin's-in-the-Fields*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 143.5 x 118.1 cm. London, Tate Gallery (Photo: Tate Gallery Publishing).



*Seller, Trafalgar Square* (1879, fig. 1) and William Logsdail's *St Martin's-in-the-Fields* (1888, fig. 2). A.E. Mulready, that most prolific painter of flower-girls, dotted his favourite subjects liberally across the urban scene: in opulent shopping districts and busy professional quarters, by brightly illuminated public houses, near residential areas, and especially on London bridges (fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Affluent residential locales were also adopted by W.P. Frith, in *The Flower Girl* (1883, private collection), and by George Clausen, in *Schoolgirls, Haverstock Hill* (1880, fig. 4) and *Spring Morning, Haverstock Hill* (1881, Bury Art Gallery).

Once the range of these sites (civic, professional, retail, residential) has been acknowledged, however, it also becomes apparent that they are all situated in central London or the West End, never extending east of Fleet Street. In this, the territorial mapping established within visual culture differs from literary representations. Paintings offer no sign of the keen competition among flower-girls on the

Whitechapel High Street, documented by Ryan.<sup>12</sup> Nor do they, like many short stories, follow them home to the slums to describe horrific domestic lives characterized by violence and degradation.<sup>13</sup> Tales of deprivation and despair were not specific to flower-girls, of course, but were standard elements in journalistic exposés and fictional accounts of the East End from the early 1880s onwards.<sup>14</sup> Nor was the misery of the slums beyond the scope of visual artists. Gustave Doré, Luke Fildes and Hubert von Herkomer all executed graphic portrayals of "darkest England."<sup>15</sup> Such images contributed to a representational tradition of "Outcast London" which highlighted a sense of unbreachable geographic segregation between classes, and impressed on Londoners "the perception that they lived in a city of contrasts, a class and geographically divided metropolis of hovels and palaces."<sup>16</sup>

Visual images of flower-girls operate on a different register from this discourse of division and separation. Characteristically marked by signs of poverty, the flower-girl is, nevertheless, far from an "outcast" in British painting. While social explorers constructed a vision of London's poor based on a discourse of otherness, according to which the poor inhabited "a foreign country,"<sup>17</sup> the flower-girl in art was

witness to the social and spatial links between people upon which the urban economy was based. Portrayed by artists as selling her wares in Piccadilly Circus or Trafalgar Square, the flower-girl was not *apart from*, but *a part of* the heart of the modern city. Though she was sometimes spatially and/or compositionally marginalized – pushed to the edge of the sidewalk and the edge of the canvas as in Clausen's *Schoolgirls, Haverstock Hill* (fig. 4) – she remained linked to the mainstream of an urban society which was still predominantly conceived in terms of the interests and activities of the middle classes.

The frequent visual representation of cross-class interactions reinforced this inclusive dynamic. While writers drew attention to the banter and friendship between flower-sellers, or to the presence of working-class Londoners among the flower-girl's clientele,<sup>18</sup> artists such as Clausen showed a marked affinity for the visual apposition of rich customers and poor flower-girls. In one respect, the effect of this

juxtaposition was to highlight economic disparity in the modern metropolis, yet at the same time the class interaction envisioned in works such as *Schoolgirls*, *Haverstock Hill* fostered a notion of social complementarity based on generosity and kindness. Despite their impassive expressions, three of the young women in the canvas turn towards the flower-girl sitting at the edge of the walk, and the closest one leans down and puts out her hand. Her gesture is familiar to city dwellers: it is the motion of a passing donation, a small act of munificence while carrying on one's way.

The situation of flower-girls within a discourse of charity was one way to circumvent the transgressive possibilities raised by women's work. Positioned as passive recipients rather than active participants, flower-girls remained comfortably within the bounds of femininity. But the problematic here is as much one of appropriate class relations as it is of acceptable gender roles. Flower-girl images promote a philosophy of personal philanthropy, embodied in the hand that extends in a prelude to giving or the customer who is "above small change."<sup>19</sup> In this they mark the persistence of a mid-century desire to reconcile the Two Nations, familiar from the writings of Dickens, Disraeli and Kingsley. Such a reconciliation, of course, could only take place on terms dictated by the wealthy; social control was always "implicit in the tableau of the one Nation extending charity to the Other."<sup>20</sup> Thus the importance, in text after text, of charities such as the Flower Girls' Guild and the Watercress and Flower Girls' Christian Mission.<sup>21</sup> Under the patronage of the Princess of Wales and the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, such societies provided significant material assistance, but always within a strongly class-based framework. Thus, bathing facilities, storage chambers and medical assistance were also accompanied by religious instruction, police supervision, a uniform and encouragement to enter a servants' training home.

By the 1880s, however, increasing challenges to this vision of class relations were being mounted. Organized Socialism began to demand structural changes. These are the years of New Unionism, the Social Democratic Federation, and unemployed protests, when thousands demanded "Not Charity, But Work."<sup>22</sup> In *No. 5 John Street*, one of the best selling novels of 1899, the author describes his flower-girl heroine's encounter with:

Figure 3. A.E. Mulready, *A London Crossing Sweeper and Flower Girl*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 97.8 x 50 cm. Museum of London (Photo: Museum of London).



those Red Women who glide from floor to floor to distribute leaflets of convocation to fiery meetings against Throne and Altar ... one of [whom] is just now struggling for the possession of the virgin soil of Tilda's nature in competition with the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission.<sup>23</sup>

In the story, Tilda remains independent, foiling radical solutions based in violence (she gives her life to stop an anarchist's bomb), but equally scorning middle-class charity. The representation of such nascent class-consciousness is unique within the fiction of the flower-girl, however – a solitary ripple in an otherwise placid pool of personal philanthropy. Much more common, in texts and images alike, is the charitable viewpoint itself, according to which the flower-girl could be transformed according to the tastes and values of her benefactors. From this perspective, the flower-girl was



Figure 4. George Clausen, *Schoolgirls, Haverstock Hill, 1880*. Oil on canvas, 51 x 76 cm. Private Collection (Photo: Courtesy of Sotheby's, London).



not only deserving of a helping hand, she was part of the ground upon which a liberal middle-class could rebuild society in its own image.

#### The Pygmalion Effect

This emphasis on transformation is not unfamiliar. Whereas quasi-factual accounts such as Elizabeth Banks' "How the Other Half Lives" (1894) emphasized the static nature of an hereditary trade, straightforwardly fictional accounts were habitually framed by a convention of metamorphosis.<sup>24</sup> The best-known of these is, of course, Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912), in which the Cockney flower-girl Eliza Doolittle is refashioned into a make-believe duchess through the elocutionary exertions of Henry Higgins. Shaw by no means invented the formula, however. From the 1870s onwards, numerous stories were modelled on this same premise. Thus *Norah the Flower-Girl* was "raised up" to domestic service, *Kitty Bright the Flower Girl* became a Sunday-school teacher, and (best of all) in *Only a Flower-Girl* Mabel's long-lost brother returned to share his inheritance and whisk her off to Australia.<sup>25</sup> Even those tales which re-

fused the narrative of transformation did so self-consciously. At the end of *No. 5 John Street* Tilda finally rebuffs the narrator's efforts to elevate her (through such methods as trips to the National Gallery):

I warn't made right at the start. ... That's jest what's the matter with all on us. ... We wants pickin' all to pieces, and if you begin that, you'll only tear the stuff. ... All these missions tryin' to make us mealy-mouthed! ... [S]ome time you'll see us jest as we are. Then you'll git the 'ump and cuss the dye you tried to mike a lidy out of a fightin' flower-gal.<sup>26</sup>

In the earlier books these transformations were primarily economic, rather than personal, and they were effected through a variety of sources: philanthropy, faith or just good luck. Increasingly, however, the agent of change was a middle-class man who attempted to refashion the woman's very character. "I tell you," boasts Henry Higgins of Eliza, "I have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden."<sup>27</sup> In her malleability, the flower-girl became a cipher for masculine desires, linking the two ever closer together.

Nowhere is this process more obvious than in the well-rehearsed story of painter John Lavery's marriage to a Regent Street flower-seller, whom he first saw outside an artists' supply shop in 1889. In true fairy-tale fashion, Lavery recounts in his memoirs how he engaged the woman as a model, was overcome by desire, and married her in a secret ceremony. Tragically, she died of consumption after childbirth, and it was only years later that the artist discovered that she was not, as she had claimed, an eighteen-year-old Irish woman named Kathleen MacDermott, but Annie Evans, seventeen and from Wales. Further elaborating the narrative, Kenneth McConkey relates that Lavery's efforts to improve his wife's speech through elocution lessons provided the inspiration for *Pygmalion*.<sup>28</sup>

At every level, the narrative reinforces an image of the flower-girl as supremely malleable urban material. The events themselves are firmly rooted in a discourse of nineteenth-century bohemianism, in which male artists reinscribed their creative desires on and through the bodies of working-class models/mistresses/wives. As Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock have demonstrated with respect to the Pre-Raphaelite model and artist Elizabeth Siddall, this action was necessarily one of politically invested fictionalization, in which historical individuals became discursive signifiers of masculine creativity.<sup>29</sup> For Lavery, the process was specifically inflected by the workings of nineteenth-century discourse according to which a woman selling flowers was always already a "flower-girl," and thus a ready-made recipient of a benefactor's transformative energies. Tellingly, as soon as the flower-girl stopped being a fiction and entered the artist's life in a meaningful way, she became less suitable as a subject for representation. Catalogues of Lavery's oeuvre, for instance, record no paintings of his first wife as a flower-seller. Only decades later, once her memory had assumed the legendary tone so apparent in the memoirs, would Lavery ask his granddaughter to dress as she had and sit for him as *Kathleen, the Flower-Girl*.<sup>30</sup> By the time of the memoirs, certainly, her role had been reduced to that of a cipher for himself; her illness was presented in terms of the impact it had on his career and psyche, and the only emotions she was recorded as having centred on him. Yet by secretly re-inventing her own past, Kathleen/Annie had already refashioned herself more thoroughly than Lavery ever would. As with Eliza Doolittle, she was more than the sum of another's visionary efforts.

#### Flowers and Femininity

Issues of transformation and desire raised by the flower-girl are necessarily linked to the products she sold. The con-

junction of flowers with femininity, so thoroughly inscribed by Western artists, reached a new level in nineteenth-century works such as Grandville's 1846 series *Fleures Animées*, a surreal metamorphosis of flowers into women.<sup>31</sup> In Britain, flowers were held to be "the female part of nature,"<sup>32</sup> and this strategy of outright conflation characterizes many representations of flower-girls. In *A Summer Rose* (1910, private collection) by George Elgar Hicks, a young woman with silky skin and a mass of black hair proffers a rose to an unseen customer. The title is clearly a double entendre, accenting both the flower-like charms of the woman and the feminine delicacy of the blossom. The same technique is even more blatant in verbal texts:

She stands at her post, dainty and fresh as the flowers she sells. Somehow the term "all a-blowing and a-growing" applies to her. She is tall and slender, and sometimes one imagines that she trembles ever so slightly, like an arum lily in a summer shower. Now that I come to think of it, she is like a lily.<sup>33</sup>

The connotations of purity evoked by the metaphor highlight the specifically sexual nature of the elision. Whether as Freudian tropes for female genitalia, or simply as symbols of love and fertility, the imaginative and artistic bond between female body and floral blossom is constructed as erotic.<sup>34</sup> Walter Russell's canvas *The Flower Girl* (fig. 5) most clearly acknowledges this current of sexuality. The work is a frontal image of a seated young woman, portrayed from just below the groin with her legs open. A flower-basket appears in the background, offering visual evidence of the occupational identification made in the title. This corroboration is rendered necessary by her presence in a neutral and secluded interior space. Intimacy is suggested by the model's unbuttoned working-class blouse and her partially bared breast. She is posed looking directly at the viewer. Her unflinching gaze is reiterated by a self-confident hands-on-hips posture, commonly adopted by working-class women in photographic portraits, and completely congruous with middle-class notions of working-class sexuality as brash and unrestrained. The image engages heterosexual male pleasure on two levels; the artistic convention of sexual objectification of women through their fusion with flowers is conjoined with the pleasure of creating sexualized representations of working-class women.

The psycho-social grounds of this pleasure are plainly indicated by a passage from *No. 5 John Street*, in which the wealthy narrator acknowledges his attraction to Tilda, the flower-girl:

Great Tilda! She is such a change from the daughters of my parish. She might be scheduled as big, strong, fierce,

Figure 5. Walter Russell, *The Flower Girl*, undated. Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm. Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (Photo: Glasgow Museums).



cheeky, defiant, untameable, godless, a mighty woman of her hands. The others, bless them, are all so very much "just so." They will one day bring their males up to their own high level; but meanwhile perfection palls. It is odiously ungrateful, but there seems no "bite" in their pretty ways, their soft voices, their allusive turns of phrase .... these hothouse flowers abound at every step, and after excessive orchid one would fain see the wild rose.<sup>35</sup>

Here, the instantiation of difference through class provides the basis of desire based in lack.<sup>36</sup> In terms of gender, difference (as represented by the ultra-feminine lures of the women of his own class) is discounted as the grounds for desire. Rather, Whiteing permits his narrator to seek pleasure in Tilda's proximity to precisely those qualities so rigorously defined as "masculine" within the prevailing sexual economy: strength, defiance, might. Far from standing as a kind of perversion, however, such desire is presented as eminently natural. That is, whereas the hothouse flower is highly artificed and removed from the exigencies of the "real" world, the wild rose is indigenous – rooted in the

same experience of life as the narrator himself. Within this re-fashioning of "naturally" desirable femininity, then, it would appear that there is room for a recognition of identification (based on similarity) as well as of difference.<sup>37</sup>

If, in their respective creative fictions of the flower-seller, Russell and Whiteing both address the role of class in the stimulation of desire, they nevertheless retreat from implicating that desire in the economic system which necessarily mediated their interaction with female street-sellers. Thus, Whiteing's narrator never takes up Tilda's invitation to visit her stand at Piccadilly Circus, and Russell removes his model from the streets on which she conducts her business and consigns her basket to the rear of the composition. Despite this disavowal, commercial relations of buying and selling hover in the distance, remaining as one of the conditions of possibility of these representations. The fiction of the flower-girl was not just a story about sex, but one of economics, power and desire intertwined.

These underlying structures emerge in L.T. Meade's shilling romance *Jill, a Flower Girl* (1893). Like most sympathetically portrayed flower-sellers, the novel's heroine is possessed of floral attributes, which are expounded by one of her suitors, Silas Lynn. "You mind me," he proclaims, "o' one o' them dark, red, rich-looking

toolip-buds as comes in the spring ... so prim and yet so gay – so proper all round."<sup>38</sup> And Lynn, himself a prosperous flower merchant, knows the value of a tulip. When Jill approaches him for a loan, he attempts to finalize a different transaction, the very possibility of which his own metaphoric language has helped to formulate. "Shall it be a bargain Jill Robinson?" he asks; "I give you the five pounds and you give me your nice little purty bit of a self" (127). To Lynn, the honest businessman, the proposition is "respectable," for he makes it clear that he is proposing marriage. To the novel's readers, however, it would have been equally clear that not all such offers would have been as decorous, nor all such flower-girls as vehement in their refusal; for Jill, as the author repeatedly explained, was exceptional. "She and her mother belonged to the respectable class of flower girls .... They were [a] clean, decent sort of people," and very much in contrast to those who were still "low down, very low down in the world" – those who knew, as Meade put it, "absolute freedom from restraint" (29). A series of similar comparisons reinforces the effect: "The flower girl who sat next to her in her untidiness, her dirt, and al-



Figure 6. Alfred Munnings, *Violets (Flower Girl)*, ca. 1904. Oil on canvas, 35.6 x 42.4 cm. Dedham, Sir Alfred Munnings Art Museum (Photo: The Sir Alfred Munnings Art Museum, Castle House, Dedham, Essex CO7 6AZ).

most rags, acted as a foil to Jill. She had bedizened her person in a cheap dress of faded crimson ... and some bunches of artificial poppies (45-46).” The latter passage is laden with indicators of moral reprobation, calling into play the link between dirt and immorality. The specifically sexual nature of the disreputableness is signified in loaded terms such as “bedizened,” “cheap” and “faded crimson,” as well as in the deviance from nature signified by the artificial flowers. Where Jill was like a tulip, “so proper all around,” her companion was an artificial poppy: gaudy and denaturalized.

This pattern of classifying flower-sellers in terms of respectable and unrespectable sexuality was initiated by Henry Mayhew, who in 1851 marked off the “better class of flower-girls” from those who sought to “avail themselves of the sale of flowers in the streets for immoral purposes ... mixing up a leer with their whine for custom or for charity.”<sup>39</sup> In subsequent decades overt concern with the link between flower-sellers and prostitution appears to have declined, but illicit sexuality remained a potent undercurrent, occasionally rising close to the surface.

The spectre of prostitution haunts the opening act of *Pygmalion*, which is dominated by Eliza Doolittle’s tragicomic terror that her sales banter has been misinterpreted: “I ain’t done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman ... [Hysterically] I’m a respectable girl ... Oh, sir, don’t let him charge me. They’ll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen.”<sup>40</sup> Since, technically, Eliza is already on the streets, the implication is clear, and it forms one of the major narrative trajectories of the flower-girl fiction. However, not all texts follow the path to the same end. Having introduced the question of prostitution in the first act of *Pygmalion*, and reprised it in the second, when Eliza’s father offers to sell her to Higgins for five pounds, Shaw allows Eliza to close the issue in the fourth. In a passage indicative of Shaw’s own socialist and feminist politics, Eliza confronts Higgins with the implications of his transformative game. In answer to her anxiety about her future, Higgins holds out the possibility of marriage to “some chap or the other.” “We were above that at the corner of Tottenham Court Road,” she replies. “I sold flowers. I didn’t sell myself. Now you’ve made a lady of me I’m not fit to sell anything else.”<sup>41</sup>



Artists were not insensible to the dramatic possibilities of this sexual subtext. Alfred Munnings’ 1904 work *Violets (Flower Girl)* (fig. 6) hints at it in the posture of the flower-girl. Gazing at her customer through narrowed eyes, a smile playing around her mouth, her head slightly tilted, Munnings’ flower-girl leans forward as she proffers her bouquets. The gesture suggests that she offers herself as much as her wares for inspection. While the title evokes the popular language of flowers, in which flowers stand for personal attributes, the timidity associated with violets is ironically subverted by the flower-girl’s direct gaze and bodily presentation, as she invites the attention of a potential customer. The meaning is not transparent, but the possibility of a double-edged invitation is subtly put forward.

A.E. Mulready, by contrast, adopted a more direct approach, making the “dramatic power of innocence under threat”<sup>42</sup> his stock in trade. While giving prominence to the rosy-cheeked, large-eyed naïveté of the pubescent flower-girl in works such as *A London Crossing Sweeper and Flower Girl* (1884, fig. 3), Mulready also repeatedly mobilized potent signifiers of prostitution, particularly the night-time setting and the bridge over the Thames. Ever since Mayhew, the night-time trade in flowers had been specifically identified as the distinguishing characteristic of those fourteen- to nineteen-year-old girls who engaged in prostitution. The association with London’s bridges was equally laden, evoking the myth of the “used woman” who threw herself into the Thames in despair. Thomas Hood’s poetic treatment of the theme, *The Bridge of Sighs*, was illustrated by Gustave

Figure 7. John Lavery, *The Cigar Seller at the Glasgow Exhibition, 1888*. Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 38.2 cm. Private Collection (Photo: The Fine Art Society, London).



The relation of flower-sellers to this process is complex and sometimes contradictory. In an expanding service economy, the flower-seller was one of a growing number of women whose work was tied to the sale of commodities, and whose public representations were commonly cast in terms of available sexuality. Barmaids, milliners and shop assistants were linked to the flower-seller through a predominant conjunction of economic, erotic and epistemic models which associated selling with sex.<sup>46</sup> Assuming the personalized perspective of the customer, John Lavery's 1888 canvas *The Cigar Seller at the Glasgow Exhibition* (fig. 7) offers a glimpse into a world of commerce where the incursion

Doré and further inspired works by George Cruikshank, Abraham Solomon and George Frederick Watts.<sup>43</sup> Mulready's canvases resonate suggestively with these earlier images and associations.

The question of whether a flower-girl would or would not sell herself was influenced by the narrative exigencies of individual texts, but it was also inextricably tied to the changing nature of commercial discourse. By the second half of the nineteenth century the process of commodification had instigated a radical shift in industrial emphasis "from production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires."<sup>44</sup> As goods and desires became more intimately linked, a new role for women was carved from the economic foundations of a rapidly expanding commodity culture. In addition to their primary capacity as (re)producers of the labour force, and their more marginalized position within industrial production, women became pivotal to the process of exchange. Long figured as objects of exchange and signifiers of sexual desire, women were ideally suited to act as the lynch-pin between goods and consumer appetites. With the rapid expansion of the advertising industry after 1851, women's capacity to become the dominant sign for saleable objects was formulated in graphic terms, and by the century's close the female body had become "the prevailing icon of commodity culture."<sup>45</sup>

of young women workers had brought "dramatic changes to the sexual landscape."<sup>47</sup> In his description of these changes as they affected the representation of barmaids, Peter Bailey argues that consumer capitalism in the late nineteenth century developed a pervasive mode of managed female sexuality, which was carefully channelled into the sale of goods. Like the barmaid, the role of the shop assistant was not merely to administer the actual exchange (present the product, take the money), but to stimulate desire. It was standard practice among employers to choose a prospective assistant "for her figure."<sup>48</sup> Such desire was understood to motivate men and women differently, of course. Within the assumed logic of heterosexuality, the pretty shop attendant contributed to a sense of glamour for the new palaces of consumption, and sparked off an identificatory desire in female customers, who saw their own potential attractiveness mirrored in every aspect of their surroundings. For male customers, on the other hand, the desire that female saleswomen were engaged to elicit was more direct. Thus, unlike the busy and helpful assistants who offer the tools and trinkets of beauty to female customers in S. Melton Fisher's *Vanity Fair* (ca. 1895, fig. 8), the young woman who caters to the male clientele of the cigar shop does not need to be actually selling in order to be selling. She does not actively offer the cigars, nor busy herself in their advantageous arrangement. Rather, she relaxes back

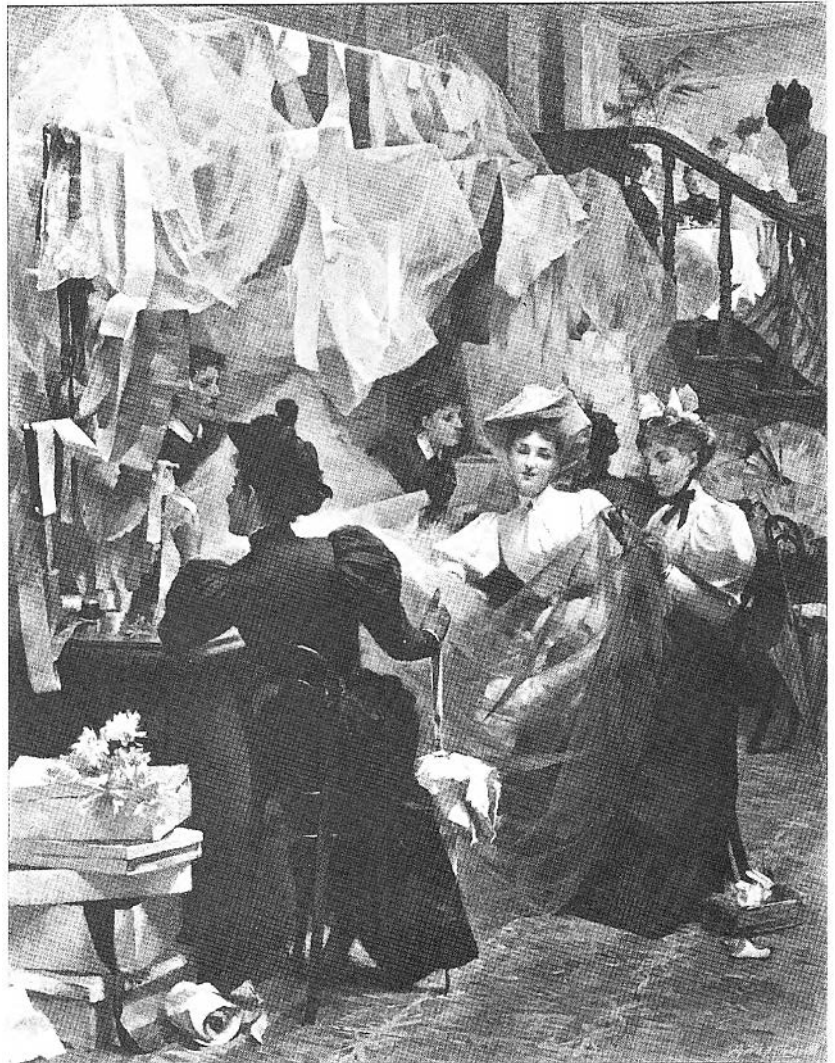
Figure 8. Samuel Melton Fisher, *Vanity Fair*, ca. 1895. Oil on canvas, 160 x 121.9 cm. Unlocated (Photo: Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, reproduced from *Royal Academy Pictures*, 1895).

out. Her nonchalant manner echoes the casually disposed cigar boxes which mediate the viewer's access to her. Like everything else at the Glasgow Exhibition, including the open box of cigars, she is there to be seen. This conjunction of seeing and desiring, of the female body and the available commodity, linked these working women ambiguously, but firmly, to the issue of prostitution.

Of course, this link was not uniformly articulated across these different kinds of employment. The flower-seller differed from the shop-assistant on many grounds; some of these differences reduced the implication of sexual exchange, while others increased it. On one hand, unlike the young women in *Vanity Fair*, the flower-seller was not constantly surrounded by luxury goods which she might envy but could never afford on an "honestly" attained salary.<sup>49</sup> Flowers were seen as wholesome products of the natural world, far removed from the decadent artifice which encouraged moral transgression.<sup>50</sup> Then again, unlike the shop-assistant, the sexuality of the flower-seller was not managed by an employer. In this respect she was, like the independent prostitute, the only arbiter of what she sold. Most significantly though, the flower-seller was, in a real sense, a street-walker. And as urban discourse shifted from an early nineteenth-century emphasis on the dangers of the city to a late-century focus on the pleasures of the metropolis, street-walking entailed an increasingly complex negotiation of positions. However incompletely and tentatively, the advent of metropolitan consumer society re-formulated the conjunction of working women, selling and the streets from a socially disruptive danger into a licensed possibility of proximity.

#### Modesty, Maternity and the Streets

By the 1880s metropolitan streets had become one of the major sites on which a growing crisis of sexual politics was enacted. Protesting women unionists, newly prominent women "in business," shopping ladies, charity workers and social investigators, suffragists, and women writers and artists looking for creative material, all articulated challenges to the formulation of femininity in, and through, urban spaces.<sup>51</sup> In the very midst of this turmoil was the flower-



girl. Perceptions of her sexuality, and her femininity more generally, were not only determined by the flower-girl's relation to her product, but also by her relation to her working environment. Throughout the Victorian period, many artists responded to the flower-girl's presence in the streets by emphasizing a feminine vulnerability and dependence. The plaintive pathos of the little orphaned flower-girl is the logical development of this approach. In the 1890s, however, a new characterization of the flower-girl began to gain currency.

Bernard E. Ward's life-sized canvas *London Flower Girls* (1895, fig. 9) participates in an urban vision of flower-sellers which emphasizes self-possession, vitality and a touch of irreverence. The painting's central figure is a mature woman, possibly the mother of the children who sit by her. With a boisterous smile she stands confidently, one foot forward and a hand on her hip, both at ease in and in control of her

Figure 9. Bernard Ward, *London Flower Girls*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 213.4 x 274.3 cm. Unlocated. (Photo: Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, reproduced from *Royal Academy Pictures*, 1896).



surroundings. The combined effect of pose, gaze and smile suggests a vigorous woman, self-assertive enough to oversee the flourishing trade which appears to be going on. Similar traits are apparent in Winifred Matthews' portrayal of *'Arriet* (fig. 10), who stands forthrightly, with her hands in her pockets, a raised eyebrow, and a lopsided grin on her comic, though sympathetically treated, face.<sup>52</sup> Both images recall E.T. Cook's description of the flower-sellers at Covent Garden as "a cheery, though somewhat rowdy, folk, who mean no harm by their very outspoken witticisms." Almost apologetically, Cook goes on to explain that such departure from accepted codes of femininity was a consequence of the women's exposure to the dangers of the streets. "Their rowdiness is an historic legacy," she writes, "for in past days, this neighbourhood used to be ravaged by the redoubted street bullies called 'Mohocks' or 'Scourers'."<sup>53</sup> The masculine forms such perils assumed is acknowledged by Richard Whiteing, as he describes Tilda's struggle to maintain her independence:

From her cradle, if she ever had one, she has faced the world, and fought her way in it to such poor place as she holds. Who can jaw a copper like Tilda, or carney a Covent Garden salesman out of a bargain, or take the size out of a chaffing swell?<sup>54</sup>

In their emphasis on the flower-girl's unabashed and high-spirited nature, Ward, Matthews, Whiteing and Cook

all allude to the specific discourse of the Cockney which was in circulation during the 1890s and 1900s. And by entitling her image *'Arriet*, Matthews makes a direct reference to the supreme fictional Cockney: *'Arry*. First developed in a series of *Punch* cartoons by E.J. Milliken from 1877 to the 1890s, *'Arry* the Cockney costermonger was brought to the pinnacle of his career by the music-hall performances of Albert Chevalier. His main features included "a picturesque cheerfulness and wit embedded in characteristic turn of phrase, a mildly irreverent attitude to law and authority, a comic particularism, a stubborn and often illogical ethical code, combined with a good hearted patriotism."<sup>55</sup> Many of these qualities are to be found in the new

vision of the London flower-girl. Indeed, it is not too much to suggest that if the quintessential male Cockney was a costermonger, his female counterpart was the flower-girl – engaged in a similar occupation but (predictably) one step down the economic ladder, with not even enough capital to afford her own barrow. Gareth Stedman Jones has argued persuasively that the political effect of the Cockney model of the 1890s was to promote a conservative language of class, according to which social and economic differences could be enshrined within a national and imperial unity. The Cockney flower-girl was reassuringly represented as part of "a conservative race," within which "there are socialistic Countesses, but never a flower-girl that is not an individualist."<sup>56</sup> As I have argued of the flower-girl at various points, Stedman Jones affirms that the difference posed by the Cockney was not understood in terms of outcast otherness, but rather as an element of domestic complementarity, in which even the poorest members "had a valuable contribution to make to the nation."<sup>57</sup>

The terms of difference posed by this new strain of representations of independent and boisterous flower-girls could not all be encompassed within the discursive formulation of the Cockney, however. As Stedman Jones's own work illustrates, the fiction of the Cockney was primarily masculine. Irreverence and coarseness were easily encompassed within this masculine framework, but within the female world of the flower-girl they posed potential diffi-



culties. Elizabeth Banks, for instance, was scathing on the violent and de-feminized nature of London flower-sellers. "I had expected to find them coarse and rough," she wrote in *The English Illustrated Magazine*, "but I was not prepared for such obscene and profane talk as I heard. With many, all womanly modesty seemed to be a thing of the long-gone past."<sup>58</sup>

Methods for accommodating such attributes varied. Most typical was the endeavour to unearth within the flower-girl some remnant of that feminine sensibility so despaired of by Cook. This could take different forms. Painters such as Luke Fildes, Trevor Haddon and Henry Woods abandoned London flower-girls altogether in favour of Venetian ones – all foreign good looks and romantic costumes.<sup>59</sup> With questions of urban struggle and poverty thus comfortably effaced by exoticism, the Italian flower-girl was constructed as the embodiment of the feminine attributes her Cockney counterpart so lacked: charm, grace and fashion sense. A more modest and domestic solution was found by reactivating that old stand-by, the association of flowers with femininity. This was Edwin Pugh's strategy as he followed a flower-girl's morning rounds at Covent Garden:

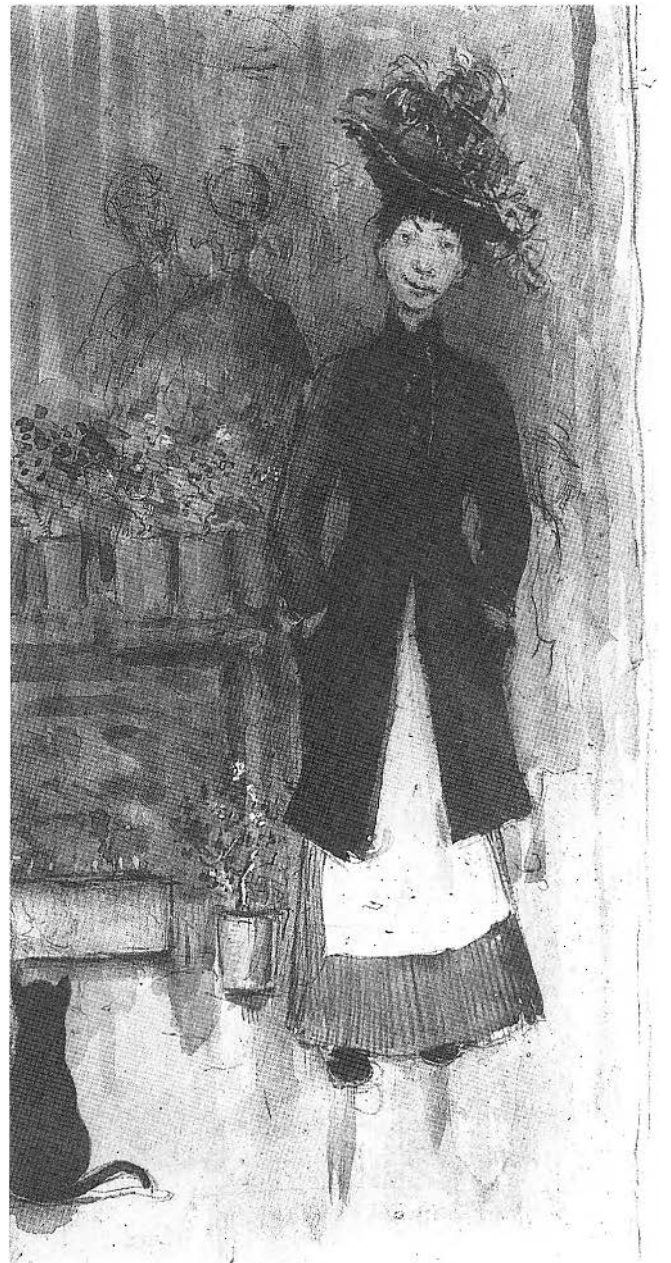
Her fingers, coarsened by cold and damp, covered with scratches from thorns and wire, are, nevertheless, the daintiest and most dextrous in the world. Her mind, despite the hardness of her lot, still retains enough delicate feminine taste to enable her to make the prettiest possible display of her wares.<sup>60</sup>

A substantially different approach was adopted in *No. 5 John Street*. As I have argued, Tilda's position as a figure of desire was enabled by the narrator's recalculation of the true nature of "womanhood[']s ... enduring charm." The result of this reworking was to unseat attraction from its traditional place within reassuringly enshrined difference, and to move it to a new ground of proximity, where apparently "masculine" qualities, such as strength and ferocity, could be shared. Listen again to Richard Whiteing as he describes Tilda:

She is Boadicea, strong of her hands, and usually not a bit too clean of them ... decidedly foul-mouthed – no "British warrior queen" of nursery recitation, but a right-down "raughty gal." ... She is Hera, the furious and proud, who is but travestied in the airs of a modern fine lady put upon her by her South Kensington aesthetes. The ferocity of these type of womanhood is the secret of their enduring charm.<sup>61</sup>

Queen and Goddess: the figures evoke a mythical power redolent of psychoanalytic readings of the phallic or archaic

Figure 10. Winifred Matthews, 'Arriet', ca. 1894. Unlocated (Photo by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London).



mother, that pre-Oedipal figure of propinquity and plenitude – remnant of a time before identity and desire were irrevocably structured in terms of Otherness.<sup>62</sup> According to this formulation, Tilda's abundant power would not so much designate "masculinity," as it would serve as a reminder of an originary and common humanity, before it was so ruthlessly cloven in two by gender. While my arguments in this article are more social than psychoanalytic, the co-incidence of language is too important to overlook, for it indicates yet another level at which the flower-girl functioned as a figure of connection.



A very different concept of maternity is employed by Charles Shaw, however. First quoted at the outset of this article, Shaw's contribution to the trade union periodical *The Woman Worker* included a lengthy account of how "his" flower-girl had rescued him from a mob of aggressive street urchins. After dispersing the band of unruly boys, Shaw reports that "Violet" reproached him. "Seems to me guv'nor, you want looking after," she admonished, to which the author responded by "humbly confess[ing] my inability to look after myself in the great city." But such an inversion of gender roles was not allowed to stand unmitigated, for after Shaw "confessed" his weakness, he reassured the reader that "Violet" looked at him "like a little mother."<sup>63</sup> With this one phrase, a young woman's street wisdom was suddenly transformed into maternal protectiveness. The emphasis on her "littleness," however, makes it clear that this is no powerful archaic mother, but the tender, gentle and nurturing figure so prevalent within Victorian ideology.

This second notion of maternity is a subordinate but pervasive theme in representations of the flower-girl from the 1880s onwards, as the business of flower-selling came to be seen as a hereditary one in which "nearly all of the London flower-girls have or had mothers, grandmothers, and even great-grandmothers engaged in the same line."<sup>64</sup> Such generational relationships were increasingly represented. Whereas early accounts, such as Mayhew's, often presented flower-girls as children, by the later Victorian and Edwardian period there was a tendency to show them as mothers. The shift is in keeping with the pattern of changing social concerns. From a mid-century emphasis on child welfare (viz. the 1842-3 Reports of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children and the 1870 Education Act), social reformists and legislators gradually transferred their attention to motherhood.<sup>65</sup> The perception of a national crisis in motherhood during the 1900s, identified by Anna Davin, had its roots in issues that were already cause for anxiety by the last decades of the nineteenth century: "a falling birth-rate, high rates of infant mortality, insecurities about Empire ... worries about international economic power, and new knowledge about the extent of poverty combined with eugenicist ideas about the degeneration of the race."<sup>66</sup> Working women were the particular focus of much of this concern, with female employment widely held to be "an unmitigated evil where there are children."<sup>67</sup>

As some of London's most visible working mothers, flower-sellers with children were obvious subjects for expression of this concern. But in contrast to the admonitory note which marked much sociological discussion of working mothers' employment, the visual images highlight dependence and tenderness. Maternity could be a potent

counterbalance to the "unfeminine" traits of independence and aggression sometimes perceived amongst London flower-sellers. Thus, in *Living London*, William Ryan tempers his military metaphors of a "militia" of female "skirmishers" and an "army of flower girls" who "advance to the attack" with a subsequent anecdote of a "girl-woman" whose maternity was apparent from "the melting tenderness in the depths of her eye and the waxen hue of her fingers."<sup>68</sup> Maternal tenderness was clearly the theme of J.J. Shannon's 1900 canvas *The Flower Girl* (fig. 11). Purchased for the nation, the painting was tremendously popular with reviewers, who found it "particularly sweet," "charming" and "very fine in sentiment."<sup>69</sup> Significantly, Shannon chose not to situate this scene of attentive motherhood and healthy infancy in the city, but against a natural background of abundant foliage. The decision gratified the critic for *The Daily News*, who waxed lyrical on this image of "a young mother nursing her child where all the surroundings speak of the ebullition of Nature's motherhood."<sup>70</sup> This is familiar territory. The elision by artists of women, maternity and the natural world has been effectively analysed by feminist art historians.<sup>71</sup> At the hands of a painter such as Shannon, the powerful combination of motherhood and nature served to ward off those troubling associations which might attend the image of the flower-seller. Questions of poverty and infant mortality, the role of women as workers within society, or the effect of urban exposure on the femininity of London's women street-traders were forestalled. As a mother, the flower-girl was once again comfortably accommodated inside conventional gender relations, despite the challenges to femininity which her employment, appearance and behaviour might have posed.

Urban Nature; or "Flowers ... existed long before railways"

With or without the intervention of motherhood, the germ of a reassuring relationship between flower-girls and the natural world was always inherent in the subject by virtue of the product they sold. Discussing the reasons for the enduring appeal of flower-sellers as subjects for nineteenth-century artists, Celina Fox comments that they "invariably evoked favourable associations ... with the delights of the countryside."<sup>72</sup> Love for flowers was seen enthusiastically by Mayhew as a link between the best qualities of the rural peasant and the urban worker. Dramatically, flowers were presented as rays of hope within urban failure. Writing in *Street Life in London*, John Thomson and Adolphe Smith saw

something inexpressibly touching in the tendency of the poor to fall back on nature's gifts when reduced to the last extremity. ... In exchange for nature's gift, she [the

flower-girl] seems to challenge human compassion; and shall the heart of man remain cold where the produce of field and garden are so bounteous and beautiful?<sup>73</sup>

A similar challenge is posed by George Clausen in his *Schoolgirls, Haverstock Hill* (fig. 4), and reinforced by the class-based parallel drawn between the flower-girl and the old milk-carrier – the latter a clear reference to the necessary incursion of country peasantry within the modern city. In fiction, too, the flower-girl was repeatedly associated with the country; perhaps she came from it (*Little Nell, the Flower Seller*) or perhaps she was eventually uplifted to it (*Kitty Bright, the Flower Girl*).<sup>74</sup> The terms of the association were not always clear-cut, however. When, in *No. 5 John Street*, Tilda is brought for a trip to the country, she is initially enraptured, but the visit soon turns sour as an encounter with some “Cockney” toughs reminds Tilda of her own “natural” environment: Piccadilly Circus. This element of refusal of the countryside in the fiction of the flower-girl suggests that her relation to the natural world was tenuously and uncomfortably balanced. On the one hand, flowers were perceived as redolent of open fields and wholesome living. Yet even the commentators who most vigorously drew this link were compelled to recognize that flowers were a distinctly urban commodity, no less subject to artificial social relations than any man-made object. As Thomson and Smith acknowledged, “even such simple flowers as the primrose and violet are now governed by the inexorable and iron laws of supply and demand. They are sold at auction and by contract.”<sup>75</sup>

In Charles Ginner’s *Piccadilly Circus* (1912, Tate Gallery) the flower-seller appears as an anachronism of the urban world. The rapid pace of the modern metropolis is contrasted with the stolid woman who sits fashioning her bouquets, a vestige of the days when nature and minor commerce were not engulfed by mechanization. And yet, as the editors of *The Graphic* acknowledged in 1872, the prevalence of the urban flower-girl was precisely due to modern mechanization in the form of the railway system. “Flowers,” they wrote, “existed long before railways, but to dwell-

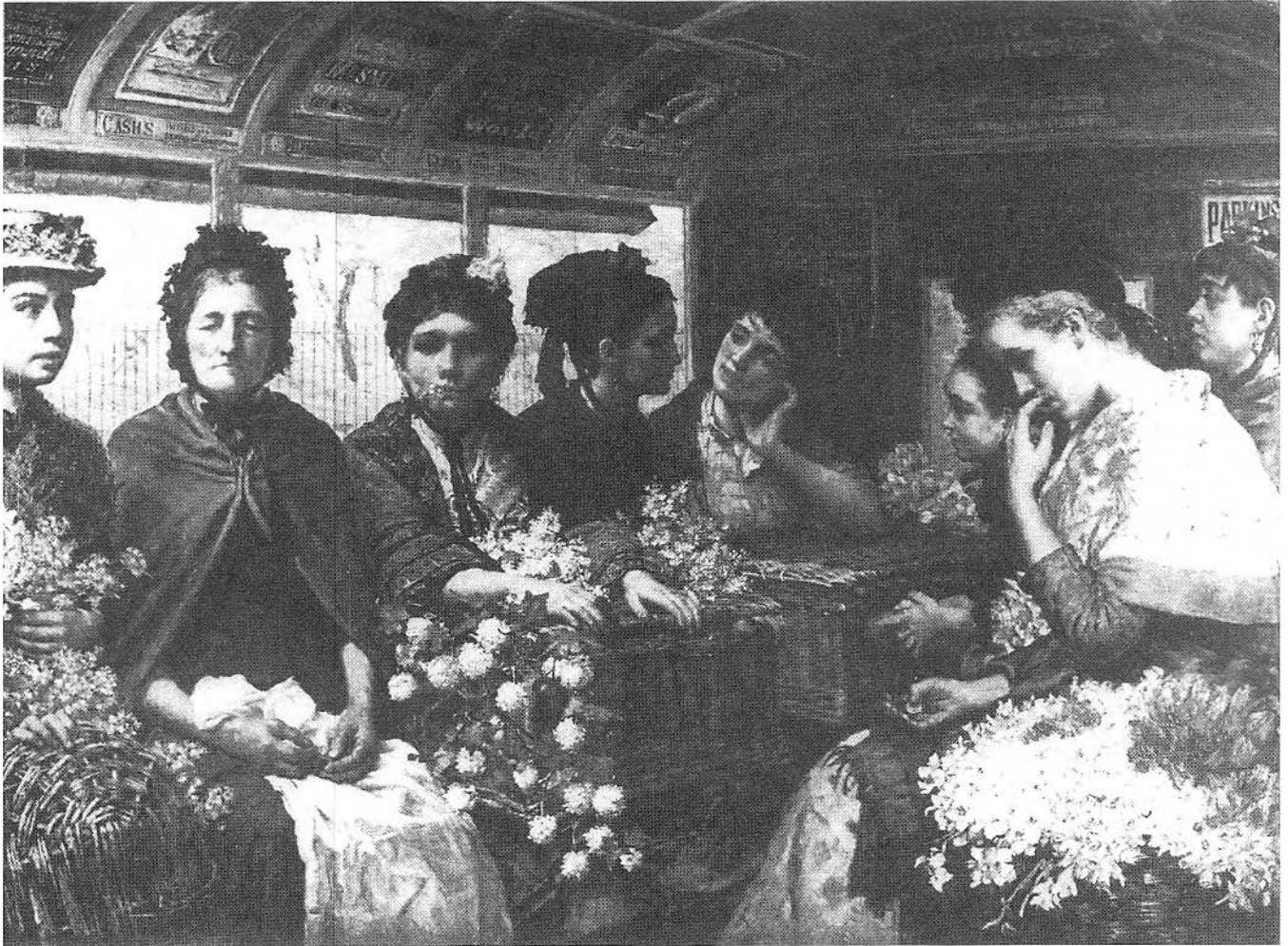
Figure 11. James Shannon, *The Flower Girl*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 84 x 67.5 cm. London, Tate Gallery (Photo: Tate Gallery Publishing).



ers in great cities railways have multiplied flowers fifty-fold, because the swiftness of our present means of communication has so immensely extended the area of production.”<sup>76</sup>

All of these commentators noted the link which bound the natural world as closely to the metropolis as it did flowers and flower-girls to the city streets. Such emphasis on connection, however, diverges from the ideological polarization of city and country proposed by dominant cultural analysis.<sup>77</sup> A different analytical trajectory is suggested by Nicholas Green in *The Spectacle of Nature*. Here, Green argues that in the nineteenth century “the material and cultural fabric of the metropolis ... set the terms for the social production of the countryside,” resulting in an understanding of nature as “not antithetical but integral to the living out of metropolitan culture.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, for instance, there was a shift in perception from the countryside as the seat of

Figure 12. Maria Brooks, *Down Piccadilly*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 95 x 127 cm. Private collection (Photo: Witt Library, London).



land-based wealth to nature as a visual commodity, constituted in part by the rapid proliferation of landscape paintings and prints circulated through a newly expanded urban art market.

For flower-sellers, these links were primarily economic, but they were recognized culturally. In a fantastic scene in *No. 5 John Street*, Tilda meets the Princess of Wales at a charity function for neighbourhood children. "It must be delightful to live in the country with the beautiful flowers," the Princess comments politely. As the narrator immediately points out, "it is a shot which, in its aim, takes no account ... of the fact that Tilda has hardly ever in her life beheld a flower growing 'wholesale'."<sup>79</sup> The ironic wording highlights the transformation of nature into a commodity. To behold nature, for Tilda, can only be to see it in terms of her own economic activity. And this was not only true for flower-sellers themselves. Both materially and discursively, the existence of the flower-seller/flower-girl had an impact upon the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-

century vision of the countryside. Thus even in such bucolic countryside scenes as William Logsdail's descriptively titled *Flower-Gathering in the South of France* (RA 1892) her spectre is apparent, for the number of women working the fields and the quantity of flowers which they gather indicate intensive production for a metropolitan market.<sup>80</sup> In this fashion, flowers did indeed provide the link Mayhew imagined between the rural peasant and the urban worker; however the terms of this association were not those of an uplifting love of nature, but an interdependence of labour structured by capitalism.

#### Urban Authority and the Economic Insider

Flower-sellers' relation to prevailing systems of commodity exchange and urban organization are most explicitly acknowledged in a unique work by Maria Brooks, entitled *Down Piccadilly* (1882, fig. 12). The painting depicts seven flower-sellers crowded together in an omnibus, *en route* to

their places of business. Some of them chat amongst themselves, while others stare impassively ahead with the detached self-containment so familiar to travellers on public transportation. At the right of the scene, the foremost figure looks fixedly at the coins in her hand. The fingers she holds up to her mouth suggest concentration, possibly puzzlement or anxiety. Across from her, her companion regards her intently, eyes wide open.

The image is unique in a number of respects. Through its unusual setting it rewrites the relation of the flower-girl to the city streets, showing her not so much as part of an urban spectacle, but as a participant in the infrastructure of the metropolis. Replacing the appeal to the spectator with a casual conversation amongst the women, it is also one of the only images to show social interaction among flower-sellers themselves. Through the product advertisements above the women's heads, it is certainly the only work which explicitly juxtaposes the buying and selling of flowers with the broader commercial world. And most importantly, through the suggested financial drama taking place at the front of the scene, it calls attention to the economic activity of the flower-seller.

It is at this last level that the flower-seller can most thoroughly be said to occupy the role of urban "insider" for, despite her poverty, the daily activity of the flower-seller could be perfectly encompassed within a bourgeois economic order. In a very real way, the flower-seller could be seen as a mini-capitalist.<sup>81</sup> Dependent upon her own efforts to turn a profit, she was a sterling witness to the ability of the reigning system to embrace all ranks within its reach, and to work in the interests of even the lowliest members of the urban economy. Unlike the unemployed and unruly proletarians of "King Mob" on London Streets, the flower-girl was a sign that the current system could be made to function through free-enterprise with an occasional dose of philanthropic benevolence. This was a recipe for urban harmony without class upheaval. Its promise was that of a well-ordered society, in which there was room for the peaceable coexistence of "all kinds."

But was this coexistence so peaceable? In 1851, Henry Mayhew recorded an interview with a flower-seller "of an immoral character." The interview is remarkable in that it provides the only account of personal rebellion within the constitutive discursive components of the flower-girl fiction. When Mayhew met her, the woman had recently completed a three-month term of imprisonment with hard labour "for heaving her shoe," as she said 'at the Lord Mayor, to get a comfortable lodging.'" This was followed by a subsequent prison term for breaking street-lamps, in the hope "that by committing some such act she might be able to

get into an asylum for females."<sup>82</sup> It is ironic, but also appropriate, that this sole instance of transgression on the part of a flower-girl was not perpetrated in antagonism to the system of social relations which characterized metropolitan society, but as a plea to be allowed to participate in these relations in an authorized way: to be taken into an asylum, to leave her outcast position and be accepted inside a network of institutionally determined urban positions. The poignancy of this scene lies in the fact that of course the flower-seller was already thoroughly implicated in such a network, determined by the operation of the prevailing systems of gender and economics. Already in 1851 the futility of the gesture of a flower-girl hurling her shoe at the Lord Mayor in protest at the role she had been allocated within these systems was apparent. Forty years later all such traces of transgression had been erased from the fiction of the flower-girl. In 1892 Queen's Counsellor Montagu Williams emphasized the trustworthiness of flower-sellers, characterizing them as a "very worthy class,"<sup>83</sup> and part of the lawful and orderly functioning of London. When, disguised as a flower-girl, the journalist Elizabeth Banks strayed too far into the middle of the sidewalk, a policeman took her by the shoulders and propelled her forcefully back to its edge. But normally such efforts were not required for, unlike Banks in costume for a day, the women who engaged in the sale of flowers for a living knew their place.

British artists participated in the construction of this well-defined set of urban relations. Formally, the process is particularly apparent in Logsdail's *St Martin's-in-the-Fields* (fig. 2), which constructs a spatial alignment between flower-girl, policemen and the imposing portico of the church. Logsdail's choice of edifice registers on multiple levels. Though the tenets of Christianity might be invoked to highlight the pathos of poverty amid plenty, and to promote charity towards the poor of London's streets, the long-standing implication of the Church of England in the economic and political fabric of the nation also rendered it a powerful symbol of the reigning hegemony. Furthermore, as a framing architectural component of Trafalgar Square, the facade of St Martin's-in-the-Fields was part of one of the most symbolically charged emblems of imperial order.<sup>84</sup> Logsdail does not contrast the flower-girl to this order as much as he includes her as part of it, formally linked in a visual chain of power relations through the spatial and symbolic deployment of the policemen. That the policeman's presence here is not just coincidental is suggested by his repeated appearance across a range of flower-girl images. He is there (along with St. Martin's and a Royal coat of arms) in Clausen's *The Flower Seller, Trafalgar Square* (fig. 1) and in A.E. Mulready's *Our Street of Publishers* (1886).<sup>85</sup>

He stands by the flower-sellers congregated at the Cheapside monument to Sir Robert Peel, founder of the Metropolitan Police, in an illustration to W.J. Loftie's *London City* (1891), and in Ward's *London Flower Girls* (fig. 9) he is far in the distance, but still recognizable. Yet though the visual presence of the police is reiterated again and again in paintings of flower-girls, they are not brought into direct relation with each other. Rather, the policeman stands in the shadows, as in Clausen's scene of Trafalgar Square. Better still, in the works by Mulready, Logsdail, Ward and Loftie, he has his back to the flower-girls altogether. He is not a coercive presence for the "meek and lowly dealer in blossoms;" there is no need for him to be, for, as long as she followed the rules of the game, the flower-seller was, perversely, a model urbanite. Though poor, she was not part of that "Outcast London" to be found east of Aldgate Pump. Rather, she was present and accessible at the heart of the West End. And within that space, despite her poverty, the flower-girl could participate in that ultimately appropriate urban endeavour, buying and selling. As part of a modern consumer economy she was not only a prime example of that oh-so-profitable commodification of women, but was herself a reassuring parody of the small business-person. Within the schema of turn-of-the-century representation, the flower-girl was a fully integrated part of the commercial metropolis.

#### Notes

This article stems from doctoral research into the representation of women workers in British visual culture, conducted at the University of Manchester. I wish to express my warmest gratitude to Deborah Cherry, whose insightful and sympathetic guidance has made the learning process all that it should be. Thanks also to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission for their generous support, and to Andrea MacKean, Mark Crinson and Bridget Elliott for their comments.

- 1 Charles N.L. Shaw, "The Flower Girl," *The Woman Worker*, 17 November 1909, 457.
- 2 Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, eds, *The Edwardian Era* (Oxford, 1987), 73. In "'With My Own Eyes': Fetishism, the Labouring Body and the Colour of its Sex," *Art History*, XVII, 3 (September 1994), 342-82, Griselda Pollock has complexified the terms of this process, but here, too, difference is ultimately reasserted through the mechanism of race.
- 3 Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London, 1993), 143.
- 4 Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" in Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London, 1988), 50-90. Even for prostitutes, as Lynda Nead has demonstrated in *Myths of Sexuality* (Oxford, 1988), difference was the fundamental character of visual representation.
- 5 Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992); Lynne Walker, "Vistas of Pleasure: Women Consumers of Urban Space in the West End of London 1850-1900," *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester, 1995), 70-85; Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca, 1995). In "The Invisible Flaneur," *Post Modern Cities and Spaces*, eds S. Watson and K. Gibson (Oxford, 1995), 66-67, Elizabeth Wilson has challenged the division between the "real" presence of women in cities and their "ideological" proscription from them, arguing that ideology and reality are linked in shifting and not necessarily contradictory ways. If ideology is to retain any usefulness as an analytical concept, however, it must be *precisely* to the extent that it signifies a difference from material conditions. For this reason, I have preferred to adopt a Foucauldian formulation of discourse as the bridge between material and symbolic.
- 6 My own search, by no means exhaustive, has identified over 100 paintings and prints of flower-girls made between 1875 and 1912.
- 7 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1851), I, 134; P.F. William Ryan, "London's Flower Girls," *Living London*, ed. George Sims (London, 1902, rpt. as *Edwardian London*, London, 1990), II, 155.
- 8 Gareth Stedman Jones, "The 'Cockney' and the Nation, 1780-1988," *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations Since 1800*, eds David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (London, 1989), 315.
- 9 Sims, ed., *Living London*, 154-55. Flower-sellers were present in cities across the country, but the flower-girl was distinctly of London. When representations specify a location, it is virtually always London.
- 10 *Piccadilly Circus* (Tate Gallery) is reproduced in Wendy Baron, *The Camden Town Group* (London, 1979), 313. Other examples are Edward Wilkinson, *Spring Piccadilly* (1887; Laing Art Gallery) and Walter Duncan, *Flower Sellers Piccadilly* (1908; Museum of London).
- 11 Little is known about A.E. Mulready, a figure painter who specialized in sentimentalized paintings of children. Judging from the sheer number of his flower-seller paintings, which all conform to a standard type, the works must have sold well to private buyers.
- 12 Sims, ed., *Living London*, 156-57.
- 13 Rudyard Kipling, "The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot" (1890), in Kipling, *Many Inventions* (London, 1920), 295-326; Edith Ostlere, "Any Fla-ars or Po-t Ferns" in Ostlere, *From Seven Dials* (London, 1898); Emma Leslie, *Fanny the Flower Girl* (London, 1872).
- 14 Peter Keating, "Fact and Fiction in the East End," *The Victorian City*, eds H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London, 1973), 589.



- 15 Griselda Pollock, "Vicarious Excitements," *New Formations*, IV (Spring 1988), 25-50; Allan Woods, "Doré's 'London' - Art as Evidence," *Art History*, I, 3 (1978), 341-49; Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times* (Manchester, 1987).
- 16 Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 26.
- 17 James Granville Adderly, "Preface," *East End Idylls*, A. St John Adcock (London, 1897), 4.
- 18 Sims, ed., *Living London*, 157.
- 19 Sims, ed., *Living London*, 156.
- 20 Sheila King, "'Savages and Martyrs': Images of the Urban Poor in Victorian Literature and Art," *Victorian Artists and the City*, eds I.B. Nadel and F.S. Schwarzbach (New York, 1980), 20.
- 21 Information on the societies is taken from the following texts: Sims, ed., *Living London*, 156; Eric Hammond and B. Prescott Row, *London Town: The Daily Mail Jubilee Guide to the Metropolis* (London, 1897), 91; Walter Besant, *East London* (London, 1901), 342; "The London Flower Girl," *Clerkenwell Lamplighter* (December 1890), 2; John Groom, *The Romance of the John Groom's Crippleage and Flower Girl's Mission* (London, 1919). Thanks to Vada Hart of Islington Libraries.
- 22 Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London, 1976), 156-203.
- 23 Richard Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street* (London, 1899), 75-76.
- 24 Elizabeth Banks, "How the Other Half Lives: The Flower Girl," *The English Illustrated Magazine*, XII (June 1894), 927.
- 25 G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1912), in Shaw, *Androcles and the Lion, Overruled, Pygmalion* (London, 1916), 97-205; Vladimir Norakidze, *Norah the Flower-Girl* (London, 1872); Eliza Coates, *Kitty Bright the Flower Girl* (London, 1874); Hal Ludlow, *Only a Flower-Girl and Other Tales* (London, 1887).
- 26 Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, 295.
- 27 Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act V, 178.
- 28 John Lavery, *The Life of a Painter* (London, 1940), 66-71; Kenneth McConkey, *Sir John Lavery* (Edinburgh, 1993), 67; Kenneth McConkey, *Edwardian Portraits: Images of an Age of Opulence* (Woodbridge, 1987), 234. It is worth noting that art history has provided more than one alleged role model for Shaw's *Pygmalion*. In *Frederic, Lord Leighton: Eminent Victorian Artist*, by Richard Ormond, Leone Ormond, Christopher Newall, Stephen Jones and Benedict Read (London, 1996) the basis of inspiration is credited to Leighton's relationship with his working-class model, Ada Alice Pullan. Thanks to Bridget Elliott for this reference.
- 29 Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall," *Art History*, VII, 2 (1984), 206-27.
- 30 McConkey, *Sir John Lavery*, 67.
- 31 Eight of Grandville's fifty-two illustrations for a book of the same name by T. Delord (Paris, 1846) are reproduced in J. Gerard, *Grandville: Das Gesamte Werk* (Herrsching, 1972), II, 1500-07. Thanks to Andrea MacKean for bringing Grandville to my attention.
- 32 Journal of Elizabeth Rigby, later Lady Eastlake, 1843; quoted in Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women* (Rochdale, 1987), 20-21; Pamela Gerrish Nunn, "Delightful but Limited" in Nunn, *Problem Pictures* (Aldershot, 1995), 29-31; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1750-1850* (London, 1987), 374.
- 33 Shaw, "The Flower Girl," 457.
- 34 Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 135; Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London, 1981), 119-23; Linda Nochlin, "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth Century Art," *Woman as Sex Object*, eds T. Hess and L. Nochlin (New York, 1972), 11.
- 35 Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, 228, 265.
- 36 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, 1986).
- 37 In *Star-gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London, 1994), Jackie Stacey has persuasively argued that the psychoanalytic formulation of desire should be broadened to include some elements of identification.
- 38 L.T. Meade, *Jill, a Flower Girl* (London, 1893), 122. Subsequent page references will be provided in the text.
- 39 Mayhew, *London Labour*, I, 134.
- 40 Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act I, 109.
- 41 Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act IV, 165-66.
- 42 Celina Fox, *Londoners* (London, 1987), 165.
- 43 See Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 168-70, figs. 29, 39, 44 and 45.
- 44 Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (London, 1985), 2.
- 45 Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* (London, 1991), 205.
- 46 Theresa Ann Gronberg, "Femmes de Brasserie," *Art History*, VII, 3 (September 1984), 329-43; Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas* (Berkeley, 1986), 151-64. On links between selling and sexuality, see Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique*, XXXIX (Fall 1986), 118-22. While recognizing this conjuncture, Ruth E. Iskin, in "Selling, Seduction, and Soliciting the Eye: Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*," *Art Bulletin*, LXXVII, 1 (March 1995), 26, argues that the image of the woman behind the counter must also be situated in a "much broader discourse of mass consumption."
- 47 Peter Bailey, "Parasexuality and Glamour: the Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype," *Gender & History*, II, 2 (Summer 1990), 165.
- 48 E.T. Cook, *Highways and Byways in London* (London, 1902), 302.
- 49 Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City* (London, 1991), 49-50.
- 50 Mayhew, *London Labour*, I, 132.
- 51 Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 41-80; Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets, passim*.

- 52 Thanks to Alicia Foster for bringing Winifred Matthews to my attention.
- 53 Cook, *Highways and Byways*, 318.
- 54 Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, 229.
- 55 Stedman Jones, "The 'Cockney' and the Nation," 278.
- 56 Cook, *Highways and Byways*, 438; Edwin Pugh, *City of the World* (London, 1912), 41; quoted in Stedman Jones, "The 'Cockney' and the Nation," 304.
- 57 Stedman Jones, "The 'Cockney' and the Nation," 303.
- 58 Banks, "How the Other Half Lives," 926.
- 59 Fildes, *The Venetian Flower Girl*, 1884, is a prime example; see also Banks, "How the Other Half Lives," 925.
- 60 Pugh, *City of the World*, 218.
- 61 Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, 95.
- 62 The relation of working woman to phallic mother is eloquently developed in Pollock, "The Labouring Body," 371-78. For general theoretical background, see Elizabeth Grosz, "Phallic Mother," *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford, 1992), 314-15.
- 63 Shaw, "The Flower Girl," 457.
- 64 Banks, "How the Other Half Lives," 927.
- 65 Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918* (Oxford, 1993).
- 66 Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, 213; Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop*, V (Spring 1978), 9-65.
- 67 Helen Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor* (London, 1896), 81; quoted in Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, 220.
- 68 Sims, ed., *Living London*, 155-57.
- 69 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1901, 1-2 and 7 May 1901, 1-2; *Daily Express*, 11 May 1901, 4.
- 70 *The Daily News*, 29 May 1901, 6. The painting does not, in fact, show the mother nursing.
- 71 For example, Linda Nochlin, "Morisot's *Wet Nurse*: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting" in Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power" and Other Essays* (New York, 1988), 39-41.
- 72 Fox, *Londoners*, 164.
- 73 John Thomson and Adolphe Smith, *Street Life in London* (London, 1877), 6.
- 74 E. Brodie, *Little Nell, the Flower Seller* (London 1890); Coates, *Kitty Bright*.
- 75 Thomson and Smith, *Street Life*, 6.
- 76 "The Flower Girl - A London Sketch," *The Graphic*, 22 June 1872, 572.
- 77 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973; rpt London, 1985); Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 39.
- 78 Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-century France* (Manchester, 1990), 11, 75. For the development of Green's arguments in a British context, see Cherry, *Painting Women*, 168-86.
- 79 Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, 271.
- 80 Reproduced in *Royal Academy Pictures*, 1892. See also Frank Glinden, *Making Garlands*, 1880, reproduced in Sotheby's, London, *Victorian Paintings, Drawings and Watercolours* (26 September 1990: lot 125).
- 81 For instance, Pugh, *City of the World*, 237, and Banks, "How the Other Half Lives," 926.
- 82 Mayhew, *London Labour*, I, 136.
- 83 Montagu Williams, *Round London* (London, 1892), 297.
- 84 Mace, *Trafalgar Square*. Logsdail's canvas was painted only months after the ruthless suppression of demonstrators in Trafalgar Square on Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887.
- 85 Christie's, London, *British and Victorian Pictures* (10 March 1995: lot 193).