AN AMERICAN WOMAN’S GAZE: MARY CASSATT’S SPANISH PORTRAITS

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by

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I first encountered Mary Cassatt’s Spanish portraits in an undergraduate class. I immediately fell in love with the imagery of *On the Balcony* because for the first time I saw a woman in a work of art who reminded me so much of myself. Her bright smile, coyish glance and aura of confidence resonated with me. Even the flower in her hair reminded me of one of my favorite ways to pull back my own dark hair into a low slung bun and adorn the style with a bright and bold red rose. This instantaneous connection with a nineteenth-century image solidified in my mind that I absolutely had to research Cassatt’s Spanish paintings.

My research forced some personal struggle to the surface and was certainly an exercise in careful restraint. While I unearthed some less than desirable information, it was also the motivation to keep digging because I knew the results would enable personal as well as academic growth. This project is first and foremost dedicated to Dr. Navjotika Kumar who challenged me to just keep reading and writing no matter what. You were the most supportive person I had the privilege of knowing in my academic career. You were like a surrogate mother during our time together at Kent State. Thank you for pushing me to be better with each new assignment and thank you for always believing in my ideas and intellectual interests. I hope we are able to work on projects in the near future. I am proud to have been your student.

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INTRODUCTION

In analyzing Mary Cassatt’s Spanish portraits, one can account for any number of categories surrounding identity. There is the artist’s gender, her social class, her race, and her nationality. All of these identities are intimately linked to one another and therefore it would be difficult to discuss one without vaguely making reference to another. Similarly, the Spanish men and women that modeled for Cassatt shared their own identifiers as well. While art and art historians were my foundation for this study, much of the analysis on the following pages is interdisciplinary in nature, looking to scholars in history, social history, semiotics, anthropology, sociology, and literature to inform my interpretation and understanding of Cassatt’s Spanish portraits.

During her sojourn to Spain in 1872-73, Cassatt produced six paintings. Two canvases depict Spanish men and women interacting with one another while four are individualized portraits. Despite their difference in content compared to her more well known images of women taking tea or attending to children, very little has been written about these Spanish paintings. Art historian Mary Elizabeth Boone includes a chapter about Cassatt and the ritual of Spanish travel in her book *Vistas de España* (2007). For Boone, Cassatt’s Spanish paintings were part and parcel of Nineteenth-century fascination with Spain’s perceived foreignness and a renewed interest in the Old Spanish Masters from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹

Art historian Griselda Pollock, too, included a small examination of Cassatt’s Spanish subject matter in her book *Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Woman* (1998) concluding that Cassatt’s interest in Spanish themes reflected an established French taste for *espagnolisme* as

well as Cassatt’s reaction to the Spanish Masters in the Prado. While I am indebted to Boone and Pollock for introducing these lesser known works by Cassatt, I wish to expand the discourse further by devoting a closer examination of the socio-political context in which these paintings were produced that accounts for issues surrounding identity of the artist and her sitters.

During the Nineteenth-century, women artists were prohibited from frequenting the same public spaces as their male contemporaries throughout Europe. While male artists like Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet aimed to produce images of modern public life, women were expected to adhere to subject matter deemed appropriate for their sex. Additionally, male artists were able to study the human form from live nude models whereas women were limited to reproduced images of the nude form in paintings or sculpture housed in museums. Despite these limitations on account of Cassatt’s gender, Spain provided freedom in that she traveled alone to Seville and privileged Cassatt’s ability to look as an artist. In the first part of my study I examine Cassatt’s position as an American woman painting Spanish women and men considering Spanish history and identity while juxtaposing Cassatt’s own understanding of gender and societal expectations for men and women as it was shaped in the United States.

Race and national identity in the United States was in a state of flux during the Nineteenth-century. Race conjures up a myriad of definitions and understandings if not, at times, misunderstandings. I agree with art historian Pamela A. Patton when she notes that the definition

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3 There is, to the best of my knowledge, no primary source other than Cassatt’s letters that provide much more detail about the lives and backgrounds of her models in Spain. Thus, I focus primarily on a general nineteenth-century social history of Spain narrowing down to fashion/dress, gender, and nationalistic tendencies.

4 Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 158-164. Nochlin traces the development of women’s artistic education from Renaissance to the present concluding that women have not been given the same opportunity as men in the arts and those who have had opportunity were often daughters of male artists.
of race and its boundaries does not only depend on a culture and context “but also, at times, on
the circumstances of the individual, and they can be shaped by external and mutable factors, such
as ethnic or religious affiliation, as well as by theoretically fixed ones like ancestry or skin
color.” In the case of Cassatt, she was an individual artist; an American outsider creating images
of the Spanish ‘race’ through her own understanding of Spanish identity in the Nineteenth-
century as it was shaped in the United States.

In his seminal text, Orientalism, postcolonial scholar Edward W. Said observed that “the
Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality,
experience.” While Said contended that this Orientalizing process was a French and British
endeavor, semiotician Walter Mignolo noted that after México declared its independence from
Spain in 1821 the United States rose as a global superpower of the West as a result of land
obtained during the Mexican-American (1846-48) and later the Spanish-American War (April-
August 1898). Consequently, this amassing of new territories and resources reshaped the
definition of Orientalism. According to Mignolo, Orientalism was the “cultural imaginary” of the
modern world which the United States was now a part of.

Spanish literary scholar George Mariscal observed that for the United States, Spain
functioned as Other. Literary scholar Barbara Fuchs noted “rival European states busily
constructed it [Spain] as the racial other of Europe” while for some European nations, Spain was

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5 Pamela A. Patton, “Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America,” in Envisioning
Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America ed. Pamela A. Patton (Leiden:
Brill, 2015), 6-7.
6 Edward W. Said, Orientalism Western Conceptions of the Orient (New York: Penguin Books,
1995), 2.
7 Walter Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking
seen as another example of the East or of Africa.\(^8\) Though Spain at one time represented the European presence in the Americas, by the nineteenth-century its ‘Europeanness’ was in question both in the United States and Europe. This project posits that Spain was an Orientalized nation in the nineteenth-century. Art historian Ila Nicole Sheren suggested that critical examination of the literal border between the United States and Mexico and the art that has been produced as a result carries with it a much larger global context that allows for the study of the relationship between the United States/Europe and Latin America.\(^9\) Though her observation referred to contemporary art production, it is applicable given Spain’s unique history in the Americas. At the end of the fifteenth century, Spain began its conquest of what is now Latin America.

These new Spanish colonies were inundated with a diverse population comprised of indigenous, Spanish (European), and African peoples. Art historian Ilona Katzew noted by the eighteenth century a new pictorial genre of, *casta*, or caste paintings developed as a way “to remind both colonial subjects and the Spanish Crown that” the ‘New World’ was still “an ordered, hierarchical society in which each group occupied a specific socio-economic niche defined largely by race.”\(^10\) The unavoidable co-mingling of such diverse populations inevitably led to confusion and anxiety about one’s social position on account of it no longer be possible to identify who was indigenous, Spanish, or of African descent (or some combination of all three).


Similar to the development of *casta* painting throughout Latin America, art historian Mey-Yen Moriuchi noted that *costumbrismo* was a nineteenth-century literary and artistic movement established in Spain as well as Latin America “characterized by its descriptive nature and emphasis on the customs, costumes, and traditions of everyday people and their lives.”\(^1\)

While Cassatt’s Spanish paintings conformed to the artistic style of *costumbrismo* it is important to keep in mind that the genre is complicated by an outsider/insider perspective in terms of who is doing the looking, who is looked at and how what is represented was assumed to be true or indicative of a people and its nation. Art historian T.J. Clark noted that ideologies are constructs and their meanings are produced in a social capacity. In his words, “they are most often tied to the attitudes and experiences of a particular class, and therefore at odds, at least to some extent, with the attitudes and experience of those who do not belong to it.”\(^2\)

As an American woman looking at Spanish men and women, Cassatt’s choice in imagery was filtered and constructed in opposition to an American identity.

American identity throughout the Nineteenth-century was characterized by notions of Manifest Destiny\(^3\) as exhibited by John Gast’s *American Progress* (Fig. 1) painted in 1872. In this painting, the nation is characterized as a beautiful white woman guiding the pioneers westward bringing with them enlightenment symbolized by the book she clutches to her bosom and industrialization as evidenced by the railroad that follows directly behind her on the right of the canvas. Pictured in shadow are the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas pushed further and

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further to the margins of the picture plane, reflecting lived realities of displacement and dispossession of land(s). Manifest Destiny had a racial component in which self-defined Anglo-Saxons felt compelled to lead the charge in educating, ‘civilizing’, conquering and dominating American Indians and Mexicans.  

Race and nation are intimately linked. The birth of the United States was first steeped in European settlement and, indeed, as sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant argued, for five centuries the phrase “American people” is understood as an implied white classification. In relation to art history, examination of race in the Nineteenth-century typically revolves around critical examination of the Orient. Feminist art historians Linda Nochlin and Pollock have challenged art produced by white male artists in the Nineteenth-century in their respective essays, “The Imaginary Orient” (1989) and “Avant-Garde Gambits” (1993). While I certainly acknowledge their important contributions to this critical study of art, my project also seeks to expand the discourse further by suggesting that as an American artist Cassatt, too, held the ability to Orientalize the Spanish ‘race’.

Similar to the understanding of the male gaze as a privileged position in relation to artist and sitter, I suggest that race and national identity is also a privileged position in relation to artist and sitter, regardless of gender. Despite her marginalized position as a woman, as an American, I examine in the second part of my study how Cassatt was capable of enacting an orientalist gaze while in Spain. I begin my inquiry by examining a sketch produced in the United States a year

16 Omi and Winant, Racial Formation, 75.
before Cassatt traveled to Spain which helps to link her early interest in foreign subject matter and peoples.

By the time Cassatt reached Spain, it had experienced a vast array of foreign and domestic influence. Art historian Tara Zanardi and social historian Timothy Mitchell have both traced the phenomenon of *majismo* which Mitchell described as “a bold, sexy, self-assured, and flippant manner of dressing, walking, and talking.” Majismo was a response to eighteenth century French influence and a way for Spanish men and women to reclaim Spain’s past glory and to redefine their own native identities in opposition to foreign influences. Zanardi’s doctoral dissertation, “National Imaging and Artistic Rendering: The Creation of the Spanish ‘Type,’ 1750-1830,” traced the development of nationalistic ‘types’ in the form of the majo and maja “who personified a purer form of ‘Spanishness’ than their compatriots.”

The development and influence of *majismo* was unique in that it was a proletariat movement that eventually lead to noble aristocrats donning the same fashions of those social classes considered to be beneath them. As both Mitchell and Zanardi observe, this was an attempt by the Bourbon monarchs to establish their legitimacy to the Spanish throne. What better way to establish authority than to dress like the self-defined Spanish men and women of the lower classes? Zanardi’s research focused primarily on the artwork of Francisco Goya and his courtly images of Spanish royalty but her in-depth analysis of fashion helped to read Cassatt’s Spanish images.

Folklorist and ethnologist Dorothy Noyes observed that this practice of self-signification through fashion and behavior throughout Spain also worked simultaneously to cement in the

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minds of the non-Spanish what a Spanish man and woman was supposed to look like. Taken out of its historical framework, this form of self-signification worked to, in Noyes words, “lure foreigners and soothe the masses,” but also turned certain modes of dressing and nationalistic practices into “ideological weapons against Spain’s own cultural peripheries and a variety of modernizing movements.”

Majisimo served as a rebellious mechanism for lower-class Spanish men and women to empower their own identities against foreign influence but simultaneously cemented stereotypes of the Spanish populace regardless of social status. Similarly, costumbrismo sought to emphasize and describe the customs, dress, and traditions of everyday Spanish and Latin American people but indirectly established caricatures and stereotypes of those same individuals being depicted.

Cassatt’s six portraits at face value evoke Spanishness but the question is how do we know they are Spanish? Is it by their dress? Their demeanor? Cassatt may have well looked to the Spanish Masters during her visit to the Prado while in Madrid and constructed her canvases in direct response to the art that she saw but as Noyes points out this recycling of imagery would have served to reinforce stereotypes about the Spanish that had developed during the Nineteenth-century in the United States and other parts of Europe. To a Nineteenth-century middle-class American woman like Cassatt, the brashness and brazen behavior of Spanish men and women may have been, at best, culture shock and, at worse, proof that the Spanish were indeed a lower

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22 I’m struck by how strong and lasting these stereotypes are. Every Cinco de Mayo, I anticipate seeing non-Mexican people wearing serapes and sombreros assuming that this particular form of dress, or costume, is somehow indicative of ‘Mexicanness’ and therefore appropriate. Newsnet 5 in Cleveland ran a story on April 12, 2016 reporting the Phi Delta Theta fraternity’s use of culturally insensitive costumes for a skit. http://www.newsnet5.com/news/local-news/oh-cuyahoga/case-western-fraternity-under-investigation-for-insensitivity-to-latinos
class of people. Regardless of their day-to-day reality, they are forever frozen in her canvases embodying certain *tipos* or ‘types’ of Spanish men and women.

Spanish Conquest and Manifest Destiny were two sides of a very similar coin operated by two separate but powerful nations. Spain established its power in the Americas long before the advent of the United States but Spain would eventually see its imperial glory dwindle and, as Boone noted, by the Nineteenth-century, Spain would be a nation marginalized by the United States and its European neighbors. This is evident in the romanticized images produced by American and European writers and artists who traveled to catch a glimpse of Spain’s former glory. Cassatt’s identity as an American in Spain placed her squarely within this deeply interlocked history and forms a rich basis in which to analyze her Spanish portraits of 1872-73.

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GENDER AND SEX APPEAL

Mary Cassatt produced six paintings during her stay in Seville, Spain. These six paintings are unique in that three of them are the rare examples in which she chose to depict men. The interpretations of these paintings are complex given the variety in approach to the handling of the figure in relation to the space as well as the global context in which they were painted. Two canvases situate Spanish men and women interacting with one another while four of the five are individualized portraits; one of a man dressed in a bullfighter's uniform, two of the same woman dressed in two distinctly different outfits, and finally, a three-quarter length portrait depicting a Sevillian lady in profile.

*Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* painted 1872-73 (Fig. 2) depicts a young, dark-haired woman staring directly at the viewer. There is a quiet strength about her as she leans slightly forward, balancing her elbows on her lap, and tilts her head as she gazes nonchalantly while peeling her orange. Her illuminated brown skin emerges from a nondescript background while the greens and reds of her dress and shawl spill into the foreground. She is monumental in pose and her rounded, fuller figure remains unmoved by our gaze. Her facial expression is not so easily read as her parted lips and direct stare suggest an element of boredom, even a slight annoyance, with our presence. It is as though we have disturbed her solitary moment with her orange and she is subtly trying to ask us to leave.

While *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* is featured in Boone’s exhibition catalog, *España: American Artists and the Spanish Experience* (1999), no reading or interpretation of the image is offered. Instead Boone focused on contextualizing the image within Cassatt’s interest in Spain making brief mention that the woman who modeled for Cassatt complained of the long
hours asking if people lived long who sat for the artist. In Pollock’s brief section on Cassatt’s Spanish subject matter, *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* was not discussed nor imaged alongside Cassatt’s other five paintings from Spain. Though Pollock noted that Cassatt’s visit to Courances in 1867 exposed her to the art of the Barbizon School and one of the most well known producer of peasant and landscape painting, Jean-François Millet. In light of Pollock’s research, *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* may have been Cassatt’s attempt to revisit the theme of peasantry. Pollock noted that this theme, “offered to the newly urbanized bourgeois consumer a sanitized and comforting sense of a world of simple labors and regular habits.” The nondescript and austere background is reminiscent of Cassatt’s earlier *The Mandolin Player* (Fig. 3) from 1868. In both images, the lone figure appears to be absorbed in thoughts inaccessible to the viewer.

The same dark-haired model in *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* posed for Cassatt’s *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* also painted 1872-73 (Fig. 4). She again, emerges from a nondescript background; this time her golden hued skin is illuminated by the lavishly painted mantilla, or veil. Instead of an orange, she holds an elaborately painted fan decorated with flickering strokes of pink connoting floral patterning. The mantilla overwhelms the composition and the sitter. It is difficult to determine what exactly is on display; this young woman or her decorative veil and accessory.

The mantilla was intimately linked to a Spanish woman’s identity and her ability to afford certain materials over others but also contributed to signify her social status in society. Zanardi traced the link between the mantilla, Spanish women’s identity and the lace-making industry in Spain and other parts of the world ultimately concluding that the mantilla “was a

26 Boone, *Vistas de España*, 110.
loaded and culturally significant object that showcased women’s ingenuity, national production and stylish Spanish femininity.”\textsuperscript{27} While Zanardi’s study is primarily focused on the late 18th century, it is clear by Cassatt’s 1872-73 image of the Spanish dancer that the mantilla was very much still in use and very much still considered a staple of Spanish feminine identity. Cassatt’s figure is nearly overtaken by the veil she wears revealing that the item defined the woman rather than the other way around.

The titles of the latter works are a starting point to make sense of whom we are looking at. The fact that it is the same woman posed in two different forms of dress with two distinct titles suggests that she was neither a dancer nor a peasant woman but modeled as a kind of personality for Cassatt to explore through her painting. Boone noted these paintings “divest themselves of anecdotal narrative in favor of a probing exploration of individual character.”\textsuperscript{28} This departure from a picturesque setting is evidenced in both paintings by the cool intensity of this woman’s stare and overwhelming physical presence in relation to the canvas. Furthermore, the woman occupies an indeterminate space as evidenced by the muddy and austere background.

Cool intensity emerges again in Cassatt’s \textit{After the Bullfight} from 1873 (Fig. 5) which depicts a lone bullfighter in elaborate dress focused squarely on lighting the cigarette that hangs from his mouth. We look at him but he does not look at us and seems to be completely unaware of our presence. Just like the peasant woman and dancer, he also emerges from a non-descript background. He leans his body on a wooden fence while his iconic red cape spills into the left foreground. Much like \textit{Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla}, his elaborately decorated attire thrusts forward through his leaning elbow which moves over the wooden fence and into our space while

\textsuperscript{27} Tara Zanardi, “Crafting Spanish Female Identity: Silk Lace Mantilla at the Crossroads of Tradition and Fashion,” \textit{Material Cultural Review} 77/78 (Spring/Fall, 2013): 141.
\textsuperscript{28} Boone, \textit{Vistas de España}, 110.
the blazing brush marks of white throughout his jacket dance across the canvas. Similar to
*Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange*, we have stumbled upon a lone, private moment in which
the individual appears to be seeking a moment of solace from their own life.

Cassatt’s *After the Bullfight* also zeroes in on the elaborate fashion of the matador. The
bullfighter’s *traje de luces* or, suit of lights, was an important element inside the ring; as Zanardi
noted “the costume exaggerates the performative quality of the fighter’s action.” As if the risk
of permanent injury and death were not enough, the man had to look good while he tested fate.
This kind of bravado was what made the bullfighter a spectacle inside the ring but as Cassatt
exhibits, he was just as much a spectacle lighting a cigarette after a close encounter with
potential injury or death.

The Nineteenth-century bullfighter represented a rich history. What had formerly been an
activity reserved for aristocrats on horseback while members of the plebeian class assisted on
foot was now completely an urban class profession. Despite his working class origins, the
bullfighter, as Zanardi attest to in her research, was capable of rising to heroic, if not god-like
status in the eyes of an adoring Spanish public. While Cassatt’s image displays a lone figure in
such lavish attire, there is very little evidence elsewhere in the painting that reveals his elevated
status in Spanish society and history. The modern Spanish bullfight created a public space for
men and women of all classes and national backgrounds to gather and cheer in unison the
boldness of a lone brave man. Historian Mary Vincent noted that the bullfight was highly
profitable and crucial to urbanization and development in localities throughout Spain. Although

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30 Zanardi, “National Heroics,” 201.
the seats were stratified in terms of price and therefore by social class it was a communal event.\textsuperscript{31} Regardless of one’s opinion of its practice, the bullfight was a Spanish analog to the French opera in that it gathered a mix of seemingly separated men and women into a momentarily unified activity.\textsuperscript{32}

One of the complexities of Cassatt’s image is evidenced by the title itself. The ‘after’ in the title suggests that we are looking at the bullfighter after what we presume to have been a violent, potentially fatal, encounter with a bull. Cassatt removed any signs of the brutal activity of the bullfight by situating the bullfighter in a quiet, intimate moment of peace and tranquility. He is stripped of any remnant of the virile masculinity associated with the practice of bullfighting as seen in painter and printmaker Francisco Goya’s print series titled \textit{La Tauromaquia} from the early part of the Nineteenth-century which Boone noted was one of the most important sources for the long held artistic tradition of depicting the bullfight.\textsuperscript{33} In this series of thirty-three prints, Goya depicted (Fig. 6) the brutal encounter between man and bull which, if successful on the man’s part, would result in the bull’s death.

Rather than the actual encounter between man and beast, however, Cassatt focused on the individual bullfighter in a fleeting moment. He lights his cigarette and takes a drag as evidenced by the puff of smoke that escapes from the top of his mouth. Upon close inspection one can see the flame at the end of his match blow in the wind suggesting movement. In \textit{The Painter of...}  

\textsuperscript{32} The opera was a social event, a space in which men and women from all classes and backgrounds could enjoy the same scene on stage. Similarly, Spanish men and women from a variety of classes and backgrounds attended the public bullfight. In both spaces, men and women were enabled to look at one another regardless of class. Fans were used at the opera as part of dress etiquette but they were also a staple in Spanish fashion accessories as well. I draw parallels to the anonymity one could exhibit behind a fan or pair of opera glasses to look without being detected.
\textsuperscript{33} Boone, \textit{Vistas de España}, 106.
*Modern Life* (1863), art critic Charles Baudelaire explained the difference between an artist and a ‘man of the world’ defining the latter as a man (person) who understood and appreciated everything that happened on the surface of the earth.34 This didn’t mean the person of the world necessarily understood what they were supposed to be appreciating. In the case of Cassatt’s *After the Bullfight*, the artist divorced the individual bullfighter from his surroundings. While the wooden fence that runs along the picture plane indicates a division of space, Cassatt depicted the bullfighter’s location in an unclear manner.

Nochlin noted that the Western portrait reveals as much about the artist as it does the sitter.35 *After the Bullfight* reveals an acute attention to detail and an added emphasis upon the matador’s fashion. Though he remains mysteriously aloof to the viewer, we cannot help but be drawn in by his elaborate costuming that exhibits an almost jewel-like, regal quality. He is presented to us in such a lavish manner because *After the Bullfight* also reveals Cassatt’s sexual objectification of the male figure she painted. His elbow rests along a fence-like structure which mimics a balcony partition, but his lean outward into the artist’s space suggests availability much in the same way that painted balcony scenes of women suggested sexual availability (which I will discuss later). Cassatt depicted the man in a dazzling *traje de luces* or suit of lights. His costuming and physicality are all ornamental. Cassatt’s choice to depict the man preoccupied with lighting a cigarette creates a distancing between the artist and the model. He is both object and Other to Cassatt. Cassatt transformed her Spanish male subject into her own personal object to gaze upon. His posture and preoccupation with lighting his cigarette signal a cavalier attitude to our presence but he is still frozen in this moment and cannot escape our (or the artist’s) gaze.

Nochlin suggested that the world of public performance and professionalism, or “the male-coded ‘heroism’ of modern life” was not a subject available to Cassatt.\textsuperscript{36} While this remains true when discussing Cassatt’s much later works depicting the lives of middle and upper-class women, the subject matter of \textit{After the Bullfight} was precisely heroic and modern. Using Nochlin’s definition of the hero of modern life as an “active contributor” which included professionals, artists, and religious dignitaries, I contend that the Spanish bullfighter provided the “welfare of democracy and humanity” for the Spanish audience.\textsuperscript{37} Though Cassatt didn’t depict the act of the bullfight, she still took on the subject of a Spanish public male protagonist by painting a bullfighter. As a bullfighter, this matador—whose title literally translates as murderous—performed a familiar public spectacle for Spanish citizens and an unfamiliar public spectacle for non-Spanish citizens alike. Here, however, in this quiet moment of solitude, Cassatt turned the individual bullfighter into spectacle and object with his radiant bolero jacket and mysterious, aloof demeanor.

If \textit{After the Bullfight} was an examination of the Spanish hero (as Cassatt understood him to be), then \textit{Offering the Pañal to the Toreador} (Fig. 7) and \textit{On the Balcony} (Fig. 8), both painted in 1873, explored the gender politics of Spanish men and women. Boone’s research of these paintings revealed that the original title of \textit{On the Balcony} was \textit{The Flirtation: A Balcony in Seville}.\textsuperscript{38} Cassatt’s understanding of acceptable social behavior for middle and upper class men and women of the United States relied heavily upon what historian Barbara Welter calls the Cult of True Womanhood. Loosely defined, this was a set of social behaviors affirmed in mass produced Nineteenth-century women’s magazines from roughly 1820-1860. The expectations extolled relied heavily upon four main pillars: domesticity, piety, submissiveness, and purity.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Nochlin, “Issues of Gender in Cassatt and Eakins,” 360.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Nochlin, “Issues of Gender in Cassatt and Eakins,” 357.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Boone, \textit{Vistas de España}, 102.
\end{itemize}
These pillars were obligation or as Welter observes, “a solemn responsibility” which the Nineteenth-century American women had to uphold “with her frail white hand.”

If we consider that this was the expectation for a woman during Cassatt’s formative years (she was born in 1844), then her encounter with Spanish women must have been one of culture shock but ultimately a source of artistic fascination for an American woman. For Cassatt, born and socialized in the mid-Nineteenth-century United States, her understanding of acceptable social behavior between the sexes could have been a contributing factor as to why she would have wanted to explore potentially scandalous behavior with her Spanish models as center-stage actors.

Clark examined Nineteenth-century middle class artists’ preoccupation with the modern spectacle. His study is situated in the ever expanding urban world of Nineteenth-century Paris, however, his observations remain true when applied to Cassatt’s depiction of Spanish working class men and women. For Clark, the image of the working class functioned as a way for the artist to depict what was distinctively different from his or her own economic class and background. Cassatt’s preoccupation with Spanish themes of lavishly dressed toreadors, and mysterious dark-haired women functioned in direct opposition to her own identity as a middle-class, American woman.

Consider, for example, the bold assertiveness Cassatt captured in the woman who waves her fan coyly in front of the male suitor in On the Balcony. Cassatt explored the theme of

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40 As Welter points out, American women were expected to embody the four pillars of domesticity, purity, piety, and submissiveness. Men were instructed to never tempt a woman into breaking these sacred vows. Cassatt’s painted Spanish men and women behaving in ways that ran contrary to both of these gender specific expectations.

41 Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, 8.
flirtation in *On the Balcony* as evidenced by its original title. We look on as a mysterious man emerges from a dark interior space to meet a young lady who tilts her head back toward him and smiles with her fan near her face. While this woman’s behavior reads as flirtatious, it is also important to note the equally suggestive stance of the man entering the space. He leans his arm above this smiling woman which may have initiated the reaction seen on her face. Her eyes gaze up at this mysterious man and her stance suggests an incredible aura of confidence. Her left arm rests along a green partition and works to guide our eye to the third figure whose somewhat aloof demeanor seems out of place though her act of gazing out from the balcony draws our eyes (and imaginations) out of the space begging, in my mind, the most obvious question: what (or who) is she looking at? The balcony in Spain functioned as an intermediary space. It was public in the sense that an individual could look out from it as well as be seen but it was also private because it was attached to an interior domestic space inaccessible to the public. This contested space offered women, in particular, the freedom to look but the simultaneous safety of distance from the object of their gaze.

If flirtatious smiling, fan waving, and mysterious public gazing take place in *On the Balcony*, then sexual forwardness is on full display in *Offering the Pañal*. Boone noted a mythos steeped in sexual prowess existed in regards to bullfighters and their relationship with women. The young woman stands equally confident to her male companion in *Offering the Pañal*. With hand on hip, she offers the young toreador liquid refreshment and he does not hesitate to accept. Recalling Clark’s observation that the representation of working class individuals functioned in direct opposition to the middle-class artist, the Spanish men and women Cassatt painted represented a freedom and bold confidence that Cassatt could not identify within herself but

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42 Mary Elizabeth Boone, “Bullfights and Balconies: Flirtation and Majismo in Mary Cassatt’s Spanish Paintings of 1872-73,” *American Art* 9 (Spring, 1995), 68.
found worthy of artistic exploration, nonetheless. Or as Boone noted: “Cassatt used the foreignness of her models to explain her titillating subject and excused herself for painting it.”

Cassatt’s formal training differed from that of her male contemporaries. Though educated early on at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the prestigious European schools like the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris were closed off to women. As a result, much of Cassatt’s training had to be independently contracted. She studied under Jean-Léon Gérôme whose own works were deeply invested in the Orient. Nochlin and Pollock have both explored the phenomenon of the Orient in their respective essays, “The Imaginary Orient” (1989) and “Avant-Garde Gambits” (1992). Pollock’s essay is especially useful because she situates her research around the work of Paul Gauguin in Tahiti. Though not an African or Turkish society, Tahiti was still foreign to Gauguin. In the same way, Spain was foreign to Cassatt.

Literary scholar Lou Charnon-Deutsch noted that during the Nineteenth-century there was a rising tendency of the bourgeois culture of the urban centers in Barcelona and Madrid to Orientalize the south of Spain due to its historical ties to Arab rule centuries earlier. As a result, the image of southern Spain in mass produced literature was embodied as an exotic woman which Charnon-Deutsch notes, “served both as a reminder of its idealized pre-industrial self and as a pretext for a politics of neglect or exploitation.” Cassatt’s position as an American artist privileged her gaze much in the same ways Pollock argues Gauguin’s position as a European male artist privileged his.

Anthropologist Gordon Roe wrote an essay in which he examined the power relations between the artist and artist’s model. Though his account is contemporary it references the art historical practice and concluded that the visual arts, historically, have been highly gendered;

43 Boone, *Vistas de España*, 102.
almost, if not always, representing the artist as male and the model as female. His conclusion is similar to John Berger’s observations in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) in that men look and women are looked at.\textsuperscript{45} However, Roe differs from Berger in that he also concluded that the roles in the visual arts are so gendered that even a male model still occupies the role of the female and similarly the female artist still occupies the role of male.\textsuperscript{46}

Similar observations about swapped gender roles were made during the Nineteenth-century in regards to labor. Literary scholar, Martin A. Danahay researched the changing definition of masculinity during the Nineteenth-century. Using an interdisciplinary approach and analyzing photography, literature, and painting, Danahay concluded that the definition of masculinity was heavily tied to manual labor.\textsuperscript{47} Though Cassatt was middle-class and afforded certain privileges, she was still a woman and her act of painting was still a form of labor. This intimate link between labor and gender role was evidenced by such strong opposition to middle-class women’s demand to possess occupations outside the domestic sphere. Art and the subsequent study of it professionally would have placed Cassatt within a world supposedly deemed only suitable for men but as Roe points out, as an artist, she already occupied a masculine position.

Feminist criticism often times challenges social limitations levied against women both presently and in the past. On the one hand Cassatt’s ability to produce work despite Nineteenth-century limitations suggests a kind of feminist victory that art historians can draw upon to celebrate. However, if her chosen profession occupied a presumed male or masculine position, then feminist criticism must account for this particular nuance. This is not to suggest that gender


\textsuperscript{47} Martin A. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art, and Masculinity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005) 7.
roles are fixed or immutable but rather to suggest that they are, at times and in particular situations, much more fluid and, therefore, complex. Danahay approaches masculinity as an ideology that is “context-specific, mutable and constructed through representations.” This observation is appropriate because the very same could be said for femininity and its subsequent representation.

*Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* is a constructed representation of a Spanish woman as viewed through Cassatt’s eyes. On the one hand, the term peasant refers to a person of a lower socio-economic class but it also refers to the individual’s tie to the land and agricultural work. The woman in the image holds an orange, a crop that would have been harvested from the many orange trees that grew throughout the area. This act of physical manual labor would have masculinized this woman in the Nineteenth-century yet her demeanor and physical setting do not situate her in the act of manual labor. She peels an orange but her facial expression and monumental presence suggests a quiet strength. She may be a laborer but Cassatt painted her with a sense of dignity.

This sense of dignity can be seen in *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* when compared with Alexandre Roslin’s *The Lady in the Veil* (Fig. 9) from 1768. While this image was discovered as a result of research into the use of fans in the Nineteenth-century, my comparison illuminates vastly different approaches to a similar subject; in this case, a veiled woman with a fan. In Roslin’s image, the woman peers coyly out from her veil with a slight smirk. Her bosom is nearly out of her dress and it’s clear that we aren’t looking at just the decorative fan in her hand. Historian Nancy Armstrong notes that even without a veil a woman could use a fan to cover her eyes and when her duenna wasn’t looking still achieve the same

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48 Danahay, 3.
effect, supposedly driving men wild with desire. Compared with Roslin’s painting, Cassatt abandoned visual signifiers to entice a male viewer in favor of a much more conservative pose. Her dark-haired woman looks at us with a direct gaze that assures us that she is aware of our presence but isn’t playing any kind of flirtatious game.

The women in the Spanish portraits painted by Cassatt all exhibit varying degrees of personality, flair, and stylishness. While one woman smiles and waves a fan (reminiscent of the coyish smile in *The Lady in the Veil*) in *On the Balcony*, another woman sassily offers her cup in *Offering the Pañal*. Yet another woman sits contemplatively in *Peasant Woman* and *Spanish Dancer*. The bold and self-assured behavior of the fan waving woman is easily understood when we consider the phenomenon of *majismo* which in my introduction was described as a sexy, flippant manner of behaving. There is very little evidence of the same kind of personality on display, however, in *Peasant Woman* and *Spanish Dancer*.

Cassatt painted a third portrait of a Spanish woman titled *Portrait of a Lady of Seville* (Fig. 10) in 1872-73. She is seated in a three-quarter length profile and wears a rather conservative dress and lace shawl. Her hands are positioned in an almost awkward, albeit noble, pose. She stares into the distance while the red flower in her hair loosely hangs off to one side. She is situated within what appears to be a domestic space as evidenced by the door frame on the right side of the canvas. Just beyond the doorway, a flower can be made out, perhaps a bouquet just in the other room. While this woman does not look at us, her facial expression demonstrates a sense of self-control and reserve.

In terms of their formal composition, *Peasant Woman*, *Spanish Dancer*, and *Portrait of a Lady* share very similar characteristics. In each image, a woman holds an object. All three women seem to exhibit a quiet strength about her. While *Peasant Woman* and *Spanish Dancer*...
exhibit a more painterly approach with gestural strokes of color to connote embroidery or applique, *Portrait of a Lady* appears to be painted with a little more illusionism in mind as evidenced by the black lacy patterning of the woman’s shawl though there are also wide blue paint strokes to suggest a pattern on her dress. The psychology of all three women is one that evokes mystery and beauty all at once; perhaps this is what made Spanish women such a worthwhile subject for Cassatt.

Cassatt’s position as an artist is complicated, however, by the fact that she didn’t just depict southern Spanish women in her paintings but also painted Spanish men. Feminist inquiry typically situates the experience of women against that of their society but in the case of Cassatt she was a woman in a foreign society gazing at men from a safe distance in her position as a visiting artist. *After the Bullfight* is similar to Édouard Manet’s *A Matador* (Fig. 11) from 1865-70. Both images portray the bullfighter in elaborate costume with a non-descript background. While Cassatt’s image is three quarter length, Manet’s is in full profile. Both images depict the bullfighter engaged in activity that is far removed from his actual occupation. Compare both, for example, with Mariano Fortuny’s *The Bullfighter’s Salute* (Fig. 12) and *Toreador* (Fig. 13) from 1869 which clearly position the bullfighter within a specific location and context.

Nochlin observed that “the male viewer was invited sexually to identify with, yet morally to distance himself from, his Oriental [male] counterparts depicted within the objectively inviting yet racially distancing space of the painting.”\(^{51}\) Though in reference to Gérôme, her observation remains true for foreign painters in Spain. Spanish men--and their occupation as a bullfighter--would have been something that, as artists, Manet and Cassatt could find interesting enough to explore as subject matter, but would have simultaneously been an unfamiliar occupation in

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which to distance themselves from. Manet seems to have borrowed the bullfighter’s salute while Cassatt, the elaborate costuming and corporeal gestures of the bullfighter. Their artistic borrowings from Fortuny are familiar in regards to Spanish subject matter, but remain at a distance.

The sense of artistic distance is evidenced in Manet’s much earlier image *Victorine Meurent Dressed as a Bullfighter* (Fig. 14) from 1862. An art historical reading of a woman painted by a male artist could conjure up notions of the male gaze as discussed by Berger or Laura Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) in which the presumed male viewer is invited to identify with the male artist and gaze at the painted woman before him. Though in costume, Victorine stands in place for the bullfighter but the brutality and violence is reduced to a vignette above her shoulder. Instead of the iconic red cape, she holds a pink sash and her facial expression signifies that she has been removed from any imminent danger. In an attempt to capture a uniquely Spanish theme, Manet simultaneously feminized the position of the bullfighter by representing him as a woman in costume.

The feminization of the bullfighter to twenty-first century eyes is not a negative assertion per se. Indeed, to equate femininity with a negative attribute would be to succumb to a form of sexism and misogyny. However, in the nineteenth-century, gender roles were rigidly fixed and thus any deviation from them evoked suspicion and anxiety. The bullfighter was, as Danahay described, “caught between a masculinity that they represent in working-class terms, and a middle-class identity that is implicitly feminized.”\(^5\) While the bullfighter’s occupation represented Spanish working class masculinity, his earning potential and celebrity-like status functioned to reduce him, in the eyes of the non-Spanish observer, to an entertainer, an object to gaze at and project ideas upon, similar to that of the female model who poses for the male artist.

\(^5\) Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture*, 5.
Keeping in mind the idea that gender is mutable given the circumstances (Danahay), the bullfighter occupied a fluid space. Zanardi noted that the bullfighter was in prime physical shape to perform in the ring but also needed to showcase ballet like grace and poise in order to put on a good show for the crowd.\textsuperscript{53} Pollock noted that there exist structures that allow some men to enter and disrespect the relations of other men who they cast as “racial and hence socially inferior.”\textsuperscript{54} Like Manet, Cassatt may have found the practice of bullfighting fascinating but could have simultaneously found it to be a practice indicative of an inferior class of people as Boone noted that the subject of the bullfight was quintessentially Spanish but nonetheless a controversial theme for foreigners.\textsuperscript{55} Cassatt’s *After the Bullfight* removed any hint of violence or brutality and functioned as a way to distance the male subject from a masculinity defined by the very same brutality and violence that characterized the bullfight. Instead, as discussed earlier, Cassatt has transformed the Spanish bullfighter into an ornamental object.

Mitchell traced the development of the bullfight and its rise to modern sport in Spain. The code of *vergüenza torero*, Mitchell concluded, was the willingness of the bullfighter to put honor before life. It was the code of conduct that, in Mitchell’s words, “has led time and again to the mythical or romantic exaltation of the bullfighters who succumbed to it.”\textsuperscript{56} In other words, the very code that dictated the behavior of the bullfighter in the ring was the very thing that valorized his existence, and yet he had to be willing to die in order to ensure that *vergüenza torero* was fulfilled and that the code could live on for the next bullfighter.

Mitchell also linked the public bullfight to notions of masculinity and its profound ability to entice female members of the audience; sometimes, even women belonging to a social class

\textsuperscript{53} Zanardi, “National Heroics,” 207.
\textsuperscript{55} Boone, *Vistas de España*, 103.
\textsuperscript{56} Mitchell, *Bloodsport*, 77.
above the bullfighter. While bullfighting is not about sex per se, it does conjure up, in Mitchell’s estimate, “physiological arousal.” We do not know for certain if the man in After the Bullfight was in actuality a bullfighter. We also do not know if Cassatt was alone with her male model at the time of painting his portrait. However, given Cassatt’s emphasis on the spectacle of the bullfighter’s dress and his lean into her space, Cassatt may have looked at her male model with a sense of sexual desire considering that, in the words of Mitchell, looking “can still whet one’s appetite nonetheless; it can still be deeply arousing and habit-forming.” The man did not have to be performing his feats of bravery because, for the artist, his costuming signified the idea of the racialized Other—the Spanish bullfighter—and the sex appeal that came with it.

Cassatt’s male figures in her Spanish portraits are certainly dripping with sex appeal; the lone bullfighter painted with a cigarette in his mouth or the men who casually offer their advances in On the Balcony and Offering the Pañal. The male figure in On the Balcony leans into the space with an aura of confidence and swagger. His left hand braces the wall next to him for balance but situates his arm in a dominating position in relation to the woman he flirts with. The lavishly dressed matador in Offering the Pañal stands erect with puffed chest, dipping his sugary confection in the young woman’s glass container visually enacting penetration.

The bullfighter’s final act was to stick the beast with the muleta. The metaphors for sex abound in relation to the bullfight and at times men and women would take on different roles in terms of representation. While the male role in penetration is understood in relation to the

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57 Mitchell, 154-175. Mitchell links ancient blood sports such as gladiator fights to the similar love and desire for the bullfight and how both practices evoke a sense of sexual arousal around the idea of heightened excitement and the unpredictability of the spectacle.

58 Mitchell, 167.

59 While I attempted to find research connecting cigarette smoking after sex in the Nineteenth-century, my efforts turned up empty. When I unearthed research that connected eroticism with the bullfight it was nearly impossible to not see the cigarette in the painting as further proof of this erotic connection from a twenty first-century perspective given that in movies and television, viewers often see a character light a cigarette after a sexual encounter.
bullfighter penetrating the bull, Mitchell also notes that metaphors for the bull taking on a masculine role were common as well given that the bull had horns and would always represent the ‘horned’ or cuckold man everywhere.\textsuperscript{60} While Mitchell’s scholarship linked eroticism and bullfighting, much of the assumed sexuality present in Cassatt’s Spanish images revolved around the women and their arrangement on the balcony.

Cassatt did not seem to enjoy the company of the people she met in Spain. In her correspondence to Sartain she referred to Spanish men and women as “nothing more than barbarians”\textsuperscript{61} while in another she described the “odd” and “peculiar types” and finally confessed that she thought the “Spaniards infinitely inferior in education and breeding to the Italians.”\textsuperscript{62} Cassatt’s choice to paint Spanish men and women interacting in such a bold manner as seen in \textit{On the Balcony} and \textit{Offering the Pañal} visually preserved her written observation of the kinds of behaviors she found at odds with her own understanding of acceptable behavior between middle-class American men and women. While Cassatt captured men and women interacting in their native country, Cassatt’s observations were tied heavily to those Spanish images that had existed long before the artist ever set foot on Spanish soil.

Attributed to Goya, \textit{Majas on a Balcony} (Fig. 15) from 1824-35 and Bartolome Murillo’s \textit{Two Women at a Window} (Fig. 16) from 1655-60 also depict young women situated in a balcony scene. Boone noted that it was commonly assumed during the Nineteenth-century that these women in the Old Spanish Masters’ paintings were prostitutes.\textsuperscript{63} While Cassatt’s arrangement of figures in \textit{On the Balcony} is a direct reference to these much older images, it also recalls Manet’s arrangement of French men and women in his painting \textit{Balcony} (Fig. 17) from 1868. Dressed in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} Mitchell, 157.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Cassatt to Sartain, Madrid, 13 October 1872, 103.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, New Year’s Evening, 1873, 114.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Boone, \textit{Vistas de España}, 101.
\end{itemize}
contemporary fashions, the figures are enclosed in a balcony space which visually borrows the shutter seen in Murillo’s image.

One of the models in Manet’s image was Berthe Morisot, an accomplished Impressionist painter. However, as Pollock noted the “‘women on the balcony’ theme often was prostitutional, with women leaning on balconies in fluid and thus sexually propositional poses that were interpreted at sexual initiation, indicative of demeaned social class.” Art historian Hollis Glayson’s study on prostitution in the French avant-garde observed that rather than “beclouding moral and sexual issues, illegibility helps to fix the morality and character of the women portrayed.” Morisot’s lean on the green partition between public and private space cemented her identity within the picture plane for Nineteenth-century viewing audiences as a prostitute even though in reality she occupied a very different identity.

Literary scholar Leigh Mercer traced the influence of Nineteenth-century Spanish novels in shaping social customs and expectations concluding that the Spanish novel was “primarily preoccupied with establishing as much as reflecting social mores.” The same can be said for art. As an outsider, Cassatt constructed imagery that functioned to reinforce her own negative opinion of Spanish working class men and women just as it simultaneously functioned to represent them. Though prostitution is not commonly associated with the work of Cassatt, her imagery in On the Balcony and Offering the Pañal recalled the works of Goya and Murillo whose women were assumed to be prostitutes. Cassatt’s familiarity with past Spanish imagery as well as the more contemporary example exhibited in Manet’s image worked to create a fictional world which observed public interactions between Spanish men and women in ways that

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64 Pollock, Mary Cassatt, 102.
questioned familiar social mores for the artist and her viewing public. In other words, Cassatt’s painted Spanish women became prostitutes through art historical association in the same way that Morisot had.

While the original title of *On the Balcony* clearly defined the image as a public display of flirtation between lower class men and women, this act of conducting one’s self within a public performance was not a practice strictly reserved for the lower classes but, as Mercer observed, was key to the development of the middle class in Spain, as well. She traced the development of the *paseo*, or promenade, and its centrality to establishing middle-class public sexual etiquette through external signs and behaviors. While Cassatt’s figures interact in a contested space--the balcony--the middle class walked along public streets alongside the middle class. Cassatt remarked on the stretch of orange trees that grew along the streets in a letter her friend Emily Sartain. In theory one could walk along the long stretch and pick from an orange tree and enjoy the fruit in a public space. *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* may signify one such public act that Cassatt may have witnessed firsthand.

Mercer highlighted the kind of double bind that Spanish middle class women found themselves in. While there was strong emphasis in keeping the ‘lady’ as far as possible from the urban marketplace, the woman as consumer was essential to the establishment of cultivating the ideal bourgeois home. Similarly, while the *paseo* was paramount in establishing middle-class mores in regards to securing a marriage partner, it also ran the risk of confusing the ‘lady’ with the public woman or prostitute. Unfortunately this double-bind that Mercer speaks of simultaneously erases the working class woman and I don’t just mean in terms of a woman of the night but the public entertainer evoked in *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla*. The public

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67 Mercer, 99.
68 Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, 27 October 1872, 109.
69 Mercer, 61-100.
entertainer--whether male or female--occupied a unique space in which the cult of celebrity allowed one a chance at upward social mobility. Iberian historian Jesus Cruz noted that in Spanish bourgeois culture rose the idea of the self-made individual or “the belief in a society open to the opportunity to advance one’s self.”\(^7\) If the Spanish bullfighter was a self-made man so too was the female singer or dancer who could cast a spell on her adoring audience.

By the Nineteenth-century the Spanish empire was in decline and much of American interest in the country was marked by both antipathy and fascination. Most of the admired literary and artistic achievements were revived from long gone seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this way, Americans were much more interested in the romanticized ideal of Spain than the Nineteenth-century realities which were marked by stark economic decline and slow progress toward urbanization.\(^7\) Despite this reality, there is very little evidence of it in Cassatt’s six images.

Instead Cassatt’s images of Spanish men and women attempt to parse out the cultural differences as interpreted by a middle-class American woman visiting Spain for the first time. As an artist, Cassatt was still competing in a profession that belonged to men. If she truly wanted to be recognized by sanctioned institutions like the Salon, she had to produce images that explored the same subject matter made popular by a male contemporary like Manet or her own Orientalist painter-teacher, Gérôme. *Offering the Pañal* was accepted to the 1873 Salon. Cassatt was in a man’s world and despite any social limitations placed on women artists at the time, she was in a privileged position, as an artist, to represent Spanish men and women how she saw appropriate using the images from the past as well as the present as her guide.

She explored a *tipo* or type of Spanish woman in her individualized portraits of the same

\(^7\) Jesus Cruz, *Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 11.  
\(^7\) Boone, “*Sol y Sombra*,” 42-47.
dark-haired woman and the lady from Seville, but when it came to her interactions of men and women, she depicted her Spanish women with assertive, sexual forwardness that conformed to Nineteenth-century anxieties and fears of prostitution as an unavoidable result of modern urbanization. In regards to the bullfight, she scaled back the violence and instead opted for an objectifying composition in *After the Bullfight* and extended even more sex appeal in *Offering the Pañal*. All in all, her six Spanish paintings were versatile in terms of subject matter and themes given such a short stay in Spain.

One of the distinguishing factors of Baudelaire’s idea concerning the “Painter of Modern Life,” was his emphasis on the experience of the modern individual and the ephemeral, fleeting moments captured by the watchful observer. Literary scholar Dana Brand notes that “in the modern world, the phenomenological character of experience is less unified, coherent, or continuous that it was in earlier historical periods.” Cassatt’s Spanish images certainly *feel* modern but to the Nineteenth-century observer with no prior knowledge of Spanish history it would have been very easy to dismiss these studies as nothing more than an exercise in observing the Spanish Other.

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RACE AND INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY

Mary Cassatt studied with a number of independent teachers including the popular Orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gérôme whose own images have been scrutinized by Nochlin in her essay “The Imaginary Orient” (1989). Nochlin contributed a critical analysis of Gérôme’s work that accounts for national, ethnic, and racial difference as it was represented by the Nineteenth-century artist. Gérôme encouraged his students to visit various parts of Spain including Madrid and Seville.73 Boone noted that by the time Cassatt began her Spanish paintings, the sojourn to Spain had become a popular artistic destination. While many of the artists painting Spanish subject matter were male, Cassatt’s Spanish portraits are clear evidence that exotic peoples and colorful fashion were just as interesting to the visiting female artist.74

However, Cassatt’s interest in exotic subject matter is evidenced much earlier than her trip to Spain. An early work, Sketch of Mrs. Currey; Sketch of Mr. Cassatt (Fig. 18) from 1871 is an unfinished image of a black woman painted over an inverted image of the artist’s white father. Art historian Hugh Honour contends that the “portrayal of a black [figure] by a white artist is a kind of image of otherness even when it suggests that the difference is no more than literally skin deep.”75 Sketch of Mrs. Currey is a rare example of racial difference depicted in Cassatt’s oeuvre and provides a unique opportunity to explore racial dynamics in relation to the artist and her model. In this section I seek to connect Cassatt’s early exploration of exoticism in the sketch with her images of Spanish men and women painted only a year later.

74 Boone, Vistas de España, 89. Boone mentions artists such as John Phillip, Édouard Manet, Robert Henri, and John Singer Sargent.
In Cassatt’s sketch, Mrs. Currey—the Cassatt family’s servant—emerges from a chaotic unfinished background and stares at us with pursed lips. Her expression is enigmatic and her head covering, too, remains unfinished. On the right there is what appears to be Mrs. Currey’s left hand raised up toward her chest and in the position as if holding something. The dark patch that serves as the shadowed part of Mr. Cassatt’s face appears to be forming into what could be a brown bottle. The yellow may have been the start of a bright and colorful dress for Mrs. Currey though her bare shoulders also suggest Cassatt may have intended to paint her model in the nude. An inversion of the canvas (Fig. 19) reveals a ghost like image of the artist’s father who stares out at the viewer sternly from an equally chaotic bright, yellow background.

Omi and Winant have noted that much of nineteenth-century understanding of racial difference was largely informed by an assumed natural order of humanity. White skin was considered the norm and the most advanced of the human form. Nonwhite corporeal features such as brown skin or variations in hair texture and eye shape had to be explained in regards to the assumed white norm. In a letter to Sartain, Cassatt observed being amused at Mrs. Currey for finding that Cassatt had not made her look like a white person. Given that in the Nineteenth-century white was the assumed norm, it must have been refreshing for a black woman to see a painted image of herself, beautiful brown skin and all. In light of Nochlin's observation that the Western portrait tells us as much about the artist as it does the sitter, Cassatt’s sketch also reveals a past of racial dynamics between Mrs. Currey and her relationship to the white, middle-class American home.

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76 Walker, “Mary Cassatt’s Modern Education,” 23.
78 Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Gender & Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought,” in *Feminism and ‘Race,’* ed. Kum-Kum Bhavnani (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 74-88. Spelman cautions feminists from denying the positive aspects of racial identity noting that while racial identity can be a source of oppression, it is a source of racial pride.
The unfinished image of Mrs. Currey and Mr. Cassatt was started shortly after Cassatt’s father moved the family to Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Cassatt claimed she did not finish the portrait of her father due to his constant dozing off during their sittings while in another letter she claimed to have destroyed the image. Art historian Andrew J. Walker interpreted Mrs. Currey’s portrait as evidence of Cassatt’s longing to return to Europe and her interest in the similar exotic subject matter favored by her Parisian teacher Gérôme. Walker situated the image of Cassatt’s father in light of the artist’s anger with him for uprooting the family, forcing Cassatt into an artistic limbo in a location that lacked professional models which prompted Cassatt to utilize the family’s servant. If Cassatt was attempting to explore foreign locales but could not physically travel to them, having the family’s domestic servant model for her was the next best possible solution given Mrs. Currey’s ethnic features and darker skin. Mrs. Currey could be ‘done up’ complete with a turban-like head wrap that would have directly referenced the turban-clad men seen in some of Gérôme’s notable works of the time.

Though race is hardly the first theme one thinks of in regards to Cassatt, Honour noted that the kind of imagery displayed in Sketch of Mrs. Currey was often chosen for étêts d’étude which were distinct from a commissioned portrait. While the commissioned portrait often depicted elite sitters, the étude “comprised old people, beggars, peasants, and a wide variety of ethnic types who were literally and metaphorically colorful rather than conventionally beautiful.” While Cassatt created a visually interesting image, Mrs. Currey was painted in an indeterminate space and time. On the one hand, given that the image is an unfinished portrait, it is by its very nature always going to be in an indeterminate space and time. However, given that it is one of the rare examples in Cassatt’s body of work that depicts racial difference,

79 Cassatt to Sartain, Hollidaysburg, 7 June 1871, 72-76
80 Walker, “Mary Cassatt’s Modern Education,” 23.
81 Honour, 36.
the nineteenth-century history of gendered race relations is an important consideration when interpreting the work.\(^8^2\)

For example, while the gestural and chaotic black lines throughout the canvas are evidence of the artist’s process of producing a sketch, another interpretation may suggest that these same marks signify a sense of violent frustration coming from the artist. The marks move haphazardly throughout the composition because two different unfinished paintings occupy the same canvas. However, another interpretation may suggest that Cassatt’s anger with her father spilled into her artistic output as evidenced by these same haphazard marks. Cassatt produced these same violent strokes around her sketch of Mrs. Currey, as well. Surrounding Mrs. Currey’s head wrap, Cassatt made aggressive indexical marks over the brown patch of background framing Mrs. Currey’s head. Cassatt’s hostile gestures throughout the composition suggest antipathy toward both Mrs. Currey and Mr. Cassatt.\(^8^3\)

Cassatt’s frustration with her father is understood in terms of her feelings of artistic exile in regards to her father moving the family away from Philadelphia and Cassatt feeling powerless to stop it. Cassatt, however, also expressed frustration with Mrs. Currey when she stated, “just as I had the mask painted in she gave warning. My luck in this country!”\(^8^4\) Cassatt’s exasperation at the news of losing her model is evident in the violent gestural marks throughout the unfinished

\(^8^2\) bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze, Black female spectators,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 94-99. Though hooks’ research is in relation to cinematic criticism, her comments on an ‘oppositional gaze’ and looking helped to inform my own interpretation of this image.


\(^8^4\) Cassatt to Sartain, Hollidaysburg, 7 June 1871, 73
image of Mrs. Currey and signifies a far more complex dynamic between artist and model. Cassatt’s phrasing ‘my luck in this country (emphasis my own)’ also suggests a sense of entitlement to Mrs. Currey corporeal presence as the artist’s model.85

On the one hand Cassatt could have identified with Mrs. Currey on account of their shared gender but distanced herself on account of their racial difference. Although white women, too, suffered from the sting of gendered oppression, art historian Lisa E. Farrington noted that since the start of the slave trade in the 1500s, African descended women have been stereotyped in the Western imagination as “both sexually attractive and physically repulsive; as promiscuous femme fatales and genderless domestic servants; as excellent caregivers to white children and inadequate mothers to their own children and as either naive and childlike primitives or dangerous and cunning shrews.”86 Cassatt’s disorderly and unfinished arrangement of subject matter signified animosity toward Mr. Cassatt for uprooting the artist while it was directed at Mrs. Currey for leaving the artist.

In a letter to Sartain, Cassatt referred to Mrs. Currey as “our mulatto servant girl.”87 Cassatt’s use of ‘mulatto’ which for Cassatt did not even refer to a person signified her sense of racial superiority.88 Her phrasing, ‘our’, manifested a sense of ownership over Mrs. Currey’s

85 Cassatt seems to recognize the subjugated position of black women in the United States and has expressed her disappointment in not being able exercise domination over Mrs. Currey’s body.
87 Cassatt to Sartain, Hollidaysburg, 7 June 1871, 74
88 Katzew, Casta Paintings, 44. The term, ‘mulatto’ had roots in Spanish colonialism during its occupation of what is now Mexico. Katzew notes that ‘mulatto’ was a zoological term that referenced hybrid animals such as mules and in particular designated the children of Spaniards and Africans.
body. In 1871, when Cassatt had begun the painting, the United States’ Civil War ended only six years prior. Though the Emancipation Proclamation had freed the once enslaved African population throughout the South, it did not mandate that white America rid itself of racial prejudice in locations outside of the South.

Cassatt’s choice to leave Mrs. Currey bare shouldered and unclothed further highlights Cassatt’s sense of superiority and the position of the white artist as privileged in relation to the othered model. Cassatt studied with Gérôme whose own images privilege a white male gaze which has been scrutinized by both Nochlin and Pollock. I contend that a white woman is just as capable of harboring a privileged gaze. Cassatt was a product of her privileged middle-class background, as well as her privileged racial position in a post-Civil War era of the United States.

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Cassatt’s choice to leave Mrs. Currey bare shouldered and unclothed further highlights Cassatt’s sense of superiority and the position of the white artist as privileged in relation to the othered model. 89 Fashion historians Anne Brydon and Sandra Niessen note that the clothing systems “of the colonial Other were considered to be non-fashion, or fashion in negative image: sign of the child-like mentality of the prototypical ‘primitive’. “90 For example, while Cassatt may have been attempting to depict a visual signifier of the exotic by adorning Mrs. Currey with a head wrap, media studies scholars Ayana Byrd and journalist Lori L. Tharps have noted that the head wrap was a common accessory in slave culture in the United States.91

Byrd and Tharps highlight in their research that the head wrap protected from the sun but also functioned to hide away unsightly hair as a result of black women not having access to traditional hair grooming tools.92 In this way, Cassatt’s depiction of Mrs. Currey’s head covering functions on two simultaneous levels. While it may be read as evidence of Cassatt’s interest in foreign peoples and locales, it also was also a visual signifier of racialized politics surrounding black hair and identity in the United States. This same use of fashion and accessories to connote a specific tipo or ‘type’ of identity for a figure would later be employed by Cassatt during her

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92 Byrd and Tharps, 12-13.
stay in Spain. This was discussed, for example, in the last section examining the bullfighter and his iconic *traje de luces* or the female model who wore a lace *mantilla*.

Pollock explored the combination of white and black figures in Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* from 1863 noting that the depiction of a white woman attended by a black woman was typical of Orientalism.\(^93\) Pollock’s analysis of the Afro-Caribbean woman Laure in Manet’s *Olympia* observes that Laure’s head wear was “indicative of her cultural predicament.”\(^94\) While it was “a real example of African and Afro-Caribbean headgear [sic]” Pollock observed that “it was also a generalized sign used in orientalist painting.”\(^95\) Pollock also highlights how Laure was “displaced from her African home through colonial slavery” and was now in wage slavery.\(^96\)

In light of Pollock’s observations Cassatt, too, painted Mrs. Currey with a head wrap to signify a generalized sign of an exotic other. Mrs. Currey’s position as a domestic servant also follows Pollock’s observation of a figure in wage slavery. While Cassatt’s sketch does not include a white female figure, it does include a white male figure. Mr. Cassatt functioned as a visual reminder of Mrs. Currey’s social predicament. While she was employed and paid by Mr. Cassatt, Mary Cassatt took advantage of her access to Mrs. Currey’s body and labor. This dynamic of the privileged artist and othered model placed Mrs. Currey in an even further subjugated position within the Cassatt home.

Art historian Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby recently provided a more in-depth analysis of the position of black women who modeled for artists in, “Still Thinking About Olympia’s Maid,” (2015) noting that after slavery was abolished in France, black women owned their bodies and

\(^{93}\) Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, 35
\(^{95}\) Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, 21
\(^{96}\) Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, 21
their labor. A similar analogy could be made for Mrs. Currey and her relationship to the Cassatt family. While she was employed long enough for Cassatt to utilize her as a model, she also was able to ‘give notice’ and therefore control the conditions of her labor. Additionally, I contend as does Grigsby that we need to examine the politics of our interpretations “self-consciously” whether we are examining the pervasive racism in France or, in the case of Mrs. Currey and Cassatt, in the United States.

While Cassatt lost access to an exotic model in Mrs. Currey, she would soon find Spanish men and women to serve her artistic need. Cassatt’s own fickleness concerning her place as an American is complex. For example, on the one hand Cassatt so longed for Spain while in America that she professed that she should have been born a Spaniard and that it had been a mistake that she had been born in America. Yet, her ability to exploit the family servant to serve her own artistic endeavors highlights her own nationalistic privilege as a white, middle-class American working in the United States. This sense of privilege would carry over into her production of Spanish portraits.

Upon her arrival to Spain, she marveled at the art of Murillo and Velázquez as well as the many landscapes she observed which she described as “infinitely picturesque” but warned that “the people are not to be compared to the Italians in my opinion, except for beauty.” Despite Cassatt’s enthusiasm with Spanish art and the vast array of scenery, her aversion to Spanish men and women is evidenced in her own words. Much like Cassatt’s sketch of Mrs. Currey, Cassatt’s Spanish paintings revealed the complicated dynamics between the United States and Spain in the nineteenth-century. Boone noted that much of American opinion regarding Spain was largely

98 Grigsby, 447.
99 Cassatt to Sartain, Hollidaysburg, 22 May 1871, 70
100 Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, 27 October 1872, 109
informed by the *leyenda negra* or ‘black legend’ which was a negative characterization of the Spanish people promoted throughout Europe during the Renaissance and Reformation and well into the Nineteenth-century.101

Cassatt’s desire to visit and see Spain while simultaneously degrading Spanish men and women can be understood in light of Boone’s observation. However, it is also understood within the phenomenon of middle-class tourism. Latin American scholar Justin Crumbaugh studied the Spanish tourist boom of the 1960s. While his inquiry is contemporary, his conclusions are not limited to the twenty-first century in terms of application. “The tourist,” he states “constitutes not only a spectacle but a mode of perceiving Spain’s development years . . .”102 In regard to the nature of Cassatt’s visit, she was a tourist and her canvases remain as the evidence of her mode of perceiving Spain and its inhabitants.

Pollock also studied the nature of the First World tourist noting that the tourist gazes “at the spectacle of nature and rural labour is protected and privileged, its pleasures are secured precisely through privilege of proximate distance.”103 This proximate distance is evidenced in the deceiving beautiful quality of Cassatt’s Spanish portraits. Cassatt’s Spanish men and women are painted with such a lively quality to the unassuming eye and that is exactly their purpose. While a non-Spanish viewer marveled at the shimmering light reflecting off of the *traje de luces* in *After the Bullfight* or the diaphanous *mantilla* in *Spanish Dancer*, they could forget for a moment that Cassatt found bullfighting to be detestable and thought the women of Seville lacked the sensibility which belonged to a true woman.104

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101 Boone, “*Sol y Sombra*,” 42.
104 Boone, *Vistas de España*, 113.
Just as Clark noted that images of the working class functioned as a way for the middle-class artist to distance themselves from their subject matter, Cassatt’s position and national identity as an American enabled her to distance herself from her Spanish figures through their costuming and interactions with one another within the pictorial space. Moriuchi observed that in order for any image to successfully imply any kind of signification it must be repeated continually within representation.\textsuperscript{105} In other words if Cassatt wanted her audiences to recognize the ‘Spanishness’ of her figures, she needed to employ certain features, fashion, and accessories that had been established long before her arrival including fans, dark-haired women and mysterious bullfighters. Cassatt’s figures are caricatures of Spanish men and women.

Just as the head wrap worn by Mrs. Currey signified both an African identity as well as a general symbol of orientalism, Cassatt’s Spanish men and women are adorned with the trappings of Spanish identity as seen through an American tourist’s eyes. We do not know for certain if each model came to her studio wearing the outfits she painted them in or if they were supplied by the artist herself. Given that the same woman modeled for two different tipos or ‘types’ of Spanish women (the peasant and the dancer) suggests that the men and women in Cassatt’s images were nothing more than an exercise in the artist playing dress up with her models. This was an act of power and privilege because Cassatt dictated what her models wore, how they posed, and how they interacted in relation to one another within the pictorial space.

For example, the male figure in On the Balcony wears a brimmed hat and what appears to be a cape thrown over one shoulder. His face remains hidden in shadow creating a sense of allure and mystery as to his identity. His hand curls around the wall as he leans in with an aura of confident swagger. His physical command of the space and mysterious identity all combine to exhibit majismo, which was defined earlier as a bold, sexy, self-assured, and flippant manner of

\textsuperscript{105} Moriuchi, “From Casta to Costumbrismo,” 218.
dressing, walking, and talking. The *majo* and *maja* of the eighteenth and Nineteenth-century came to define how a Spanish man or woman should dress, talk, and act.

In the late eighteenth century, an attempt was made to outlaw the iconic wide-brimmed hat and cape on account of its ease in aiding the wearer in wrapping up and disguising themselves. The ambiguity in identity combined with noble class anxiety about this supposed threat to security resulted in a ban on the costume. The subsequent riot that ensued would come to be known as the *motín del capa y del sombrero* or, the revolt of the cape and hat.\textsuperscript{106} While for Cassatt, the costume functioned as a distinctly Spanish outfit, it simultaneously signified an element of cultural resistance that empowered the male plebeian classes of the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth.\textsuperscript{107}

The assured confidence in the male figure in *On the Balcony* and is also seen in the female figure that smiles at him. In this way she is equal to him. While we cannot see her facial expression in *Offering the Pañal*, the female figure in the composition stands in a contrapposto stance with one hand on her hip. Her physical position is strikingly similar to a *maja* depicted in a fashion plate from 1801 (Fig. 20).\textsuperscript{108} While we can see this woman’s face, it does not reveal the same coy smile as Cassatt’s figure from *On the Balcony* but the *maja* does wear a very similar outfit as Cassatt’s woman in *Offering the Pañal* complete with shawl and a low slung, pulled back bun. Physical embodiment of *majismo* necessitated posing one’s self in a self-assured, perhaps even, at times, intimidating way.

\textsuperscript{106} Noyes, 208.
\textsuperscript{107} Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, 27 October 1872, 109. “...here and there, a flock of sheep, a herd of cattle or swine, with the herdsman, wrapped in his cloak...”
\textsuperscript{108} This image originally appears in Noyes’ article, “La Maja Vestida: Dress as Resistance to Enlightenment in Late-18th-Century Madrid” which examines various fashion plates published during the early nineteenth-century.
While the male figure in *After the Bullfight* does not embody nearly the same kind of swagger as the male figure in *On the Balcony* and *Offering the Pañal*, his casual lean and preoccupation with lighting a cigarette do signify a kind of aloof confidence. In the previous section I explored how the bullfighter’s link to masculinity and sexual prowess made him a modern Spanish hero. While not a *majo* in the traditional sense of the eighteenth century, the modern bullfighter owed much of his popularity to those men who sauntered down streets long before he went toe to toe with a bull. Indeed, if *majismo* necessitated a profound sense of assured confidence in walking, talking, and dressing then the bullfighter embodied all of these things inside the ring.

The woman in *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* does not exhibit the same behaviors as her female cohort in *On the Balcony* or *Offering the Pañal*. Instead she looks out with a calm and composed demeanor. Her cascading veil is just as visually stimulating as the bullfighter’s *traje de luces*. Spanish women enjoyed a similar kind of public fame as dancers and singers on the theatre stage though, as Mitchell pointed out, there were important differences between the singing *majas* and bullfighting *majos* in that the stage was an imaginary space but that the bullfight and the risk of death was absolutely real.109

*Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange* also seems to be an image divorced from the overt boldness seen in *On the Balcony* and *Offering the Pañal*, however the woman’s monumental presence and slightly leaning forward posture still commands the viewer’s attention. However, compared with *Portrait of a Lady of Seville*, certain nuances begin to emerge. First, the title of each work already evoke a classification of person that the viewer is looking at. We only know we are looking at a peasant and a ‘lady’ because the title tells us so. Secondly, the treatment of the figure in relation to space is completely different. For example, while the peasant woman

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109 Mitchell, *Bloodsport*, 67
emerges from a non-descript, austere background, the ‘lady’ sits comfortably in what appears to be in interior, domestic setting. Both women hold an object in their hands but the peasant woman in in the act of peeling the orange while the ‘lady’ rests her idle hands upon her lap and holds her closed fan. While the peasant woman wears an almost garish green dress and decorative shawl, the ‘lady’ appears in a much more conservative black lace and monochrome dress. The peasant woman stares at us but in the portrait of the ‘lady’ we stare at the woman who looks off into the distance. The lady’s crucifix hangs from around her neck signifying her Catholic faith while her red flower hangs lifelessly from her hair.\textsuperscript{110}

*Portrait of a Lady* is unlike the other five paintings Cassatt produced during her stay in Spain. While Pollock makes a brief mention of it, Boone did not include it in her numerous essays on Cassatt’s Spanish portraits.\textsuperscript{111} Certainly *Portrait of a Lady* foreshadows one of the themes that Cassatt would eventually go on to explore in her later works; namely, that of women in domestic interiors. It is unlike any of the other Spanish images produced by Cassatt and perhaps that is its novelty. It showcases that Cassatt was clearly capable of constructing an image of a noble Spanish woman; a ‘lady’ as one would have it, but the majority of her canvases depicting Spanish women in implied sexual situations with Spanish men reinforcing the idea that Spanish women were an inferior class.\textsuperscript{112}

*Portrait of a Lady* is ironic because as Cassatt’s own words attest, she found Sevillian women lacking the sensibility which belonged to a true woman. Why, then, paint a portrait of a ‘lady’ if Sevillian women lacked the very sensibilities that made them ladies in the first place?

\textsuperscript{110} Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* and George Mariscal, “An Introduction to the Ideology of Hispanism,” Both scholars link Spain’s tie to Catholicism as a contributing factor to its perceived otherness to Protestant nations like the United States.

\textsuperscript{111} Pollock, *Mary Cassatt*, 108

\textsuperscript{112} The peasant woman is working class, the dancer a public entertainer and therefore subject to questionable behaviors to an outsider while the women in *On the Balcony* and *Offering the Pañal* interact with men in a bold manner.
Pollock concluded that *Portrait of a Lady* is evidence that Cassatt was painting portraits in Seville but may also be evidence that Cassatt was working for a patron who may have influenced the final image since it does not seem to conform to the other type of women Cassatt painted while in Spain.

What exactly was a ‘true woman’? While it is difficult to even begin to answer such a loaded question, I earlier framed Cassatt’s understanding of prescribed gender roles within the framework of the Cult of True Womanhood which stipulated piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The women in *On the Balcony* and *Offering the Pañal* do not exhibit any of those four characteristics but *Portrait of a Lady* does seem to conform to such notions. The ‘lady’ is dressed modestly and her body language exhibits self-restraint and poise. She does not lean forward as the peasant woman does nor does she busy herself with flirtatious fan waving. Instead she holds her fan primly and properly closed while her cross signifies her piety.

This comparison of women is not to suggest the antiquated notion of the Madonna-Whore Complex but rather to point out that if the measure of a ‘true woman’ in the nineteenth-century was one whose demeanor embodied the four pillars of the Cult of True Womanhood, than the woman painted in *Portrait of a Lady* visually conforms to these standards and thus, was as much as a ‘true woman’ as Cassatt. Yet, the bold behaviors depicted by Cassatt of Spanish women were misinterpreted by nineteenth-century audiences to represent an inferior class of women when in reality it was a case of historical and cultural difference. Not better or worse, but

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113 Sigmund Freud, “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men,”; “On the Universal Tendency of Debasement in the Sphere of Love” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 165-175, 179-190. Freud concluded that men categorize women into two distinct positions: either a Madonna (virtuous, chaste) or whore. Given that the Cult of True Womanhood of the nineteenth-century called for a strict set of expectations rooted in piety and purity, any woman who deviated from this path would be suspect not only to men but even to other women as evidenced by Cassatt’s own words in regards to Spanish women.
just different. In other words, Spanish women were far more complex than Cassatt painted them to be.

Noyes observed that clothing functions as a primary indicator of social status. One of the key components utilized by Cassatt to create the ‘Spanishness’ of her figures was the use of fashion and accessories. Her use of these elements, however, had their own history tied to Spanish national identity and gender performance that stemmed back to late eighteenth century resistance to the then foreign French influence on dress and public visibility. This resistance was led primarily by the lower, plebeian classes in Spain but the noble classes quickly embraced the fashions in an effort to relate to their lower-class subjects, which in turn quickly blurred the lines between aristocrat and peasant. *Portrait of a Lady* blurs the line between ‘exotic Spanish other’ and modern woman with the latter subject defining Cassatt in the contemporary study of her life and work. *Portrait of a Lady* attest to the fact that Cassatt produced more than just seductive, flirtatious Spanish women and sexy bullfighters.

*Portrait of a Lady*, if commissioned, was an example of how a paying Spanish patron wanted to have a Sevillian woman represented, which reversed the privileged position of Cassatt and her sitter. In Cassatt’s other five paintings, she was able to paint Spanish men and women however she deemed suitable. She looked to the past to create a supposed modern image. In other words, she exploited the *majismo* aesthetic without fully understanding the political and national heritage behind it. It was flashy, bold, and assertive because it was all that the Spanish men and women had at that time to publicly display their dissatisfaction with foreign invasion and influence. The irony of course is that because these men and women were so adamant about their Spanish style, it would come to typify them to visitors outside of Spain including Cassatt.

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114 Noyes, “La Maja Vestida,” 211.
I argue that Cassatt’s six canvases tell a story of Spain’s most recent history as Cassatt understood it. Her images of men and women interacting in the same space function to highlight not only the Old Spanish masters’ images of men and women interacting in the same space but also to recall the eighteenth century phenomenon of *majismo* while the individualized portrait of the bullfighter and dancer signify the transformation of the street aesthetic of *majismo* incorporated into a public display readily consumable by the Spanish (and non-Spanish) masses. Lastly, her individualized portraits of a peasant woman and ‘lady’ function to highlight the presumed differences between the two women’s class and position in Spanish society but simultaneously blurred the line between ‘exotic other’ and modern woman.

Upon her arrival in Spain, Cassatt was enamored with the artwork of Velazquez and Murillo but by the end of her six month stay in Seville she seemed to have changed her mind. About a year later she wrote to Emily Sartain from Rome that she had regretted her time in Spain.\(^{115}\) In 1875 Sartain wrote to Cassatt recalling frank criticism from Sartain’s instructor, Evariste Luminais concerning Cassatt’s Spanish themes. Luminais concluded that although Cassatt appeared to be highly organized as an artist, her effort to capture, in his words, “frankness” ultimately led her to fall “into brutality” and that her pictures were not “distingué”.\(^{116}\)

What specifically was this brutality that Luminais was referring to? Luminais, himself was a painter of historical subject matter. His less than favorable criticism concerning Cassatt’s Spanish paintings may have been on account of her handling and application of paint as well as her choice in subject matter overall. Her models captured a snapshot of modern Spanish life but to the non-Spanish observer, these were simply unsavory characters behaving in a most

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\(^{115}\) Cassatt to Sartain, Rome, 26 November 1873, 123.

\(^{116}\) Sartain to Cassatt, Paris, 25 May 1875, 128.
undignified manner. And therein lies much of the problem. Because of the negative stereotypes associated with Spain throughout the United States and Europe, Cassatt dismissed her time in Spain as nothing more than a regrettable choice and her critic observed her subject matter of Spanish men and women as nothing more than a choice rooted in brutality.
CONCLUSION

Very little research has explored Cassatt’s Spanish portraits. Boone and Pollock’s research framed interpretation of Cassatt’s Spanish paintings around the phenomenon of American artists and their desire to travel overseas to study and learn from the masterpieces housed in Spanish museums. Discussion that surrounds any kind of global exchange of culture and knowledge should account for nuance and, in a word, hierarchies. It has been my aim to do just that. This study posited that Spain, though once a European presence in the Americas was a marginalized country in the Nineteenth-century that functioned as the Other to both the United States and the rest of Europe.

Cassatt’s sketch of Mrs. Currey as well as her Spanish portraits produced soon after all conformed to Nochlin’s observation of the picturesque, which she stated functions “to certify that the people encapsulated by it, defined by its presence, are irredeemably different from, more backward than, and culturally inferior to those who construct and consume the picturesque product.”[^117] To the unassuming eye, *Sketch of Mrs. Currey* and Cassatt’s Spanish paintings are absolutely beautiful and that is exactly their point. They trick our sensibilities and are deceivingly beautiful because they purport to represent a people and its nation divorced from socio-political realities.

Literary Janice Hewlett Koelb noted that the idea of the picturesque was an outgrowth of expanding middle-class tourism during the late eighteenth century. This phenomenon in light of the changing borders for both the United States and Spain throughout the Nineteenth-century all combined to provide a complex way to interpret and understand the Spanish images painted by a visiting artist like Cassatt in a country that was not her own. Koelb further highlighted that the purpose of picturesque travel was created for the “possibility of visiting nearby and partially

familiar locations, but looking on these everyday scenes as if they were exotic, unfamiliar, and worthy of representation in art.\textsuperscript{118} Spain was familiar enough to Cassatt in light of having studied under a teacher who encouraged his students to visit parts of Spain, and thereby legitimizing its worth as artistic subject matter.

Cassatt’s own words echoed this sentiment. In a letter to Sartain, Cassatt stressed the need for Sartain to visit Spain explaining the vast amount of money to be made in there as “it has not been ‘exploited’ yet as it might be, and it is suggestive of pictures on all sides.”\textsuperscript{119} In other words, when Cassatt looked out at the Spanish scenery, she saw an opportunity for a visiting artist to make money and gain professional success for his or her exotic pictures. The landscape and people of Seville had not yet been spoiled (‘exploited’) by modernity in the eyes and mind of Cassatt. Cassatt’s own words and images attest that she found the idea of Spain more appealing than the people who lived there.

Literary scholar Ainslie Armstrong McLees wrote on the function of caricature in poetry but traced its existence to have first been used in the visual arts. Tracing its use in the visual arts as early as the Renaissance, he argued that caricature was also a development of modern art. One of the requirements for caricature, McLees concluded, was the ability to “pass moral judgment on the subject.”\textsuperscript{120} We know that Cassatt’s first title for On the Balcony explicitly named flirtation as its subject matter. Cassatt’s fan-waving female figure shows her teeth, which Pollock noted was a visual signifier of aggressive sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{121} In light of Cassatt’s antipathy

\textsuperscript{119} Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, 27 October 1872, 109.
\textsuperscript{120} Ainslie Armstrong McLees, “Baudelaire’s ‘Une charogne’: Caricature and the Birth of Modern Art,” *Mosaic* 21 (Fall, 1988): 113
\textsuperscript{121} Pollock, *Mary Cassatt,*
toward Spanish men and women, her use of negatively perceived visual signifiers in her art are all the more problematic.

While Cassatt’s cultural and national bias is evidenced in her own words and art, her racial privilege is as well. In producing Sketch of Mrs. Currey, we are given a rare glimpse into the artist’s personal struggle with the loss of a supportive artistic surrounding as well as her artistic model. The image of Mrs. Currey atop Mr. Cassatt mirrors this particular moment of frustration and anger in Cassatt’s life in dealing with both sitters though for very different reasons. Her words stress a sense of entitlement to artistic production through a body that she deemed as racially inferior in the United States and therefore readily accessible to her. This same sense of entitlement to models and the control of their corporeal representations would be echoed during her time in Spain.

Compositionally, Sketch of Mrs. Currey and Cassatt’s Spanish portraits painted soon after share in common an indeterminate space. While On the Balcony and Portrait of a Lady were painted with a location implied, the remaining canvases are painted in empty surroundings. While the austere backgrounds can be interpreted as a nod to the Spanish masters Goya, Murillo, or even Zurbaran Boone concluded that Cassatt’s Spanish portraits were evidence of the artist’s ability to use her journey to Spain as a way to position herself as a painter of modern life. The shortcoming of such an observation, however, is that it is unclear what specifically was supposed to be ‘modern’ in Cassatt’s imagery. Cassatt did not ‘discover’ Spanish culture. She observed Spanish society but what she painted on the canvas may or may not have represented a lived reality of the Spanish men and women who modeled for her.

In light of Nochlin’s study of the Orient, this unidentifiable space and time in the majority Cassatt’s Spanish portraits “suggests that this Oriental world is a world without change,

122 Boone, Vistas de España, 89.
a world of timeless, atemporal customs and rituals, untouched by the historical processes that were ‘afflicting’ or ‘improving’ but, at any rate, drastically altering Western societies at the time.”

Spain was a predominantly agrarian country at the time of Cassatt’s visit and as Boone noted had not followed neighboring countries rapid modernization and was therefore, in the eyes of many Americans and Europeans a backward country. Cassatt’s own observations that Spain had not yet been ‘exploited’ echoed the idea that Spain, at least to Cassatt, was frozen in time.

Most perplexing about the nature of Cassatt’s tour of Spain was her own fickleness concerning it. Before she actually set foot on Spanish soil, her initial longings were for a country that was not her own. So strong was this sense of entitlement to Spanish identity that she wished she had never been born American. This romanticizing of a nation would continue upon her arrival in Spain as she wrote of all the wonderful Spanish art she was seeing, declaring at one point that one learned how to paint in Spain. Yet her antagonism toward Spanish men and women was evidenced in her choice of subject matter. She chose to paint a peasant woman, a dancer, flirtatious women on and off a balcony, and sexually aggressive men. Her caricatures were a political weapon at the height of nation building in the United States even while they still functioned as an artistic exercise for Cassatt.

Mignolo noted that after Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821 the United States rose as a global superpower of the West as a result of land obtained during the Mexican-American (1846-48) and later the Spanish-American War (April-August 1898). Consequently, this amassing of new territories and resources reshaped the definition of Orientalism. According to Mignolo, Orientalism was the “cultural imaginary” of the modern

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123 Nochlin, 50.
124 Boone, España, 15-47.
125 Cassatt to Sartain, Madrid, 13 October 1872, 103.
world in which the old Christian Europe of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (Italy, Spain, Portugal) was replaced by the “heart of Europe” (England, France, Germany). The flow of resources in gold and silver reached the rest of Europe through Spain and eventually led to its own demise. The United States’ successful claim to these same territories that had made Spain once a wealthy, global empire gave the United States its literal and metaphorical superiority in the West along with the rest of Europe in relation to Spain. This assumed superiority is evident in both Cassatt’s descriptions of Spain and her representations of Spanish men and women.

126 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 57-58.
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