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Introduction

When conjuring up an image of England during the nineteenth century, smoking industrial chimneys, narrow streets and black locomotives filled with men in black coats and top hats come to mind. Or one might think of the neo-gothic architecture with its pointed arches and towering structures or else the image of a sombre-faced Queen Victoria in the usual black she wore after the death of her husband, comes to mind. With thoughts of workers trudging through filthy streets afflicted with constant fog and children slipping into narrow tunnels to work in coalmines, flashes of colour seem out of place if not irrelevant in the century dominated by the Industrial Revolution. It is, however, this age of prolific industrial advancements, which may, to this day darken its conceptions in monotone shades of grey, and black, that also brought forth a range of new colours (Kalba 2017, 30) and with it, what Charlotte Ribeyrol has termed the “chromatic turn” (2020, 2), referring to the reappraisal of colours that took place in Victorian England.

The changes that the Industrial Revolution brought with it seeped into, if not all then, most dimensions of human activity, and thus, into the Victorians’ lives, which it changed significantly. Artificial illumination shed new light on familiar sights, as oil lamps gave way to gaslight in London in 1807 (Ackroyd 443). The bright light was not always welcomed as it cast particularly dark shadows, causing concern about what might occur in the unlit spaces (ibid. 444). Electricity took over from gas lamps and bathed the streets in yet another form of light, making its first appearance in London at the Embankment in 1878 (ibid. 445). The changes in lighting are significant as they influenced people’s visual perception and with it their perception of colour. But that of the visual world was not the only tangible change that took place, as the railway transformed travel into an entirely different experience, while also giving rise to a standardised time distributed from the Royal Observatory by 1852 to coordinate railway traffic and post offices (Rooney and Nye 6-7); medical advancements prolonged peoples’ lives; the invention of machines, like the sewing machine, made work processes easier and faster; steam-driven printing presses suddenly brought forth newspapers, periodicals and magazines regularly distributing information to an ever growing number of readers and synthetic colours, like aniline dyes brought with them a sudden appearance of much more vibrant colours in people’s wardrobes. A visualisation of all the advancements brought forth around this time was presented with the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was held in London. The exhibition and its catalogue demonstrate that Victorian society was very well aware of the consequential developments that took place within their lifetime and showed an avid fascination for them. However, the glorious

achievements of the age also gave rise to great injustice, such as the working and living conditions of the labourers, a fact that also did not go unnoticed by the Victorians. People like John Ruskin, William Morris (Thorsheim 6-7), or Charles Dickens, to name but a few, famously voiced critiques of their present society and addressed the dark side of rapid industrial growth.

Due to the Industrial Revolution and the fundamental changes it introduced to society, many people harboured a fear of both social and cultural decline (Dunbar 227), especially towards the end of the nineteenth century. This thesis, which is located in the field of cultural studies, focuses on mapping out anxieties that arose in connection to colour situated in a specific historical timeframe, 1856 until 1901, making the reception of colour in Victorian discourses the object of my analysis. To present the aversion that colour was faced with at the time, I aim to discuss Victorian sources, which include articles or illustrations in fashion magazines, household magazines, satirical newspapers, conduct and etiquette literature, essays as well as travel reports. In addition, this thesis analyses nonwritten objects like contemporary clothing items as well as artworks such as John Gibson's statue *Tinted Venus* (1861-1865) or John Singer Sargent's *Madame Pierre Gautreau (Madame X)*, (1884). Such cultural objects allow me to exemplify chromatic anxieties as they convey different stances towards colour.

The word colour stems from the Latin *celare* and means to conceal and hide, while 'to colour' "is to embellish or adorn, to disguise, to render specious or plausible, to misrepresent" (Batchelor 52). Considering the etymology of colour shows that the word colour itself is already charged with a negative connotation in its root. Colour appears as an agent of change where an existing matter is transformed by hiding the original state (as though colour did not exist in the original). However, this change is not regarded neutrally but is rather charged with an inherent sense of deception. In extension, colour becomes secondary, superficial, misleading and even illusionary. This understanding of colour, embedded in its very name, informs a pervasive approach to colour that frames it as something untrustworthy and deceptive. Some of the main accusations voiced in debates surrounding the subject of colour during the second half of the nineteenth century frame colour in such terms thereby reflecting chromatic anxieties.

The word anxiety also finds its root in the Latin language. *Anxietas* refers to an "apprehension caused by danger, misfortune, or error, uneasiness of mind respecting some uncertainty, a restless dread of some evil" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Likewise, the *Cambridge Dictionary* summarises anxiety as "an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future" (Cambridge UP, n.d.). Thereby, anxieties are a form of fear that is less about concrete dangers and more about the

dread of a perceived threat. The focus lies on the observer, who has an emotional reaction to something that might not necessarily occur, but still has the power to make them feel wary. I define chromatic anxieties as discomfort and apprehension caused in connection to considerations of colour. Although proving the emotions of people who lived and died in the Victorian period may prove impossible, it is possible to analyse specific examples of the cultural production of the time and recognise a reflection of chromatic anxiety inscribed in the stances they project. Colour itself might not have been a direct threat to members of English society, but what colour implied, how it was used and by whom, nevertheless warranted moral scrutiny and evoked an aversion to it. This thesis aims to highlight that there was such a phenomenon as chromatic anxieties and underlines what form they took.

As chromatic anxieties are fuelled by broader cultural developments and are tightly intertwined with moral considerations, this thesis has identified multiple directions from which colour faced contemporaries with a moral dilemma and therefore could give rise to chromatic anxieties. In the first chapter, the ideological heritage of the role model of Ancient Greece is explained and how this entailed an aversion to colour. Moreover, the chapter gives greater insight into the historical context of the time, with a focus on colour-related debates. Chapter two then established another source of animosity towards colour, by exploring the connection of colour with Eastern cultures and foreign countries. The third chapter shifts the gaze back towards the English society and its members and reflects on gender ideologies and colour's supposed connection to femininity. Along the same lines, the fourth and final chapter highlights the ambiguous approach to colour that many cultural objects of the time reflect. It is the sensuality of colour that inscribes in the Victorian society dominated by black-clad men functioning under the "strains of asceticism" (Harvey 211), a looming sense of unease that in turn explains the numerous dismissals colour faced. Colour at once unnerves, offends, appeals, and fascinates people. It posed a threat to moral behaviour and propriety and thereby gave rise to chromatic anxieties.

The year 1856 marks a key turning point when looking at colour in the nineteenth century. In 1856 the 18-year-old Sir William Perkin was looking for a cure for malaria but instead accidentally discovered the first synthetic dye, mauve. During the 1850's the disease, which was said by British imperialists to be the most substantial obstacle to colonisation, brought tens of thousands of people to St Thomas's Hospital, for instance (Garfield 31). The remedy that helped best against malaria was at the time made from the bark of the Cinchona tree, native to South America, due to the fact that it contained quinine (ibid. 32). In his self-

constructed enthusiast's laboratory, young Perkin was trying to chemically produce quinine to secure an independent source for the valuable drug. However, his experiment produced a kind of red powder instead of the colourless quinine he was aiming for (ibid. 36). Struck by curiosity, Perkin experimented further and tried the same process, which included distillation and oxidation, with other materials including the coal tar derivate, aniline, which "had already been linked with colorants and colour-producing reactions for thirty years" (ibid. 37), however, had not been deemed significant enough nor pursued for commercial use. Adding aniline to his experiment brought forth a black product, out of which Perkin then managed to separate his purple dye, which he tested on silk and discovered that it did not fade with washing or light the way the usual dyes did at the time (ibid.).

Given the importance of the discovery of the first synthetic dye - from a colour perspective -, 1856 marks the beginning of the timeframe I have chosen for my research. The proceeding years saw a wave of so-called aniline dyes, flooding a booming market and instigating a new fashion. Colour suddenly appeared everywhere in Victorian England. The end of my chosen timeframe is marked by the end of Queen Victoria's reign in 1901. By that point, fashion, for example, was strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement which, in turn, advocated a return of subdued colours and brought with it an end to the fashion-related colour craze (Forster and Christie 10-11).

This thesis aims to answer the following research questions: How did chromatic anxieties manifest themselves in Victorian England? How did the discovery of synthetic dyes in 1856 herald a renewed discourse on colour? What ideologies informed and influenced chromatic anxieties? What role does gender play in the chromatic revolution that took place during Queen Victoria's reign? To answer these questions using an interdisciplinary approach, this study draws on concepts coined, and ideas formulated within the fields of history, literary studies, post-colonial studies, philosophy, gender studies, art history, anthropology and design, specifically fashion design.

To contextualise the understanding of colour of the Victorians relevant to my study, it is necessary to refer to the colour theory both of the contemporary time and modern studies re-examining the historical period. From the 1990s onwards, two scholars - the art historian John Gage, and the historian Michel Pastoureau - moulded a new approach to colour theory, which highlights colour as a cultural phenomenon that must be investigated through its cultural context. Both of these scholars are pioneering figures in their studies of colour from a cultural perspective and demonstrate how it is a profoundly intricate construct of culture. There is no

universal colour meaning or “transcultural truth to color perception” (Pastoureau 7). Accordingly, colour is inherently a social phenomenon. As Pastoureau articulates “[a]ny history of color is, above all, a social history. [...] It is society that ‘makes’ color, defines it, gives it its meaning, constructs its codes and values, establishes its uses, and determines whether it is acceptable or not.” (10) This dynamic relationship between colour and society inevitably results in evolving treatments of the former over time and within specific local contexts. In essence, the perception of colour is contingent upon its cultural environment. The foundation of my cultural approach to colour is based on these two scholars’ works, as it allows me to approach colour in its cultural context rather than using a psychological, optical or linguistic approach to name but a few. I aim to consider the subject of colour-related anxieties from a multitude of perspectives to come to a multifaceted understanding of the reasons why, what I will be calling a complex ‘network of aversions to colour’ could surface in debates on the subject during the Victorian era. Furthermore, a close reading method allows me to gain great insight into the subtexts of my objects of analysis, as specific wording reflects certain stances that frame colour in a negative light, which in turn is informed by the historical context.

All in all, my cultural studies approach seeks to gain a new insight on colour as a cultural phenomenon and the anxieties it caused between 1856 and 1901. The research process of this study took the form of searching databases for articles, reflecting stances towards colour, in Victorian periodicals, magazines, newspapers etc. published in, or about England by searching for key terms such as ‘mauve’ and ‘aniline dyes’ as well as key dates that mark historic events that are important in terms of colour in the nineteenth century, such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the International Exhibition of 1862. The articles that reflected a stance towards colour were considered for this thesis. Furthermore, much of the evidence is indebted to the works of other scholars who aimed to gain insight into Victorian colour reception informed by their respective fields of speciality, hence allowing this study to be an interdisciplinary work of research.

The Victorian era saw the rise of England to a grand industrial power, far removed from the agricultural beginnings of the previous centuries, bringing with it vast changes and inviting much academic attention. For my study, the specifically Victorian colour-based arguments are heavily indebted to the current work of Charlotte Ribeyrol, editor of *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England* (2016) and contributor to the 36th issue of *Word & Image* that focussed on “The Changing Colours of Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature” (2020). Ribeyrol was the leading curator of the exhibition “Colour Revolution”, focusing on Victorian colours,

which opened on the 21st of September 2023 at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. She was also a contributor and editor of the catalogue, *Colour Revolution, Victorian Art, Fashion & Design* (2023), which complemented the exhibition. This catalogue proved very useful for this study as it assembles essays written by some of the leading scholars researching on colour from a cultural perspective, including Ribeyrol, Matthew Winterbottom and Stefano Evangelista. Regarding fashion, John Harvey's work *Men in Black* (1995), still stands uncontested in its field, as it provides a detailed historical overview of men's fashion and the colour black in particular. Additionally, I made use of the work of the anthropologist Michael Taussig, who provides a perspective on colour that highlights the complexity of the subject by detailing the cultural, historical, social and economic implications it holds. Simon Garfield's research provides an in-depth reflection on William Perkin and his discovery of mauve (2000), while Laura Anne Kalba's *Color in the Age of Impressionism: Commerce, Technology, and Art* (2017) offers important insights on the perception of colour in France but also reflects on dominant stances of the English society. Although the focus of Kalba's book lies on France and Paris in particular, I suggest that similar anxieties caused by colour can be found in Victorian England. Furthermore, I made use of Regina Blaszczyk's, *The Colour Revolution* (2012), as it offers valuable information on the history of the reception of colour during the nineteenth century, which is when she refers to England, however her focus lies on colour in the US during the 20th century. Hence her argument places the 'colour revolution' in a different time and place, which I contest by highlighting how the so-called revolution already took place in Victorian England. Ribeyrol, along with the other scholars who contributed to the catalogue *Colour Revolution* (2023) also dates this revolution to nineteenth-century England, although the work does not directly engage with Blaszczyk's claim. Moreover, David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* (2000) is a useful reference, as it takes a broader approach to the aversion of Western culture to colour throughout history. The title of the book already gives away the term that Batchelor coined in this work, "chromophobia", which is "the loathing of colour, this fear of corruption through colour" (both Batchelor 22). This thesis makes use of the concept of chromophobia as it addresses precisely the negative connection to colour that was interwoven into the conceptualisation of colour during the timeframe chosen for this study.

Discourses on colour are not a new phenomenon that surfaced during the reign of Queen Victoria. Important chromatic debates already took place before the second half of the nineteenth century. In the early eighteenth century, Sir Isaac Newton conducted his famous experiments breaking white light through a glass prism into seven colours. His work *Opticks*

(1704), encompassed his colour theories which, in turn, influenced later colour debates, especially amongst artists, as it ushered colour into a scientific realm rather than an aesthetic one. Another influential colour theory that must be considered when regarding late nineteenth-century chromatic debates is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Farbenlehre* (1810), which was translated into English and published by the painter Charles Lock Eastlake in 1840 and complemented with additional notes by the translator. Goethe was convinced that "there is an infinite amount of colour variation, every colour being the sum of circumstantial and ever-varying combinations of light and darkness" (Porée 188), which appealed to artists like Joseph Mallord William Turner, who readily adopted this stance for his work and openly acknowledged Goethe's influence with paintings like *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory)*, *The Morning after the Deluge - Moses writing the Book of Genesis* (fig.1), dating back to 1843.



Fig.1 J. M. W. Turner, *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory)*, *The Morning after the Deluge - Moses writing the Book of Genesis*, 1843

Another important colour theory of the nineteenth century was formulated by the French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul. His book, *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs, et de l'assortiment des objets colorés*, published in 1839, was translated into English in the 1850s

(Nicklas 218) and “became one of the most influential works on colour harmony” (ibid. 222). In this work, Chevreul introduces his principles of simultaneous contrast in colours and colour harmony, while also developing “a system for the scientific identification and classification of colors” (Kalba 2017, 15). The concept of harmony in connection to colour had already been discussed before Chevreul by David Ramsay Hay who used “Newton’s musical analogy in his theory of the harmony of colours” (Nicklas 221) in his book, *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring Adapted to Housepainting* (1828), which established a connection between colour and harmony. Chevreul continued the musical analogy and developed the concept of harmony in colours further by organising primary and secondary colours “into sets of complementary colours in the colour wheel” (Nicklas 221), which he aimed to function as a reference guide on an industrial scale. His system for classifying colours aimed to “move toward the precise measurement of color”, which meant that “[h]ue and tone received quantitative values, replacing the traditional heritage of names containing mythological, geographical, biographical, or [...] chemical references” (Kalba 2017, 22). As Chevreul occupied the position of dye master at Gobelins, the famous tapestry manufactory in Paris, he attempted to “standardize the dyes used in the manufactory” and came to realise that the “apparent differences in colours of tapestry sections were due to the juxtaposition of certain colours in the weaving, not because of inconsistent dyes” (both Nicklas 221). Thus, giving rise to his ideas about simultaneous contrast in colours. Chevreul’s famous book is of particular interest in the context of my thesis, as it demonstrates a clear attempt to control colour, utilising scientific classification, which, in turn, reflects a current in society that was not at ease with colour left to its own devices. Although the focus of my thesis lies on Victorian England both Germany and France brought forth thinkers that had a great influence on chromatic discourses in Victorian England. Hence, a discussion of the subject cannot be undertaken without taking them into account.

In the discussion of chromatic anxieties concerning England’s imperial ideologies, I made use of Edward W. Said’s work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and *Orientalism* (1978) as well as Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994). Key concepts include colonial stereotypes as well as the processes of othering in colonial discourses. Regarding ‘the other’ additional insights were gained from Andreea Bălan’s essay, “The Victorian Age and the Other” (2021). Another key concept concerning gender and chromatic anxieties is indebted to Cornelia Klinger and her article, “Feministische Theorie zwischen Lektüre und Kritik des philosophischen Kanons” (2005), which highlights dualism throughout the history of the philosophical canon and clarifies the implications from a feminist perspective. From Klinger, I

adapted the concept of dualisms and highlighted how they are part of Victorian discussions on colour and repeatedly align colour or its supposed qualities with the weaker link of the dualism.

Ever since Newton's use of a glass prism to divide white light into seven prismatic colours, colour has been part of science, which caused a renewal of interest in the subject. In addition, leading up to the timeframe chosen to narrow down the scope of this study, the Romantic movement has brought forth a strong defence of colours as opposed to the neo-classical insistence on the superiority of drawing, which supposedly demands more craftsmanship than 'merely' colouring. The romantic understanding of colour praises hues as a God-given gift for man to enjoy, a stance which clashed with the writings of Charles Darwin who published his influential work *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 as well as *The Descent of Man* in 1871, which connects the magnificent colours displayed in the animal kingdom to a sexual function rather than an aesthetic appeal.

Colour had also irrevocably been connected to religious debates. During the reign of King Henry VIII, due to the English Reformation, colour was drained from the garments and decorations used for religious practices for the protestants, with a particular abstention practised by the Puritans. The colourful vestments, such as the bishops' garb, as well as the liturgical calendar and seasonal colours of the Catholics were seen by Protestants as a cause for distraction and were therefore rejected. The role of colour is not unimportant in religious struggles present in the nineteenth century, such as the "profound crisis produced by Darwinism" (Himmelfarb qtd. in Langland 383), however for the sake of narrowing down the scope of this study, this thesis will not delve into theological debates about colour or the romantic reappraisal of natural colours.

Despite the undeniable presence of colour in our daily lives, it remains a subject that has only recently gained more academic attention in the field of cultural studies. As Pastoureau summarises "Color is a natural phenomenon, of course, but it is also a complex cultural construct that resists generalisation and, indeed, analysis itself" (7). Gage too, in his influential work, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, first published in 1993, notes that colour has "rarely been treated in a unified way" (2005, 7). The conspicuous lack of study of colour from a cultural perspective is not only due to the complexity of colour. What Kalba refers to as the "long-standing historiographical colorblindness" (2017, 7) is the result of a lengthy tradition of disregarding colour, deeming it of little importance. Incredulously, even the field of art history has neglected the subject of colour, banishing it to a position secondary to form (Ribeyrol 2020, 3). This lack of consideration of colour in part stems

from a long-standing opposition of “*disegno* versus *colore*” (Gage 2005, 137) present throughout most of Western history, where the artist’s primary function is to create representations, where colour can be considered an embellishment rather than essential (ibid. 7). However, in the second half of the nineteenth century an important shift occurred in Western artistic production when colour was no longer seen as subservient to form and the credo “colour for colour’s sake” (Evangelista and Ribeyrol 175) could emerge.

In addition, Gage, Pastoureau, and Kalba note that it is common for us to view the past through a monochromatic lens (Gage 2005, 117; Pastoureau 8; Kalba 2017, 7), which casts a black-and-white filter over the conception of the past. Although Gage writes “[w]e are all used to experiencing the world as black and white images in photography and film” (2005, 117), in the 1990s, when the consumption of colourful media was not as omnipresent as today, I would add that this, to a great extent, still applies to the present time, seeing as to this day images of the past are strongly linked to a lack of colour, which is unanimously accepted and not questioned but rather deemed appropriate. In addition, black and white photography and film were merely “the successors of the monochrome engravings first produced in the fifteenth century that until the nineteenth were usually regarded as adequate even for the reproduction of paintings” (ibid.). This indicates a longstanding tradition in using minimal colour for representational purposes, that must be taken into consideration.

Despite the slow recognition of colour as a worthy subject of academic inquiry from a cultural perspective, it must be acknowledged that since the 1990s insightful studies focusing on colour have been published. Many scholars including the previously named Gage, Pastoureau, Kalba, Ribeyrol, Taussig and Blaszczyk have shown the complexity of colour regarded in its cultural context as well as the value of the insights that can be gained from such a study. What differentiates my thesis from works such as the catalogue, *Colour Revolution*, which is also focused on Victorian England, is that the catalogue aims to show how nineteenth-century England was, despite the predominant dark conception, a wildly colourful period, whereas my research does not aim to provide evidence for the existence of a wide array of colours. Instead, my thesis highlights how the treatment of colour in my chosen timeframe reflects chromatic anxieties and analyses the roots of the ‘complex network of aversion’ that colour faced. In addition, this study contributes to the effort of showing how the subject of colour studied in its cultural context provides a wealth of information about past societies and their people.

1. The Legacy of Ancient Greece and the “Chromatic Turn” (Ribeyrol 2020, 2)

In 1877 the London-based American artist James Abbott McNeil Whistler exhibited, among other pieces his painting, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: Falling Rocket* (fig. 2), which solicited criticism from the influential art critic John Ruskin, who famously described it as “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face” (Ruskin 160). Whistler proceeded to file a libel lawsuit against Ruskin, which resulted in a short trial in 1878, ultimately won by Whistler, although he was rewarded a mere farthing¹ as compensation (Evangelista and Ribeyrol 173). As Ruskin’s polemic suggests, the use of colour is a central part of the issue that the art critic took with the painting. Whistler’s *Nocturne* exemplifies a new treatment of colour, one that places it in the foreground. This trial, which “excited lively interest both in artistic circles and among the general public” (Ruskin xxiii), is an example that shows how colour “emerged as a complex cultural sign in the Victorian age” (Ribeyrol 2016, 7) one, that was repeatedly part of a wider public debate. Although the subject of colour was a vital part of the dispute between Ruskin and Whistler, the core of the conflict was fuelled by moral questions. Indeed, questions of morality are never far from discussions of colour in the nineteenth century. One of the reasons why morality played such a key role in aesthetic debates, will be discussed when looking at the Victorian role model of Ancient Greece, which gave rise to a moral aesthetic.

¹ One farthing is worth one-fourth of a penny.

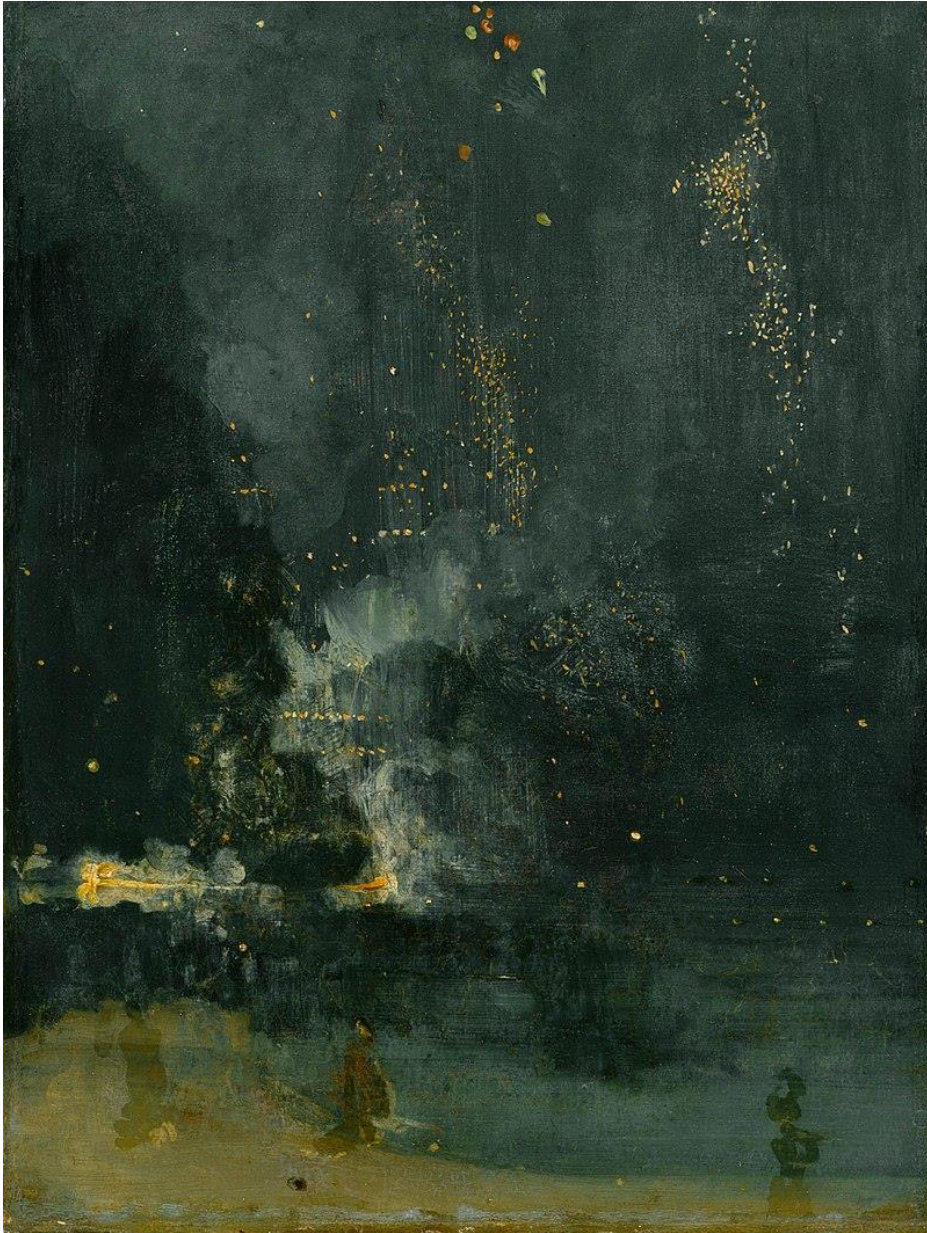


Fig.2 James A. M. Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: Falling Rocket*, 1875

1.1. The Role Model of Ancient Greece

In the aftermath of the Enlightenment and multiple revolutions, the “disruptive political, social, and intellectual experience” individuals lived through prompted a quest for “new cultural roots and alternative cultural patterns” (both Turner 2). Whether consciously or inadvertently, this was the prevailing condition in Victorian England and other Western nations. The culture they increasingly embraced, commencing in the late eighteenth century (ibid. xii), was that of Ancient Greece. Especially, during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Greek philosophy and thought were generally associated with the Platonic age and the rest of the fifth century BCE (ibid. 54). There is a moral aspect inherent in the Victorian idealisation of Ancient Greek culture, as it exerted a profound influence on the aesthetic standards of the modern day.

This impact, in turn, had significant implications for the understanding of colour and accounts for much of the negativity and aversion that it encountered during the Victorian era.

Due to a lack of knowledge and a very limited analytical framework to study Ancient Greek culture the Victorian understanding of the past society was shaped by writers who could make use of the ancient culture to shape and perpetuate an idealised image. As there were no established analytical categories or tools available for the inquiry, except for linguistic studies of Greek and Latin (ibid. 7), the Victorians had to derive these tools “from other modern disciplines or modern religious and philosophical outlooks” (ibid.), which of course raises an epistemological problem. Greek sculpture, for instance, was judged according to modern aesthetic standards (ibid.). The Victorians successfully absorbed what they knew of the Greek past and reshaped it in their image. Hence, the Victorian contemplation of Ancient Greek culture reveals less about the Mediterranean ancient culture and much more about the Victorian culture and its contemporary struggles. During a period marked by social and political upheaval, such as the reform acts of 1867 and 1884, as well as concerns about “nonconformist religion pluralistic society” (ibid. 18), the Greeks, offered the Victorians a versatile tool that could be adapted to support various arguments (ibid. 8).

The great impact of Ancient Greek culture on the Victorian upper classes is evident through their identification with, and emulation of Greek ideals, which shaped their society, identities, and values. Edmund Richardson, in his study of the classical influence on the Victorians, goes to great lengths to emphasise that “[a]ntiquity was an inescapable force at the heart of British culture and society - shaping how thousands thought about themselves, and their parts in life” (2-3). He makes a compelling point in relating how the role model of Ancient Greek society and culture influenced the *identity* of countless Victorians (ibid.). Notable examples are Matthew Arnold and Sir Richard Westmacott Jr., Oscar Wilde, J. A. Symonds, Walter Pater, A.C. Swinburne and Vernon Lee (Evangelista 2009, 2). The schooling of the Victorian elite relied heavily on the teachings of the classics (Turner 4), meaning that they were well-versed in the classical canon. Moreover, literature on the Ancient Greeks proved influential as exemplified by Arnold, whose Hellenes were still largely derived from a “late-eighteenth-century German literary and aesthetic imagination” (ibid. 21). However, it must be acknowledged that in his influential book, *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869, Arnold dismissed the complexity of the ancient culture as well as modern scientific naturalism (ibid.), in favour of an idealised image that served a modern purpose.

1.2. Winckelmann's Ideal Whiteness and the Moral Aesthetic

One of the key figures in the German evaluation of Ancient Greece was Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Frank M. Turner carefully highlights the pivotal role of the German² scholar who “[a]lmost single-handedly [...] made the Greek experience alive and vitally interesting to intellectuals and creative writers throughout Germany and the rest of Europe even though he never visited Greece himself” (40). Turner hereby remarks upon a key insight regarding Winckelmann and the people he influenced, it is an intellectual focus that investigated the Greek experience, rather than an interest in their concrete material reality.

Winckelmann's conception of ideal beauty had a significant impact on English aesthetic discourses and dictated specific paragons, particularly in the art of sculpture, which profoundly shaped the artistic production of the time. The German scholar was instrumental in the aesthetic evaluation of Greek art, particularly in his development of the idea that Greek art, especially sculpture, epitomised ideal beauty. In his work, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, first published in 1764, Winckelmann extensively explores how the Ancient Greeks achieved such mastery in artistic craftsmanship. Winckelmann, whose work was “translated and discussed in Britain by the late 1760s” (Turner 40) attributes much of their skill and superiority over other cultures to their climate, which, with its Mediterranean warmth, nurtured the development of great minds (Winckelmann 35). For followers of Winckelmann, “modern culture that was informed by false social values, inhibiting aesthetic rules, and ascetic Christian morality, Greece functioned as a metaphor for a golden age” (Turner 41). After Winckelmann, the Ancient Greeks became the unquestionable masters of sculpture and numerous Victorian artists strove for the creation of art that mirrored the excellence of their surviving works.

The moral appraisal of Ancient Greek culture constitutes one of the major conclusions that Victorians drew from their role model, one that had previously been promoted by Winckelmann. As described above, one of Winckelmann's most profound contributions to the later conception of Ancient Greek art is his emphasis on the Greeks' capacity to create ideal beauty (Winckelmann 155). However, this pursuit of the ideal encompassed not only physical beauty but also intellectual beauty, a distinction that set Greek art apart from most others (Turner 42). In essence, the Ancient Greek art praised by Winckelmann possessed the

² Winckelmann stems from Stendal, which we would currently locate in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. For the purpose of this thesis, I will refer to him as of German nationality, even though Germany in our current conception did not exist in his lifetime.

distinctive feature of a certain moral quality in its attainment of ideal beauty. This greatly appealed to many Victorians, who turned to their role model for guidance. This meant that looking to Ancient Greece to decide what is “appropriate in art and life” in general, “formed the major thrust of the Victorian interpretation of Greek culture during the third quarter of the century” (both Ibid. 51). Again, the extent of the influence the ancient culture had on the Victorian elite, or rather how much the modern intellectuals aliquoted to it, is demonstrated. The Greeks provided what was ostensibly seen as a “universal human experience” (ibid.), but in reality, it was the social and, particularly, the moral values of the English upper classes that dictated the parameters for the supposed dogmatic experience (ibid.).

Interpreting Ancient Greek art not only as an ageless ideal but also as imbued with supreme moral qualities allowed Victorians to establish a moral aesthetic that shaped much of the cultural production of England. English commentators praised the reserved quality of Greek sculpture, its quiet strength, and its purity (ibid. 37). In relation to Greek art, the Victorians employed Hellenism “as a foundation for critiquing what they perceived as excess, sensuality, particularity, and individualism in contemporary art” (ibid.). Before the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology provided evidence to the contrary, Victorians were under the impression that the Ancient Greeks celebrated a lack of colour. The limited number of statues of Ancient Greece that were accessible to Victorians, were usually of a pristine white, which seemed to strengthen the idealisation of simple, quiet, and pure strength which characterised their understanding of Greek art. Winckelmann played a substantial role in shaping this perspective in his idealisation of whiteness. However, it is important to note that “ideal whiteness was largely a convention generated by the misunderstanding of excavated antique works; [...] the erasing of colour from them, as they lay hidden over centuries, promoted the fantasy of pure Greek whiteness.” (Hatt 195). Simply put, the lack of colour of ancient statues was unquestioned, as this pristine quality was part of what Victorian observers praised about their role model.

It did take considerable time for Ancient Greek colour practices to be acknowledged on a broader societal level. The systematic excavation of Pompeii, for instance, had already begun in 1738, which prompted the archaeologist Sir William Gell to proclaim, “[n]o nation ever exhibited a greater passion for gaudy colours” (qtd. in Gage 2005, 11), as early as 1817. However, by the time of the discoveries of “the pre-Classical remains of Mycenae and Knossos” (Gage 2005, 11) in the 1870s polychrome Ancient Greece could no longer be overlooked or ignored. Nevertheless, the colours of the Greeks posed a challenge to those Victorians who

based their admiration of the ancient culture on its moral superiority, which frames colour as a threat in its ability to expose the faulty construct that underpinned their assumptions about their role model.

Colour posed a moral issue³ as many highly educated Victorians had praised the ideal whiteness of Ancient Greek art. Colour applied to sculpture embodied everything they had previously worked to cleanse from their art on the authority of the very Greeks whose image they had perpetuated. The idealisation of whiteness for its moral value also encompasses a rejection of colour for its ability to evoke sensuality and vulgarity. Therefore, despite undeniable evidence of a polychrome Greece, the connection between the ancient culture and colour was often resisted. Richard Westmacott Jr., professor of sculpture at the Royal Academy and a respected artist himself (Turner 46), provided the most extensive mid-Victorian discussion of Greek sculpture (ibid.) and vehemently opposed the use of colour in the art form. This opposition stemmed from his broader goal of banishing sensuality from the contemporary sculptural practice (ibid. 49). His aim to counter sensuality was also the source of his issue with polychromy, for colours enhance sensuality. Turner words Westmacott's attack on the modern practice of colouring statues, which was reappearing, with "untamed aesthetic fury" (ibid.). These opinions are at least partially informed by the legacy of the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds who had "deplored the application of color to stone on the grounds of its sensual appeal and subsequent lowering of the morality of sculpture" (ibid. 50). The demand for art to have a moral value is part of the moral aesthetic that played a key role in artistic developments in Victorian England. Westmacott's unwavering convictions serve as an illustration of a particular viewpoint within Victorian discourses on colour - one that regarded art as a means to elevate morality and improve the mind, an objective incompatible with applying paint to pristine white marble (ibid. 50). This is, of course, exemplary for a "chromophobic" (Batchelor 22) attitude.

The Victorian outlook that whiteness is charged with moral purity, particularly in the art of sculpture, issues the conclusion that colour is immoral in its sensuality. An ideal example that both adhered to some mid-Victorian artistic demands and deviated from others is John Gibson's *Tinted Venus* (fig.3). This statue that Gage describes as a "timid attempt" at polychromy by the "last of the English Neo-Classicalists" (both 2005, 11) was exhibited at the

³ Another moral rejection of colour is based on its connection to 'the Orient', which will be further investigated in the following chapter. In claiming the heritage of Ancient Greece, English thinkers insisted on a 'Europeanised' image of the past not one where Greece was part of a 'foreign' Eastern culture.

International Exhibition of 1862. The softly coloured Venus is indeed neither flashy nor flamboyant in her colours but rather subdued in her chromatic variety.



Fig.3 John Gibson, *Tinted Venus*, 1851-1856

True to his neo-classical background, Gibson's *Venus* is predominately white. However, subtle touches of colour are present; her hair is a delicate shade of yellow, her eyes are depicted as blue, her lips are tinted red, and she holds a golden apple in her open hand, while a brown tortoise rests at her feet. Additional ornamental colours can be seen in the drapery across her arm and in her jewellery. Nevertheless, she appears to be predominantly white, which explains the referral to a timid attempt at polychromy. Despite the limited palette, the statue still

provoked critical responses. The previously mentioned artist Westmacott and other fellow sculptors disapproved of Gibson's application of colour to the marble as to them it was "fundamentally at odds with the nature of sculpture" (Hatt 186) and thereby undermined the untouchable basis of their profession. Other critics accused Gibson of corrupting the statue's purity and innocence through the manipulation of its whiteness, even going so far as to claim that he thereby sexualised the nude (ibid.). Colour hereby caused fears of immorality, as it is connected to sensuality, even sexuality by Victorian observers.

Those Victorians, clinging to the ideologically charged versions of their Greek role model had a precarious dependence on the Ancient Greek heritage, the upkeep of which was by no means untroubled nor without its mishaps. As Richardson puts it, "Victorian Britain stumbled through a doubtful, painful and insecure relationship with the ancient world. It was a relationship shaped by the present's anxieties - and by the weight of hope which was loaded on to the past" (4). The hope that overshadows the fact that the Ancient Greek experience was not always able to adequately address modern issues accounts, to an extent, for the Victorians' fervour in maintaining their role model. Turner argues that the image of Greece, complete with its characterising sculptures, supplied an "antagonism to the harshness, materialism, and sham of modern life" which "would persist throughout the [nineteenth] century" (36). This explains the determination behind some Victorians' idealisation of the Greeks. The ancient culture offered them an escape from their fundamentally different reality while enabling them to construct intricate and imaginative parallels that served as guiding principles. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a growing tension emerged between the idealised image of Ancient Greece and the challenges voiced by the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, ultimately leading to a re-evaluation of the Greek heritage and its complex relationship with Victorian ideals.

It is important to consider the far-reaching influence of the self-fashioned ideal of Ancient Greece that was shaped, moulded and endorsed by Victorian thinkers, as this ideal gave rise to some of the chromatic anxiety of the period. The clash between the Victorian idea of Ancient Greece and the reality of the ancient culture unearthed by new sciences in the Victorian era is in part a clash of colour. It is colour that existed where it should not. Therefore, a disinclination against colour, present in the second half of the nineteenth century is tinged among many other factors by the influence of the Ancient Greek ideal. Adhering to principles derived from this ideal makes colour superficial, distracting, nonessential, overly sensual, and most importantly, immoral.

1.3. Morality vs. Aesthetics

The question of Victorian morality, a much-discussed subject in Victorian studies, leads back to the previously mentioned trial of J. A. M. Whistler and John Ruskin. What brought the *Nocturne*'s moral value into question was not merely the fact that Whistler made excessive use of colours to present an abstract image of a nightscape, it is a matter of *what* he is representing, as well as *how* he is doing it. Although the abstract composition of the painting certainly fuelled the anger of critics, there are "a number of recognizable iconographical details" (Kalba 2012, 661), that would suggest to the Victorian viewer that the night scene represents fireworks at the Cremorne Gardens, which were its trademarks (ibid.). The Cremorne Gardens had at the beginning of the 1870s, already lost their respectable status and were instead "associated with mindless public debauchery" (ibid.). In other words, the public space that had been a sight frequented by respectable middle-class patrons was now associated with prostitution. Whistler made this morally reprehensible space the subject of his painting, while also focusing on fireworks, a chromatic experience and foreign invention. It is clear that the painting deviates drastically from the "aesthetic standards of the time" (ibid. 657), the upkeep of which, was practised by people like Ruskin.

The dispute between Ruskin and Whistler means much more than a simple disagreement between two Victorians over one painting. I agree with Ribeyrol and Evangelista who assert, "[b]y spectacularly staging a conflict between aesthetics and morality, the trial revealed the rift between the new avant-gardes and Ruskin's ideal of 'Truth to Nature'" (173), which translates to a requirement of art to represent nature in a 'truthful' way, meaning the opposite of abstract art. Whistler thereby pushed "art beyond narrative and representation, aiming instead to capture elusive notions of 'harmonies' and 'atmosphere'" (ibid.), which represented a new approach to art, one in which colour played an important role. Despite the practically non-existent monetary reward, Whistler won against Ruskin. The painter achieved a symbolic victory for the new generation of artists, allowing them to "no longer adhere to the ethical stance of the ageing critic, [Ruskin,] which had shaped public discussions of art for almost half a century". This development legitimised a fresh approach to art that employed colour for its sensual and artistic effects (ibid.).

1.4. Victorian Yearning for Colours of the Past

In the late years of the nineteenth century, the thick fog, fuelled by coal smoke, which was newly recognised as something harmful⁴, caused concerns about the environment and its degradation, which were “connected to anxieties about cultural decline” (Thorsheim 6). Due to the lack of fresh air and sunlight fears were voiced that the people of England and the urban poor, in particular, were degenerating both physically and morally, which was exactly the opposite of what the country needed to remain at the height of imperial and industrial power (ibid. 7). Already in the 1870s, England’s boom years came to an end (Harvey 157). A shift of commercial power occurred as other countries surpassed England with their industrial revolutions (ibid. 155). There were some approaches to possible solutions against the imagined cultural decline brought forth by radical thinkers like Morris and the aforementioned Ruskin. They inverted the recognition of industrialisation and urbanisation as signs of progress and instead considered them to show how “England was sacrificing its connections to nature and the past in a misguided quest for material gain” (Thorsheim 7). To work against the new consumer society that was “dominated by the capitalistic forces of mass production and the mass culture” (Doran 3-4) both Ruskin and Morris looked to England’s medieval past as a role model for a simpler form of society, that was closer to nature (Thorsheim 6-7). For these influential men, who were both involved with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Ruskin as a supporter (Ribeyrol 2023, 45), and Morris as an active artist part of the second generation of the brotherhood (ibid. 46), colour played a vital role in their conception of the past and part of their yearning for a life closer to one lived in the Middle Ages meant a yearning for the medieval colours. Interestingly, many Victorians resisted the idea of a polychromatic Greece, even though the colours of the Middle Ages were widely accepted and at times even celebrated. The restoration of colour on medieval statues was not opposed while the same practice on Greek sculpture inevitably clashed with the idea of the ideal white statue (Hatt 185), which demonstrates the position of the Ancient Greek role model as an ideologically charged concept.

Both Morris and Ruskin shared a strong nostalgia, “which often verged on imaginary reinvention” (Ribeyrol 2016, 6), which is the same phenomenon that shaped the approach to Ancient Greece. Although Ruskin did criticise the use of colour in Whistler’s *Nocturne*, he was

⁴ Astonishingly, it was only in the late nineteenth century that the fog that repeatedly haunted the streets of London and other industrial cities was considered to be a real problem. It was during this time that the “modern idea of pollution was invented” (Thorsheim 2).

not a “chromophobe” (Batchelor 73). On the contrary, he took up a strong defence of natural colours, supporting colourists like J. M. W. Turner. William Morris, too, was an enthusiast for the colours of the Middle Ages. There is a connection between his political stance, as a socialist, his creative interest and his vision of a thriving society, which are all based on his (re)imagining of the medieval past. For both Morris and Ruskin colour “played a crucial role in the ideological reappraisal (and appropriation) of certain periods, notably the Gothic Middle Ages” (Ribeyrol 2016, 6). However, the colours that the two freethinkers celebrated were not free of ideological charge. Theirs was a longing for more than just brighter colours in their lives, but also the things that these colours of the past represent: a different society with different value systems and different ideals.

1.5. The “Chromatic Turn” (Ribeyrol 2020, 2)

Despite the prevailing dark conception of the nineteenth century, it was a period of vast changes in both the production of colour as well as the way it was handled, approached and discussed. Ribeyrol terms the significant changes in the reception of colour, as well as its production in the second half of the nineteenth century the “chromatic turn” (2020, 2). With Perkin’s invention of the first aniline dye, mauve, and the proceeding wave of chemically produced colours, the textile industry boomed. The Industrial Revolution brought forth “new technologies, media, and consumer goods”, which contributed to “making vivid colors a central aspect of nineteenth-century urban life” (both Kalba 2017, 2). It was not merely the fact that there were more colourful goods available and visible in the daily lives of people, but also that there was a prolific rise of discourses on chromatic matters, although “most ‘grammars’ of colour published during this period sought to control, by means of rules and classifications, the explosion of colour brought about by modern chemists” (Ribeyrol 2020, 3). The fast rise of colour, like any rapid development that leaves observers feeling out of control, was also cause for anxiety and great mistrust.

William Morris, though a great admirer of bright and strong colours, as long as they were natural, was deeply suspicious of the new chemically produced colours. In *The Lesser Arts of Life*, originally held as a lecture in 1882, he contrasted the old dyes with the new aniline dyes, finding them severely lacking.

The dye-stuffs discovered by the indefatigable genius of scientific chemists, which every one has heard of under the name of aniline colours [...] being an invention for the benefit of an art whose very existence depends upon its producing beauty, it is on the road, and far advanced on it, towards destroying all beauty in the art. The fad is, that everyone of these colours is hideous in itself,

whereas all the old dyes are in themselves beautiful colours; only extreme perversity could make an ugly colour out of them. [...] We must relegate these new dyes to a museum of scientific curiosities, and for our practice go back, if not to the days of the Pharaohs, yet at least to those of Tintoret. I say I invite you to consider this, because it is a type of the oppression under which the lesser arts are suffering at the present day. (Morris 257-8)

Morris was not alone in his prejudice against the new colours. In response to a “generalized state of chromatic confusion” (Kalba 2017, 3), which was caused by the flood of new colours, scientific laws of colour harmony were considered to eliminate chromatic uncertainties. The previously mentioned book *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and Their Applications to the Arts* (1854) by the chemist Chevreul was published before artificial colours revolutionised the colour industry. However, tastemakers readily extended his theories to address daily concerns of English Victorian society (Nicklas 223), giving his work renewed importance.

With the chromatic revolution, colour suddenly belonged to the category of artificial signs instead of natural ones, of which it had hitherto been part (Porée 185). Artists of the nineteenth century reacted to this shift. Poets created a “new lingua” while the painters reinvented “the colours of things and of the world” (both *ibid.*). With the new chemical colours came a novel terminology for colours, which entered the subject into literary debates. For example, the name of another early aniline dye, magenta, was so-called “in honour of the blood-soaked fields of the Battle of Magenta, where French troops fought against the Austrians in 1859” (Kalba 2017, 28-29), which established a gruesome connection. The poet John Addington Symonds accused the flood of new synthetic colours of destabilising the terminology of colour and generally “deemed such commercial hues unsuitable for poetic use” (Ribeyrol 2016, 8). Moreover, the subject of the new colours did not only broach the literary debates but was also discussed in domains that were not necessarily artistic.

The second half of the nineteenth century was also characterised by an increase in scientific interest in colour, in both its physiological properties as well as its psychological perception, while the very materiality of colour was changing through chemical synthesis (*ibid.* 7). The scientific debate about colour ventured into multiple directions and was approached from various overlapping fields such as ethnography, psychology and education (*ibid.* 2020, 1). The growing debate about the colour sense, from a physiological perspective, found its origin not in the works of scientists, but of literary scholarship, namely that of “William E. Gladstone, whose three-volume *Studies in Homer and the Homeric age* (1858) was to shape subsequent multidisciplinary approaches to the colour-sense” (*ibid.*). In this work, Gladstone assumed that

the Greeks of the Homeric age were not able to see the same colours as modern people could, simply because, according to Gladstone, they “ignored the ‘art of painting’ and ‘dyeing’” (ibid. 2). This is, of course, a misconception about the Ancient Greeks.

The number of discourses that were held concerning colour in the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrate a new awareness of it. All in all, colour was increasingly placed “at the core of ideologically charged debates that went beyond the sphere of art history and literary scholarship” (ibid.). The rise of the chemically produced colours, at the time, had the effect that the subject of colour was brought to the core of a multitude of debates, from various disciplines. It is of no surprise that the topic entered artistic debates as well as literary debates, as the Whistler versus Ruskin trial demonstrates, but it also proved to be an economic, scientific, social and political concern.

2. Imperial Anxieties and their Implications on Chromatic Anxieties

Particular colour-based anxieties present in the second half of the nineteenth century are fed by broader cultural fears that are often part of imperial anxieties with which English people were inevitably faced. England was at the time an imperial force “bigger, grander, more imposing than any other” (Said 1994, xxv), constantly in direct competition with France (ibid.). The fears that arose in Victorian England at the time are often directly related to a ‘primitive other’ that Victorians conceptualised in their efforts to enhance their self-understanding. This relates to colour, as it often functioned as a marker of difference between the self and ‘the other’. Fear of a lack of control over colour, the anxieties revolving around the sensuality of colour and, of course, the general aversion to colour were fed by imperial conditions that often framed colour as a characteristic of foreign places and their people. These ‘foreigners’ were often conceptualised in stark opposition to what was known and familiar. Therefore, the “Empire Question”, the “consummate question that encompassed and engendered all the others” (both 1) as referred to by Deborah A. Logan, stood in the foreground of what people in Victorian England were occupied with.

2.1. The Process of Othering

The concept of ‘the other’ did not arise during the late nineteenth century in connection to England’s imperial drive, even though it is an essential part of the phenomenon. Instead, it is a common form of identity building and contributes to fuelling a unified national identity. A fascination and preoccupation with ‘the other’ “can be traced back to the beginning of human

history and thought” (Bălan 2). It is a topic that has occupied many great thinkers of the past, such as Simone de Beauvoir who characterised the category of otherness as fundamental to human thought (qtd. in *ibid.*). Furthermore, otherness unavoidably refers to difference, “connecting it predominantly with marginalized people, who are rejected from the dominant group, who are disempowered, quieted, separated due to various deviations or to social, religious, political and sexual differences” (Bălan 2). This differentiating process takes place on the level of the individual self but also a greater national level. In connection to the colonial conquests that imperial England was undertaking, particularly during the long Victorian reign, these differences were crucial to discourses about the national self and achieving an “imperial ‘unity’” (Logan 15). Said, who initiated and substantially contributed to the academic discourse on Orientalism, highlights the association of the culture of one country with “the nation or the state” itself, which “differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia”, meaning that “[c]ulture in this sense is a form of identity” (all 1994, xiii). In other words, a nation feeds off ‘the other’ with which it is faced. This encounter with ‘the other’ is enlisted to forge a stronger idea of the national identity.

Numerous scholars from different disciplines and throughout history have argued that difference is not merely a result of the opposition between the self and ‘the other’ but a requirement for the self (Bălan 3). In other words, ‘the other’ is essential in the process of defining one’s self by creating distinctions and maintaining a certain level of distance from ‘the other’. However, in this process of distancing the self from ‘the other’, this “articulation of otherness” (*ibid.*) may inadvertently result in the development of stereotypes (*ibid.*). Notably, Bhabha provides an insightful approach to colonial stereotypes that stresses their ambivalence and refers to them as a “major discursive strategy” (66). The stereotype must not be proven, as it is already known and “logically constructed” (*ibid.*) This highlights that stereotypes often represent something already familiar but are also “something that must be anxiously repeated” (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Bhabha underscores the significance of representational practices within the colonial discourse, which relies on the “concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (*ibid.*). In essence, a rigid portrayal of ‘the other’ leaves little room for critical examination or challenge.

The practice of representation of a foreign culture and its people gives crucial insights into the stance that English society took towards another country and how this stance may change over time. In his influential work *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues “that Western discourse represented and managed societies and peoples of ‘the Orient’ through homogenised

repetitive patterns of representations in and across various hegemonic institutions” (Matthewson 209). He thereby questioned which representational system had the right to represent other cultures and what these hegemonic mechanisms entailed. In his later work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said similarly highlights the importance of narratives, that feed into imperial discourses. He argues that the question of who holds the power to either form or suppress narratives is vital to both culture and imperialism, which also consists of the main connection between the two (xiii). Bhabha, likewise, refers to the colonial discourse, which, of course, includes representational practices as “an apparatus of power” (70). In addition, “[t]he construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual” (ibid. 67), which again leads to a process of othering that plays such a key role in colonial discourses.

2.2. The Colourful ‘Other’

During the nineteenth century, the discourses circulating in Western society on ‘the Orient’ were dominated by what the West believed the East to be. As previously shown, Said laboured to highlight that these discourses are a Western creation, which means that they are in many ways far removed from the reality of the lives of people who lived in the East. Said writes, “what gave the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West” (2019, 40). For instance, for the Frenchman Louis Dupré who published an illustrated costume album, *Voyage à Athènes et à Constantinople*, in 1825, “vivid colors stand for Muslim identity” (E. Fraser 54). This was precisely because the discourses on ‘the Orient’ of his contemporary day, being the early nineteenth century, were still focused on religious as well as racial markers that create ‘the Oriental other’. Colour clearly plays a role in this differentiating process.

I agree with Amy Matthewson when she suggests that the Saidian reading of Orientalism reproduces an all too clear opposition of East and West (209), which produces a dangerous dualism. To counter this dualism, it is important to highlight the complexity of colonial processes, which Bhabha does by calling attention to the ambivalent property inherent in the stereotypes present in colonial discourses which are marked by a “*productive* ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse - that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (ibid. 67, emphasis in original). Again, the importance of the interdependence of ‘the other’ and the self is highlighted. Interestingly, the incongruity of at once excluding and dismissing something

while also being fascinated and drawn to it also appears in connection to colour. Taussig refers to this phenomenon as he regards people of refinement in early nineteenth-century Germany who voiced an aversion to bright colours, “this distaste for vivid color is actually an unstable mix of attraction *and* repulsion” (2006, 31, emphasis in original). It is worth noticing that some of the ambivalence surrounding strong colours, may stem from the same source as the ambivalence for ‘the other’ seeing as colour often functioned as a marker of otherness. Indeed, it was during the nineteenth century that the connection between ‘the Orient’ and bright colours was strengthened (E. Fraser 54).

The reception of the East in nineteenth-century England was informed not only by current political developments but also by the cultural representation practised in the previous century. Old representational practices had worked to represent Eastern people in brightly coloured garments, which consolidated the link between colour and ‘exotic’ faraway lands. Already during the eighteenth century, Europeans developed a particular fascination with the ‘Turks’ resulting in the so-called “Turcomania” (Searight 129). Paintings featuring subjects of the Ottoman Empire complete with bright colours appeared in the famous Salons of Paris as well as London (ibid.). Diplomatic ties had been established with the Ottoman Empire as early as the sixteenth century, which introduced costume albums to the Europeans, familiarising them with the diverse Eastern society through detailed costume prints that were often brilliantly coloured (E. Fraser 45). The eighteenth-century “Turcomania” (ibid.) with its “craze for Oriental fashion consolidated a link between bright colors and Eastern dress, another instance of the orientaling of color” (ibid. 53), which influenced the nineteenth-century perception of the ‘Oriental East’. However, Taussig “argues that Western culture has been ambivalent about vivid color in part because of European colonial activity and the experience of what he calls ‘colored Otherness’” (qtd. in ibid.), precisely because colour was connected to a foreign ‘other’. The positive reception of the ‘Turks’ during the seventeenth as well as the eighteenth century, developed into a more active differentiation between East and West with deteriorating relations with the Ottoman Empire.

During the nineteenth century, it appeared ‘natural’ for Westerners to draw a connection between primitivism and an affinity for colour, as colonial discourses typically clothed Eastern people in bright colours, building a stark contrast to the dark-clad men of England. This colourful divide also extended to women and children as they too wore colourful clothes at the time. As Kalba states, “[c]losely identified with, women, children and other ‘primitive people,’ including workers and overseas populations, color served in the nineteenth century as a useful

mechanism for classifying and controlling the world” (2017, 3). Colour thereby functioned, as a differentiating apparatus, which highlights how “aesthetic debates about color had pronounced social and political implications” (ibid.). Therefore, it is possible to use the analysis of colour to make sense of broader social and political developments in history. The nineteenth-century phenomenon of framing colour as a marker of the ‘cultural other’ and the ‘primitive other’ implies that there was a need to differentiate the self, in this case, the Western culture and society, from ‘the other’, that poses a possible threat.

Colour as a marker of difference works in two ways in relation to the ‘cultural other’. As cultural discourses in the eighteenth century had already worked to “orientalise colour” (E. Fraser 53) there was a strong association of brightly coloured habits with Eastern cultures, which constitutes one way in which colour came to be a marker of difference from the ‘cultural other’. But there is also the concept of colour tied to race, which refers to the skin colour, which divides people into different races. The nineteenth century saw the rise of a new concept of race, which often hierarchically ranked races (Heraclides and Dialla 32). In 1853, the Frenchman Count Arthur de Gobineau published an essay on the *Inequality of the Human Races*, which promotes the superiority of the white race, the “Aryans” over other “coloured” races (both Miller 288). This approach to race, of course, is all too familiar, as it would resurface in the twentieth century and play a key role in the justification of the atrocities that were committed. Colour cannot be exempt from these practices of categorisation. Peter B. Miller highlights how the rise of this “pseudo-scientific racism” (251), as Anna Jackson terms it, was caused by anxieties over racial chaos (Miller 288) that were brought about by Western expansion and the slow abolition of slavery in many Western states. Gobineau published his essay only five years after the abolition of slavery in France in 1848, “a revolutionary year in which racial and social boundaries became, for many, alarmingly fluid and more difficult to police” (ibid.). Once again, the fear of a lack of control and the chaos that would surely ensue led to an active search for a differentiating mechanism, one where colour could be employed.

Moreover, the discussions of whiteness during the Victorian reign, discussed in the previous chapter, cannot be disentangled from racial undertones as English society was bound to deal with the country’s new position of imperial power and consequently propagated a superiority of white skin over people of colour. Whiteness in Victorian times invokes the supposed “lesser races, the ‘coloured’ peoples and cultures of the world without directly naming them” (Hatt 195). An idealisation of whiteness has colonial implications, seeing as mid-nineteenth century England was at its height of imperial power. There was a prevailing fear that

the rational conventions of Western culture were under threat from what was perceived as non-Western sensuality, which was closely associated with coloured materials and attitudes in favour of colour (Gage 2005, 10). This approach to colour is reflected in stances taken up by the sculptors Westmacott, John Bell and Henry Weekes who perpetuated the connection between colour and primitivism. Bell even went so far as to argue that the polychromy of Ancient Greece stemmed from barbarous members of the society, not the celebrated artists (Hatt 194), fortifying the connection between uncultured and uncivilised people and colour. This bond assigned colour a lower status, while whiteness was upheld as the ideal. Whiteness, as demonstrated, is a powerful concept that not only found application in sculpture but also served as a political category, owing to its “flexibility, and the easy possibility of ideological revision in the light of historical or social change” (ibid.). The association of colour with primitivism and the elevation of whiteness as an ideal reflect broader colonial and racial attitudes of Victorian England and thereby account for some of the anxieties that were caused by colour.

Despite the nineteenth-century employment of colour as a differentiation tool, to distance the self from ‘the other’, it also played an important role in the cultural exchange between the East and the West, as can be observed in the developments of print culture in Europe. This is exemplified by the aforementioned publication of Dupré, whose book adopted the style of Eastern costume albums, already circulating in Europe, imported from the Ottoman Empire. Elisabeth Fraser argues, that Dupré’s work shows how the West did not merely patronise the East but how ‘the Orient’ also influenced and helped the development of the supposedly much further advanced print culture of Europe (46). Much of this advancement is connected to the consideration of colour and the detailed rendering of it. In her study on ‘Oriental’ colours, E. Fraser highlights the cultural exchange that benefited both the East and the West. It is clear that Dupré’s prints rely on the association of colour with ‘the Orient’ (ibid. 54), but they also demonstrate a technique with a special focus on details of colour that is characteristic of the Ottoman-Empire authored books, as can be seen in Dupré’s illustration, “An Armenian Prince and His Wife (Duzoglou)” (fig.4).



Fig.4 Louis Dupré, “An Armenian Prince and His Wife (Duzoglou)”, 1825

This illustration exhibits a celebration of brilliant colours with a remarkable attention to detail. The different kinds of materials and fabrics are rendered in different shades with tiny intricate details, down to the very tip of the embroidered shoe of the wife of the prince. Dupré’s hand-coloured lithographs appearing in his book were fashioned after the water-coloured sketches that he painted during his travels to the East (ibid.). Seeing as Dupré’s costume album was published early on in the nineteenth century the colour had to be added by hand since chromolithography had not been developed yet. Coloured printing was to make its rise only a few decades later with the help of the relentless advocate of colour, Owen Jones.

2.3. Owen Jones, the “Apostle of Colour” (Searight 128)

Jones was born in 1809 and, as was the custom for many aspiring artists with appropriate means, undertook a grand tour of Europe in the 1830s. Jones’s travels even took him beyond Europe, allowing him to explore ancient cultures in northern Africa, which proved to be hugely formative for his aesthetic development. The young Englishman was to become a “major influence on British design and decoration on the mid-nineteenth century” and was remembered as one of the “apostles of colour” (Searight 128). Jones was born into a time when colour “in both its romantic and scientific connotations, was at the forefront of discussion of art and architecture” (ibid. 129), a discourse he himself, with his unrelenting defence of colour, greatly contributed to. Sarah Searight argues that colour was pivotal in Jones’ career (ibid.). The interest in the East was not a new phenomenon when Jones embarked on his journey. Artists like Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and John Keats⁵ had already awakened, or indeed verbalised an existing fascination with “the ‘exotic’ world of the East” (ibid. 130). Countries like Egypt or Algeria (Miller 277) had become much more accessible to Europeans as they came to be dominated by colonial rule, with many Europeans settling in the colonised countries. During Jones’ travels, he met a fellow advocate of polychromy, Jules Goury, with whom he went to the recently ‘rediscovered’ “great medieval Nasrid palace of the Alhambra” (Searight 135). This visit to the Alhambra was to substantially influence Jones in his artistic development.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Jones designed a homage to Greek polychromy at the International Exhibition of 1862, housing Gibson’s *Tinted Venus*, but his interest in colour went beyond the colours of the Ancient Greeks. Jones was deeply fascinated by the colours, architectural structures and ornaments of Islamic architecture, of which the Alhambra was the most accessible to Europeans (ibid.). Upon their arrival at the Alhambra, Goury and Jones began to record and study the decorative detail of the palace (ibid. 136). After Goury’s untimely death and a yearlong visit to the Alhambra in 1837, Jones published *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra* in twelve instalments between 1836 and 1845 (Ribeyrol 2023, 131). This work earned him the byname “Alhambra Jones” (Braga 84), by which he was widely known during his lifetime.

For the publication of the work on the Alhambra, Jones ran into some difficulty in finding a publisher that suited his needs (Ferry 185). As a result, he set up his own printing

⁵ See Lord Byron’s *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), Percy Shelley’s *Ozymandias* (1817), John Keats’ *To the Nile* (published posthumously in 1838)

press in his attic and proceeded to print his illustrated book on the Alhambra, complete with illustrations done by Goury and himself, *in colour* (Searight 136). During the 1830s experiments of chromolithography were already undertaken simultaneously in Germany, France and England (Ferry 178). However, it is still unclear where the technique originated from (ibid. 177). Nevertheless, Jones' publication undoubtedly contributed to the process (Braga 82) while it "also set a standard for cheaper colour printing" (Searight 137). *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra* is an important work that demonstrates the progress in coloured printing, which had developed rapidly, especially when comparing it to Dupré's hand-coloured books that were only ever aimed to be luxury goods, rather than being conceptualised for a broader public.

The work of "Alhambra Jones" (Braga 84) is inseparable from colour. Searight argues that "Ancient and medieval Egypt and the Alhambra were at the heart of Jones's vision of the Orient, affecting his designs and colour decoration" (128), but he was also acutely aware of advancements in science and was not opposed to combining new revelations about ancient cultures, that anthropologists were unearthing, with modern developments (Braga 84). Already during the mid-nineteenth century Jones, despite his celebration of colour, which deviated from the aesthetic norm of his time, had established himself as a renowned architect and designer and was employed for important projects. The fruit of his labour could be witnessed in the first Crystal Palace in 1851, as well as the second, which was rebuilt between 1852 and 1854, where he made use of the colour theories of Field (Searight 138) as well as Chevreul. Moreover, Jones was inspired by what he had learned from the polychromy of the Alhambra (Braga 84) as can be seen in the following illustration of the interior of the Crystal Palace by William Simpson (fig. 5).



Fig.5 William Simpson, *Interior of the Crystal Palace*, ab. 1851

The entire colour scheme for the Crystal Palace was designed following scientific theories. Thin stripes of paint were applied systematically to achieve “an ideal and symbolical unification of the three primaries into light” (ibid.). This meant that a certain ratio had to be upheld to make the red, yellow and blue paints blend in the eye of the observer (ibid.), which is visible in Simpson’s illustration. In his approach to colour that heavily relied on ancient and medieval cultures as well as his awareness of scientific advancement in the field, Jones exemplified an acutely modern approach to colour that was in many ways vital to the artistic development of England.

Although Jones managed to establish himself as a skilled architect and designer in his lifetime, he was by no means exempt from severe criticism, especially for his use of colour. During the mid-nineteenth century, colour was still predominantly dismissed to a secondary position. Nevertheless, colour started to become visually ubiquitous with the rise of the new synthetic colours. The foreignizing of colour and associating Eastern cultures with “a particular talent for the harmony of color and ornament” (ibid. 78) also meant that imperial anxieties were mirrored in discourses on colour. As I have previously highlighted, uncertainties about the political, social and cultural position of England in contrast to the foreign countries that it dealt with gave rise to processes of othering, thereby attempting to secure a stable conception of the

self. England's colonial activity had the consequence that it was constantly faced with the foreign, the unfamiliar and 'the other', which led to anxieties.

A significant visual act of differentiation and distancing the self from 'the other' was practised in Victorian men's dark fashion. Harvey observes, whenever the colour black has become the dominant fashion of a European nation "this has occurred at that nation's greatest moment of international power" (156). This "imperial black" is imbued with specific values, "self-effacement and uniformity, impersonality and authority, discipline and self-discipline, a willingness to be strict and a willingness to die", all of which can be recognised as productive to the aim of "maintaining [...] imperial order" (all *ibid.*). Black in this context, can be understood as a negation of colour, although I treat it as a colour in itself. The purging of colour from fashion, especially formal dress, the expression of rationality and seriousness, is important as it signifies a purging of foreign elements from the self. If colour was readily associated with the 'Oriental other', a move away from it in clothing means an effort to distance the self from that which it does not want to be associated with, the colourfully dressed 'other'. The appearance of the English imperialists in the black fashion that their country developed is a distinct differentiating marker to other cultures. Furthermore, until the mid-nineteenth century, and the advent of the production of synthetic colours, most of the pigments needed to achieve brightly coloured dyes had to be imported from 'exotic' lands, which meant that the English were to a great extent dependent on foreign sources and often recognised an inferiority in their capability to produce strong colours. The connection between colour and fashion necessitates a closer inspection when discussing chromatic anxieties in the second half of the nineteenth century and will be the subject of the subsequent chapter.

3. Colour, A Feminine Prerogative

In the nineteenth century, the gendering of colour took a variety of forms. This chapter investigates the relation between femininity and colour and how that caused gendered anxieties. At the time colour was associated with women, as it visually differentiated them from men, who, unlike women, mostly abstained from colourful clothing during the Victorian period. Colour was thereby associated with women, but the issue is more complex than a visual marker of difference. Colour was feminised and certain supposedly feminine qualities were ascribed to colour. It was compared to women and women were compared to assumptions about colour. Both directions of ascription were degrading rather than valorising. Furthermore, another form of the gendering of colour that is detectable during the nineteenth century was metonymy,

which meant that women were often tasked with colouring in professional productions of artworks, due to the assumption that colouring needed less skill, less education than the conception, design and drawing of the piece of art. Another aspect that relates to gender and colour at the time was the understanding that women had a better sense of colour than men, an affinity for colour as it were. All of these forms of gendering of colour reflect the conceptualisation of femininity in Victorian society, as important developments were taking place, where the role of women in society was reevaluated.

3.1. The “Woman Question” (Korte 440)

When examining the chromatic anxieties that arose during the second half of the nineteenth century in England, it is impossible to separate them from broader social, political, and cultural anxieties that gave rise to fears related to colour. As the previous chapters have shown, Victorian society was faced with enormous changes that continuously transformed the daily lives of its people. Naturally, those changes produced new problems and fears that were reflected in the time’s cultural production. The association of colour with foreign cultures generated an aversion to the former, but colour also functioned as a marker of difference within English society. Indeed, there is a long history in Western society of stigmatising colour as “the ‘feminine’ pole of art” (Ribeyrol 2020, 4). Therefore, by the time Queen Victoria ascended her throne, there had already been a long tradition of connecting colour to femininity. Moreover, the Victorian period was marked by important developments regarding the position of women within society, as suffragettes and suffragists “promote[d] women’s rights in the private and the public spheres” (Chouari 1), fostering wide public debate (Langland 381). Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, fears of moral, social and cultural decline or chaos are related to anxieties about fashion, female beauty, an upheaval of ideals, and, to put it in modern terms, fixed gender roles. As colour was, and to a great extent still is, associated with femininity, all of the previously listed agitations plaguing Victorian society are linked to colour in one way or another.

3.2. The Significance of Dualisms - *disegno* vs. *colore*

The discussion of the self in opposition with ‘the other’ automatically establishes a dualism, complete with an inherent hierarchy. Reflecting on the history of Western philosophy, Jacques Derrida wrote that the Western tradition is based on pairs of opposites which provide the basis for philosophy and feed its discourses (qtd. in Klinger 338). The dualism, of man and woman, is inscribed in other oppositional pairs. It is vital to recognise that the structuring tool of dualisms is “an unacknowledged and camouflaged sexual distinction at the very heart of

philosophy” (Braidotti qtd. in Klinger 338). This opposition between the sexes was already formulated by ancient philosophers like Plato (Klinger 341) and Aristotle (ibid. 342). The former theorised a separation between the head, housing the divine part of the soul, and the rest of the body correlating with the mortal part of the soul, which creates a relation of command and obedience (ibid.). Plato directly relates this relationship of power to the dualism of men and women (ibid.), which is one of the most persistent dualisms recorded in the history of thought. On the same note, Donna Haraway calls attention to the significance of this structure of thought as it has a lasting impact on the shape that cultural discourses take.

[C]ertain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, the domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/ resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. The self is the one who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other; [...] to be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be the other is to be multiple, without clear boundary; frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many. (Haraway qtd. in ibid. 339)

Haraway thereby acknowledges the hierarchical nature of dualisms. The first term in all of the dualisms Haraway presents is charged with power over the second term, making them the ‘stronger’, ‘better’, more ‘complete’ part of the dualism. Klinger further investigates the complex relation of all dualisms with the dualism of men and women, “[s]o wie einerseits alle Dualismen geschlechtlich konnotiert sind, so werden andererseits die Geschlechter mittels der verschiedenen Dualismen charakterisiert, erst unter Rekurs auf die tief in die Denktradition eingefügten Dualismen wird die Geschlechterdifferenz als Dualismus vorgestellt” (338). This passage points out that the gendered dualism is inscribed in all others but also how contrariwise dualisms inform the gendered opposition of men and women, which is particularly relevant for the study of colour in nineteenth century England, as dualisms were often taking a formative role in chromatic discourses.

The dualisms that Haraway lists are not conceptualised in relation to colour, nevertheless, I would argue that these oppositional pairs relate to the characterisation of colour in nineteenth-century England, as colour was repeatedly linked to the weaker concept within hierarchical dualisms. The next chapter will investigate the relationship between colour and the body, nature, appearance and illusion. The dualism “whole/part” and “total/partial” (both Haraway qtd. in ibid. 339) point to another important particularity of dualisms that must be

acknowledged. Dualisms are formed according to the formula of A *versus* non-A, rather than A *versus* B (ibid. 350). The second term of the dualism is thereby conceptualised in comparison or relation to the first term, not as an independent factor. Therefore, the weaker link of the dualism symbolises a lack in comparison to the first link, which is a vital recognition when regarding discussions of Victorian masculinity in opposition to Victorian femininity. Furthermore, Haraway's first dualism, "self/other" (Haraway qtd. in ibid. 339), also applies to discussions of colour in the Victorian period. I contend that colour was made into 'the other' by habitually aligning it to the weaker position of common dualisms. It is connected to women, children and foreigners, while also being framed as inconsequential, superficial and gaudy. Moreover, Haraway contests that "to be the other is to be multiple, without clear boundary; frayed, insubstantial" (ibid.), which again relates to colour in nineteenth-century England. The very lack of a definitive boundary made it overwhelming, threatening and hard to control, enabling it to cause anxieties.

When discussing colour in connection to art, Western history shows that it is often conceptualised in opposition to design or drawing (Batchelor 28; Gage 2005, 137; Roque 6), which is mirrored in the chromatic debates of nineteenth-century England. The topos, "*disegno versus colore*" (Gage 2005, 137), is nothing other than another dualism that is related to the gendered dualism. The Frenchman Charles Blanc, in his work *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*, first published in its complete form in 1867 and translated into English as *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving* in 1874, verbalised this relation between gender and art, "[l]e dessin est le sexe masculin de l'art; la couleur en est le sexe féminin" (22). He thereby irrevocably describes a gendered hierarchy in the art of drawing as masculine and superior to colouring, which he considers to be feminine. He does not deny the relevance of colour to painting, but stresses the importance of design's domination over colour, due to its superior valour (ibid. 23). Blanc's active delegation of colour to a secondary position and his assumption of a gendered reading of colour and form, also reflect a growing "gendered anxiety" (Ribeyrol 2020, 4) that increases in relevance and public debate during the latter years of the century. In England, the chemist George Field published his *Chromatography, or, A Treatise on Colours and Pigments, and of Their Powers in Painting, &c.* in 1835, where he acknowledges the commonly held assumption that women have an affinity for colour, which is part of the gendered reading of colour, "the female eye seems to be particularly receptive and perceptive of the tender, beautiful, and expressive relations of colours" (Field 19). Aligning colour with femininity allows the gendered dualism to be constructed within chromatic discourses.

Dualisms are characterised by a particular hierarchy that charges one position with domination over the other. The scholar, Georges Roque takes Blanc's opposition between design as 'masculine' and colour as 'feminine' as a point of departure to illustrate the structural oppositions that begin with the gendered division and characterise much of the Victorian conceptualisation of the two sexes: "masculine/feminine, design/colour, spirit/heart, reason/passion, thought/feeling, language/pleasure" (my translation 6). These seemingly 'natural' dichotomies assign the stronger properties to the masculine sex, while their counterparts are of lesser value to the Victorian conceptualisation and are therefore ostensibly feminine attributes. It is shown again how dualisms are inscribed with the gendered dualism as theorised by Klinger (338). Roque's dualisms mirror the ancient division between the head and the body that was conceptualised by Plato and Aristotle (ibid. 342). All the rational qualities are attributed to the mind: masculine, design, spirit, reason, thought, and language (Roque 6), whereas the oppositional qualities align with the body: feminine, colour, heart, passion, feeling and pleasure (ibid.).

3.3. The Feminine Affinity for Colour

The association between femininity and colour is much more complex than the Victorian assumption that colour shares particular properties with women, as there was also the assumption that women possess a stronger affinity for colour. Throughout history, women have been assumed to have a better understanding of colour (Gage 1990, 519), in a general sense, as also demonstrated by the example of Field. Blanc attributes this affinity to the realm of emotion, which he always contrasts with masculine rationality, "women, ruled by sentiment, attach more importance to color" (Blanc qtd. in Kalba 2017, 34). This assumption is connected to the supposed predisposition of children for colour that Goethe already remarked upon in his famous *Farbenlehre*. Taussig takes this premise as a starting point for his study of colour, "'Men in a state of nature,' writes Goethe, 'uncivilized nations, and children, have a great fondness for colours in their utmost brightness'" (2006, 28). However, Taussig adds, "[t]he same applied to the people of southern Europe, especially the women with their bright colored bodices and ribbons" (ibid.), though the mention of ribbons suggests a reference to women of a middle or upper class. Colour is linked to a proximity to nature, a lack of education and an innocence that borders on naiveté, something that cannot be learned but is rather un-learned through exposure to society. These attributes play into the Victorian conceptualisation of femininity. However, it must be noted that the assumed affinity of women to colour may not only have a cultural but also a biological basis, seeing as "color-defective vision is nearly a hundred times more

common among white males than among white females” (Gage 1990, 520). This proves to be particularly relevant as “[c]olour perception was indeed a key concern in the second half of the nineteenth century” (Ribeyrol 2020, 1). This, in turn, meant that the wide public interest in scientific discoveries also had an impact impacted Victorian thinkers and how they approached colour.

One consequence of the association between colour and femininity is that women were often tasked with the occupation of colouring. Women and children were tasked with the activity of colouring in designs, as it was of secondary importance to the work of art as a whole. For instance, the beautiful hand-coloured lithographs of Dupré’s costume albums were coloured by a woman and her family (E. Fraser 52). As often is the case in the history of women, the names of these artists, are not recorded and therefore long since forgotten. William Burges, too, suggested in his lecture series, *Art Applied to Industry*, held in 1863-64 and published a year later, that children ought to colour in the designs of a good artist to produce affordable but high-quality tiles (166). The suggestion that children are capable of appropriately colouring any given design works as an infantilisation of women as the “feminization of the specialized art of hand-coloring confirms its lowly status as a secondary process in the making of images, a perception that is bound up as well with notions of color” (E. Fraser 53). A clear hierarchy is established where the labour of the mind presides over bodily, in this case, handiwork. This division of labour also has its roots in the ancient philosophy of Aristotle, who fostered the dualism of mind and body, which supplies a basis for the division of labour within society (Klinger 343). Women and children carrying out the handiwork of colouring assign them with the work of the body rather than the labour of the mind. Colour is irrevocably bound to be associated with the ‘infantile other’ as well as the ‘gendered other’ and thereby devalued.

3.4. Victorian Masculinity in Contrast to Victorian Femininity

The subject of Victorian gender identity is too broad for the scope of this study, however, it is of great importance when regarding aversions to colour that arose during the chosen timeframe, as they are often influenced by concerns about gender. The Victorian conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity builds upon the gendered dualism which is so formative for the Western tradition of thought. An important part of Victorian patriarchy was an oppositional conception of the genders, where “Victorian norms of femininity” were conceived “in contradiction to masculinity” (both Chouari 1). This had the consequence that femininity was perceived in direct contrast to masculinity, which allowed for comparison rather than independent consideration. Harvey asserts that the nineteenth-century use of colour was a tool

to “differentiate gender, according to the stark formula of black men and bright women” (196). The strict separation of the genders is visibly exemplified by the difference in colours worn by men and women as can be seen in the painting *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881*, by William Powell Frith (1883) (fig.6).



Fig.6 William Powell Frith, *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881*, 1883

This artwork not only depicts multiple well-known Victorians, such as Prime Minister William Gladstone, Oscar Wilde, Anthony Trollope, the actress Lillie Langtry and many others but also presents the women clothed in bright colours or white, while all the men wear dark suits in either black, grey or brown hues. Of course, it should be noted that Frith’s painting only depicts the higher classes of society, the recognisable faces of public personas, and thereby only reflects a small portion of Victorian society. It is crucial to consider Victorian gender ideologies for the understanding of the contemporary concept of femininity as the latter is an “ideological construct, [...] a historically specific bourgeois social formation” (Psomiades 4). The bourgeoisie was indeed the driving force behind the visible gender division, as the distinction between coloured clothing for women and dark suits for men could not be maintained by working-class people (Harvey 196), which meant that it functioned as an aspiration for the lower classes. There is, however, also a difference between high-quality bright-coloured clothing, worn by wealthy women and cheaper material but equally bright colouring that lower-class women wore, which will be further discussed at a later point in this chapter.

One of the most important components of the Victorian concept of femininity, fuelled by bourgeoisie ideologies, is its association with domesticity which, in turn, sheltered women from the public world but also assigned them a “moral authority” (Psomiades 5). Kathy A.

Psomiades points out how “Victorian femininity is shaped by the range of ideologies and practices that make up domesticity” (4). It was considered ‘natural’ for women of the middle and upper classes to remain at home, while the male breadwinner ventured into the world to provide for his family. Thereby it also functioned as a marker of distinction between the classes, as being able to afford the adherence to such a convention, where the woman and the children do not have to, and indeed should not work, could only be practised in middle and upper classes. In her study of the patriarchal ideology in Victorian novels authored by women, Elizabeth Langland highlights how the Victorian imagination was fuelled by myths that “postulate woman’s moral efficacy in the world at the same time as they limit her sphere for action in that world” (382). In her popular conduct books including *The Daughters of England* (1842), Sarah Ellis propagates the idea that women in their ‘natural’ domesticity are “exempt from the most laborious occupations both of mind and body, but also from the necessity of engaging in those eager pecuniary speculations, and in that fierce conflict of worldly interests” (14). According to Ellis, it is the duty of women to “counteract this evil, by calling back the attention of man to those sunnier spots in his existence, by which the growth of his moral feelings have been encouraged and his heart improved” (qtd. in Austin-Bolt 191). Women were thereby confined to the domestic, the private realm, sheltered from the public sphere of men, but were also supposed to provide moral guidance to their husbands.

The seemingly ‘natural’ contrast between Victorian femininity and masculinity is a result of historical, cultural, and social developments rather than an inherent quality of gender and thereby reveals insights into Victorian society, which worked to maintain the stark difference. By the 1860s the “woman question” (Korte 440), which raised questions on the distinction between the ‘natures’ of men and women, had become one of the most important subjects of discourse in Victorian society (Langland 382). This question was at the core of the suffragette and suffragist movements that sought to rescue women from the confinement of the private sphere, which left them with little agency (Chouari 1). Such societal and political unrest induced great anxiety about the patriarchal order of Victorian society. In raising questions about the different ‘natures’ of men and women, the focus lies once again on the difference between femininity and masculinity rather than on common attributes. Importantly, it must be noted that such a stark distinction between what is appropriately feminine, or masculine had not always been as well defined and propagated as it is in the second half of the nineteenth century (Harvey 196). In the eighteenth century, for instance, both men and women were drawn to similar fashions such as lace and cosmetics, from which Harvey deduces that at the time people were

inclined to accept the ‘threat’ of the other gender within their own (ibid.). It is telling that the historical development led to such a contrast between masculinity and femininity, of which colour became a marker and which in turn influenced the approach to colour itself.

3.5. The Ideology of Separate Spheres

The most stereotypical and well-known Victorian myth propagating a specific ideal of femininity, which is intertwined with the private space of the home, stems from Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* (1854-62) (Langland 382). This poem as well as other notable works such as Sarah Lewis’ *Woman’s Mission* (1839) (ibid.), the aforementioned conduct books written by Ellis titled *The Women of England* (1839-1843) (Austin-Bolt 183) and Ruskin’s “Of Queen’s Gardens” (1865), shaped the Victorian concept of femininity (Langland 382). Women were bound to the domestic sphere, where they could exert their “special role as the moral regenerator of mankind” (ibid.). This “moral authority” (Psomiades 5) was expected and celebrated but also confined solely to the domestic space, where the husband, father, brother, or son, would find refuge from the public world that they had to toil in. The “ideology of separate gendered public and private sphere” (ibid. 4) assigned the realm of the home to women and thereby functioned to keep them, seemingly ‘naturally’ and for their own good, from the public realm dominated by men.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw an increase in the representation of female figures in the art of painting, which was thereby interlaced with Victorian conceptualisations of femininity as private, domestic, and moral, but also dangerous in its desirability, which are all qualities that equally apply to colour. As previously mentioned, not everyone could follow the conventions propagated by the ideology of the angel in the house, but even amongst the social strata that could afford to keep the women and their influence confined to matters of the house, the ideal was not necessarily a lived reality (Langland 382). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the idea appealed to the Victorians (ibid.) or else it would not have fallen on such fertile ground within society. Victorian painters and poets began “to produce and proliferate images of femininity at an ever-increasing rate” (Psomiades 2). As aestheticism emerged, in the 1860s a kind of art developed “that locates itself in the private realms of sensation and emotion and constantly reflects upon its own removal from the public world of politics and economics” with the female figure as the perfect vehicle of this circumstance. In *Consuming Female Beauty*, Michelle Smith points out that “aestheticism represents art as a beautiful feminine figure”, imbued with the “entire apparatus that characterizes femininity as private and domestic, spiritual yet sexualized, the irresistible object of desire” (4). This baggage that Victorian

femininity carries is contradictory, which must be kept in mind when considering the connection between colour and femininity. Colour, marked by its association with femininity, is in many ways branded with the same ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the Victorian conceptualisation of femininity. As shown in the previous chapter colour holds the power to attract and repulse (Taussig 2006, 31) the same way that femininity in the second half of the nineteenth century is both spiritual yet sexualised (Smith 4), desirable yet dangerous. Both of these examples are also detectable in the conceptualisation of colour, which will be regarded in more detail in the following chapter.

The Victorian characterisation of femininity is not a static concept (Psomiades 6), as is demonstrated by the shift in aesthetic art from a focus on female figures in the private realm to representing them actively entering public spaces. From the 1840s until the 1870s, the figure of the woman was used in art as a reliable sign of privacy (ibid. 5). This, however, changed as the century progressed and “bourgeois women gain[ed] greater access to public life, greater visibility in public debate, and greater autonomy under the law” (ibid.). Beginning in the 1870s the female figure confined to the domestic sphere was replaced, in aesthetic art, by “the woman who courts public display - the actress, the dancer, the woman on a stage” (ibid.). The theatre was also one of the few places exhibiting an indulgence in bright colours, worn by both actors and actresses, although its form was often severely criticised as did Burges, for instance (170). Psomiades argues that British aestheticism plays a crucial role by being “one of the means through which femininity becomes ‘the privileged marker of the instability and mobility of modern gender identity’” (Felski qtd in Psomiades 8). As the understanding of femininity changed throughout the century, it could no longer be relied upon to represent concrete differences between men and women (Psomiades 6) which, in turn, was part of what caused agitation in Victorian society and explains the preoccupation with the subject. It is also of interest that the women on stage replaced the female figure confined to the home as the new representational model in aesthetic art since colour plays a grander role in the second setting. Of course, the earlier paintings of women in domestic spaces also made use of beautiful colours, but the later paintings could employ colour as a spectacle in a way that the previous generation of paintings could not. The shift from representing Victorian women in a private realm to their appearance in a public space liberates not only English Victorian femininity but also demonstrates a new approach to and appreciation of colour.

3.6. Women's Fashion

One of the most significant convergences where colour and gender interact time and time again is fashion, which during Victorian times was synonymous with a female domain. Harvey states that the “world of dress, and of talk about dress, is, in the nineteenth century especially, a woman's world” (197), although the mental assumption of coupling women with fashion is by no means confined to that period alone. In her extensive study of the Victorian *Punch* magazine's approach to fashion, “Politics and Petticoats”, Shu-shuan Yan highlights how during the early years of the magazine, the 1840s, the idea of fashion was laughable as it was both foreign and feminine (351). Paris was seen as the centre of fashion with the charismatic French Empress Eugénie as its leading figure (Yan 357, Blaszczyk 2012, 7). It must be noted that *Punch* magazine catered to a Victorian middle-class readership, which consisted mostly of men (Matthewson 207), while the editors and cartoonists producing the magazine were also predominantly male (Yan 351). Therefore, an aversion to female fashion must be considered in the context of this knowledge. Yan highlights how “[t]he editorial and pictorial contents of *Punch* provide expanded opportunities for male cartoonists to enter on the debates on various fashion styles, but they also reflect their misgivings about female power” (ibid.), thereby exemplifying Victorian anxieties about the precarious stability of established gender roles. Mid-Victorian popular magazines for women included, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852-79), *Ladies' Treasury* (1858-95) and *The Queen* (1861-1967), to name but a few that were newly orientated towards middle-class women (Korte 426). These magazines dealt with topics that were relatable for female readers such as, “the home and household matters, gendered desires (especially fashion and cosmetics), historical precedents for the ‘woman question’ [as well as] similar and different conceptions of femininity” (ibid. 440), which made them commercially successful. The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* often gifted advice on fashionable colours to be worn in specific settings, such as “[t]he light shades of colour preferred this summer for fashionable watering-place toilets are silver-grey, pearl grey, cerise colour, light crimson, coral-red, sky-blue, buttercup colour, bright rose, China pink, water of the Nile green, almond-green, peach-blossom, Vesuvius red, and nasturtium colour” (98), published in August 1870. The names of the colours, “China pink”, “Nile green” and “Vesuvius red” (all ibid.) point towards a prevailing connection between bright colours and more or less distant lands, which nevertheless, does not prohibit them from being fashionable.

Fashion has a long history of being dismissed as something ephemeral and therefore inconsequential; not only by Victorian men but also as an academic field for most of the

twentieth century. The satirical approach to female fashion was widespread in the nineteenth century, making fashion a matter of “feminine frivolity” (Harvey 197), “trivial” (Yan 357) and quickly forgotten. Fashion trends in general were associated with ‘folly’, as was the case for fashionable flower arrangements in Paris around the mid-nineteenth century (Kalba 2017, 45). It was understood as something that would soon pass and, therefore, should not be overvalued. This disregard for fashion outlived the nineteenth century, as the prejudices against it had the consequence of an “academic devaluation” (Aspers and Godart 172). Not only because of the association of fashion with a feminine domain but also because it was tied to consumerism and capitalist agendas (ibid.). Nevertheless, I argue for the particular relevance of fashion for this thesis. Not only because changes in dress usefully demonstrate Victorian stances towards colour, but also because contemporary fashion provides an important ground where gender ideologies are displayed and performed. Moreover, the interaction with fashion permeates cultural, social and political elements that are vital to the understanding of the period. In addition, as verbalised by Yan, fashion was a concrete fixture about which broader cultural anxieties could be formulated (351). As such Victorian fashion provides a resourceful cultural insight into a bygone age.

As previously demonstrated, there was a stark difference in the gendered approach to colour between Victorian women and men, which is most apparent in their clothes. During the nineteenth century, it was common for wealthy Western women to wear colours varying from paler hues, predominately white, for young and unmarried women (fig. 7), to rich colours worn by married women who could afford such displays of wealth (Harvey 210). Before the invention of synthetic dyes in the 1850s, the production of strongly coloured materials was based on natural pigments, which often had to be imported from distant countries. Victorian imperial activities, particularly “into the New World” meant that new colonies were acquired “in Asia, so cultivation of the indigo plant [...], became as important or more important than sugar or opium” (both Taussig 2008, 5)⁶. In addition, the process of producing the brightly coloured fabrics was laborious and consequently very expensive (Forster and Christie 2). Women displaying their husband’s wealth in the form of brighter, stronger colours in combination with

⁶ From the 1640s until the 1780s European countries were predominately relying on the exportation of indigo from colonies in the West Indies and the Caribbean in particular (Nadri 1). Only when the indigo production in Central America and the West Indies declined in the late eighteenth century (ibid. 8), did Indian indigo once again dominate the market in Britain (ibid. 1-2).

“heavy adornments” (ibid.), is another instance where femininity is shaped in contrast and complementation of masculinity.



Fig.7 Miller. *Four Young Women*. ab. 1885

3.7. “Men in Black” (Harvey xx)

So far, this chapter has considered the Victorian development of women dressing in white and paler shades as well as bright colours and shall now turn to the reasons why men’s dress absented from the indulgence in colour by being predominately black. As highlighted in the previous chapter, Harvey identifies a connection between the rise of the colour black in men’s fashion and England’s rise to an imperial power in the nineteenth century (156). Apart from being the colour of mourning, black is the colour of power (ibid. 210-11) and at the same time stands in stark contrast to the white and any bright and ‘cheerful’ colour that was worn by

Victorian women. An example of men's formal wear is the "Evening Suit" of 1885 (fig.8). This three-piece suit is entirely black and would have been worn with a white shirt. Harvey further explains how the development in men's dress during the Victorian age, which was characteristically well-cut but an overall plain style, works "to embody a downgrading of the pleasure of dress, and indeed a readiness to talk of dress and nothing else, [which] comes to be seen, in the nineteenth-century superstition, almost as constituting the feminine" (197). The subject of dress and the indulgence in it was solely reserved for women, which includes the pleasure of colour. The extent of the contrast between the Victorian approach to femininity and masculinity is further highlighted by Harvey:

the suggestion that male dress is influenced, on various levels, by a concern to cancel the feminine, might be reinforced by the arguments of Jo Paoletti that a major motor of change in men's dress (which, otherwise, seems not impatient to change) is fear of ridicule - ridicule, that is, for dressing in a way that strikes observers as feminine. (197-8)

The fear of ridicule demonstrated in the quote by Harvey foreshadows the extent to which being feminine, which is also to be colourful, constitutes a serious threat to Victorian masculinity. For this reason, clergymen, particularly those of a catholic denomination, who did not necessarily conform to the black fashion as they, on occasion, dressed in bright colours, were often ridiculed and described in *effeminate* terms (Masurel-Murray 246). The omnipresence of the colour black in men's clothing did not go unlamented by contemporary chromophiles. In France, Charles Baudelaire famously branded his day as the "funeral age" (qtd. in Harvey 153). Across the channel, Wilde publicly lamented the lack of colour in men's clothing in a letter sent to *The Daily Telegraph* in 1891 as well as letting his character, Lord Henry Wotton, speak for him in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) (Harvey 226). "The costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour element left in modern life." (qtd. in Ibid.). Meanwhile, Burges voiced his concerns about the lack of colours that could inspire designers as a serious problem (170).



Fig.8 Morris & Co., Evening suit, ab. 1885

One context where Victorian men were freed from their black garb, and colour was not connected exclusively to femininity but still constituted a potential threat, was the military and war. Burges points out that the sole colourful relief, apart from “ludicrously false” (170) colours of theatre costumes, was offered by military processions (ibid.), where colour did not threaten masculinity. Indeed, starting in the middle of the seventeenth century most British soldiers wore a red-coated uniform, earning them the name “redcoats” (Arch 100). Especially during the nineteenth century, the red coat became a “synonym for the British soldier” (ibid. 102), which demonstrates a rare exception for men to dress in a bright hue without condemning implications on their masculinity that withstood the usual custom of dress reserved for men. A visual appraisal of the “redcoats” (ibid. 100), which propagated patriotic unity through the image of the recognisable red-coated soldiers, was often provided through portraiture (ibid. 102). For

instance, Elizabeth S. Butler, a famous painter of her time (ibid.), painted many battle scenes featuring red-coated soldiers, such as *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, of 1880 (fig. 9), creating a “national narrative” (ibid. 103) in her representation of historic events and her use of colour as a recognisable marker of British soldiers.



Fig. 9 Elizabeth S. Butler, *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, 1880

This battle scene by Butler, commissioned by Queen Victoria, depicts an armed conflict between British soldiers and Zulu warriors in South Africa in 1879. It shows the red-clad men defending their station and does not evoke any sense of femininity, despite the colourful outfits. Indeed, this painting, along with most of Lady Butler's artistic production being specialised in military scenes, rather than supposedly feminine subject areas like religion, works as a challenge to the dominant “gendered conceptions of colour as seductive and feminine” (Ribeyrol 2016, 4). Interestingly, Taussig states that “war loves bright colors” (2006, 29), a statement I must disagree with based on its lack of qualification. In the case of the British soldiers stationed in India, the bright red coats were exchanged for khaki uniforms as early as 1849 (Myerly 108) and “[q]uestions of uniform visibility shaped colour changes” (Tynan 79-80) for the entirety of the British army starting to be discussed in 1893 (ibid. 80).

Considering the threat of colour, the nineteenth-century development of draining it from men's clothing, with the exemption of military dress, can be interpreted as a symptom of broad societal anxiety (Harvey 153). It is a fear that stems from an effort to appear “respectable”, “pious”, “impersonal”, “self-effacing” and “accepting of the bonds of authority” (all ibid.), all of which cannot be achieved while wearing colour. Men's black, in this sense, is “the uniform

of an effort and assertion of discipline” (ibid.) and reflects a dominant concern of Victorian society. The chaos of bright uncontrollable colours is opposed to the authoritarian black that stands for power and control. The female equivalent of the masculine black would be women dressed in white, though white does not convey the same radiance of power but rather virtue, fidelity and finesse (ibid. 205). Both colours are signs of denial and abstinence of brighter hues (ibid. 211) and, within Victorian cultural ideology, are connoted to seriousness and respectability, especially the colour black.

Black was not entirely absent from women’s dress during the Victorian time, however, when women wore black it did not automatically connote the same authority that men’s black usually did. Women were expected to wear black in the period of the “first mourning” (Kay and Storey 141) which lasted for one year and a day, as well as the “second mourning” (ibid.) lasting nine more months (ibid.). Only in the period of the following six months, the “Half Mourning” (ibid.) some colour returned to their outfits in the trimmings of the black dresses (ibid. 142), as can be seen in one of the mourning dresses Queen Victoria wore herself (fig. 10)⁷. For most women, the black dresses reserved for signalling grief could also be worn on serious occasions and were generally “fully adjusted to fashionable society” so much so “that one could almost think fashion was set by bereavement” (both Harvey 201). This seems reminiscent of Baudelaire’s proclamation of his contemporary time as a “funeral age” (ibid. 153). Only children and young women were exempt from the predominantly black grieving fashion and could also wear white clothes in mourning (ibid. 205), which supports my argument that white too is a colour of abstinence.

⁷ The most prominent woman in black during the Victorian age was, of course, Queen Victoria herself, the female sovereign who both conformed to and defied the gender norms of her time. After Prince Albert’s death, she appeared entirely in black as a commemoration of her late husband for forty years until her death (Harvey 175), far exceeding the usual period of mourning, which was up to 27 months.



Fig.10 Mourning Dress worn by Queen Victoria, 1894

The colour black in Victorian clothing holds more than a connection to grief and formality for both men and women, as it is also the colour of respectable service (ibid. 200). By the 1850s roughly eighty percent of servants in middle-class households in Britain were women (Light xv) and “[a]t the beginning of the twentieth-century domestic service was still the largest single female occupation” (ibid. xv). Accordingly, a very large number of women wore black daily during their working hours. This demonstrates that the reality of thousands of women’s lives diverged drastically from the ideology of separate spheres, especially for those women of the working class employed as servants, who did venture into the public realm and wore black as a marker of their occupation, which is not the authoritative black of men. Another occupation carried out by women wearing black was the work of a governess. The black-clad women were

respectable, serious, formal, smart and knowledgeable, all of which are qualities that resonated with the connotations of the colour black in men's clothing at the time.

As women ventured into the public sphere, conquering stages, gaining fame as professional beauties and attaining more rights, they also claimed the colour black for themselves outside of its previously established contexts. Generally, for most of the century, women only wore black in three distinct circumstances: as a sign of grief and bereavement, in service, or while working as governesses, which allowed them to benefit, to an extent, from the same signals the colour propagated for men (Harvey 199). However, during the end of the nineteenth century, as grander political and social changes were occurring, such as the women's movement which challenged "established gender ideologies that placed women firmly within the domestic sphere" (Matthewson 221), the colour black was also worn by women as an assertion of power outside of a grieving or working context. A new kind of significance of black was carved out to fit women, which was no longer an "implication of lack, but rather, it would seem, an allusion to the power-confidence⁸ in black which used to be associated especially with menswear" (Harvey 225). In other words, women were claiming men's power colour, black⁹. This development showcases how women by the end of the nineteenth century, too, began to abstain from bright colours and their concomitant negative connotations. But the development could also be interpreted as a move to dismantle the gendered colour division in the clothing of Victorian men and women.

3.8. Transgressions

A public figure who transgressed gender norms of his time is Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert who, like his wife, provided *Punch* writers and illustrators with ample opportunity to vent their anxieties, simply by occupying his position as Queen consort. It is revealing that he is often depicted as a dressmaker confined to a domestic space and dealing with such feminine matters as "frivolous" (Yan 351) fashion. The illustration titled "Prince Albert's Studio" by John Leech (fig.11), published by *Punch* on the 28th of October 1843, shows Prince Albert with an iron in hand, presenting his wife Queen Victoria with the latest model of a British infantry uniform.

⁸ With "power-confidence" (225) Harvey is referring to the signalling of authority and seriousness that was implicit in men's black wear at the time.

⁹ See also fig.16 and the discussion in chapter 4.



Fig.11 John Leech, “Prince Albert’s Studio”, 28 Oct 1843

This illustration visualises multiple, complex socially and politically charged levels of interaction between public and private spheres. Prince Albert is feminised by his occupation and thereby put in a weaker position, while Queen Victoria appears both as queen and wife. It is implied by the stances that the figures take, that she is asked for advice which conforms to the duties of a Victorian wife, providing moral guidance (Chouari 3). Her conformity to this ideal womanhood is underlined by the presence of two children, standing close to her rather than clinging to Prince Albert.

Even before the late nineteenth century and the changes that the *fin de siècle* brought forth, the Empress provides an interesting case study in which the dominant gender norms of her time did not always comply with her position in society. The Queen occupied the highest

rank as the head and face of a mighty Empire, holding vast amounts of power. She was exposed to the public world in ways that most Victorian men could never be, while also being a woman. Thereby, according to dominant ideologies, she was meant to be shielded from such spheres. As Paula Bartley phrases it, after Queen Victoria ascended her throne in 1837, she was “a young woman, a daughter, a wife and a mother in an age in which each of those roles conflicted with the idea of taking charge of one of the world’s leading countries” (12). It is of interest how “Queen Victoria’s sovereign body” is used “to address issues of female nature and nationhood” (both Yan 348) in the contemporary media. Anxieties about female sovereignty are significant as they reflect the general gender politics of the time and thereby are in extension connected to anxieties about colour.

The Queen’s complex literal and figurative position within Victorian society means that her image could be used by the media in multiple often contradictory ways, reflecting broader social and political stances. In the previously mentioned illustration, Prince Albert is showing Victoria a military uniform. The caricature is thereby delivered from a straightforward domestic scene made satirical due to the switching of normative gender roles. Instead, it is elevated to a consideration of national matters, transforming Queen Victoria’s figure into the sovereign, deciding upon national matters, which is in this case, despite the black and white illustration, also a consideration of colour. “Prince Albert’s Studio” provides an example where the transgression of gender roles is intertwined with the ambivalent position colour often occupied in Victorian society. As Queen Victoria contemplates the multicoloured uniform on the mannequin before her, the vest being darker, presumably red, while the trousers are of a light shade, it could be interpreted that she is providing her ‘natural’ female expertise of having a better sense of colour (Gage 1990, 519). Although Prince Albert is feminised by being rendered as preoccupied with fashion and dress, he still retains his masculinity in leaving this matter to his wife. All in all, this illustration shows Prince Albert dealing playfully with soldiers, while ultimately Queen Victoria bears the responsibility of making decisions of national importance. Despite this illustration providing only an indirect consideration of colour, it is provocative in its rendering of Victorian gender roles. Illustrations depicting transgressions of societal norms reflect greater fears of cultural decline, which were further ignited by the rise of synthetic colours in the second half of the nineteenth century, making bright colours an emblem of cultural decline for conservative observers.

3.9. The Rise of Synthetic Dyes

In 1856 Perkin discovered the first synthetic dye and thereby initiated the chromatic revolution. By 1862, the year of the International Exhibition in London, the synthetic dye industry had become crowded, and the newly aniline-coloured fashion was exhibited (Blaszczyk 2012, 27). The exhibition welcomed six million visitors admiring “the wares of more than 28,000 exhibitors from Britain, her empire and beyond” (McDermott n.p.) and constituted a major tourist attraction (Blaszczyk 2012, 27). The article titled “The Great Exhibition”¹⁰ published in The New York Times on the 28th of July 1862 written by the correspondent C.B.S. reported on the aniline colours exhibited in London with both fascination and repulsion.

The secret of color is, however, returning to the British Isles, and the mauves and magentas, so much in fashion just now, seem to promise for the islanders a monopoly of these peculiar dyes. Does it ever occur to Angelina, as she floats magnificently down Broadway, in all the lustre of youth and fashion, that the exquisite dress she wears, and whose faultless sheen seems to be robbed from the dewy blushes of Spring, is in fact dipped and steeped in the essence of **vile, smoky, stinky, crackly** English coal; that she is - not to be too squeamish about terms - walking off with a ton, more or less of the best Walls-end attached to her skirts. Yes, frightful as it may seem, our wives and sweethearts are gradually becoming **carboniferous**, and the day may not be far distant when **we shall have to hand them to dinner with a pair of tongs**. Coal, or rather coal tar, is the basis of all the new colors now in use, such as mauve and magenta. (2, emphasis added)

The excerpt of the article demonstrates an underlying mistrust of the female embrace of the new colours, which reflects a broader anxiety of men who feared the ensuing chaos. Colour in relation to fashion was a domain where women acted independently of men. The fashion for magenta and mauve-coloured clothes had by 1862 reached the United States. Again, the association between women and colourful clothes is fortified seeming ‘natural’ at the time. However, in this case, the women wearing aniline-dyed clothes became something else entirely. The presumably male author is addressing his readership of men and pointing out how the women in their lives are changed by these bright aniline colours they are wearing. Despite the satirical tone of the article, the comment about women becoming “carboniferous”, which is associated with the adjectives “vile, smoky, stinky, [and] crackly” (both C.B.S. 2), is less than pleasant and points to an underlying mistrust and aversion to the new aniline fashion. The article does not deny the appeal of women in the new colours, but it also criticises the overindulgence in the new fashion. Interestingly, the author verbalises this fashion development as though it

¹⁰ The correspondent is referring to the International Exhibition of 1862 not the Great Exhibition of 1851.

were a threat to men. Brightly dressed women become untouchable to men in black. Synthetic dyes indeed gave rise to a new development that caused gendered anxiety, *vis-à-vis* to black-clad men, colour “*empowered* the women of the industrial age, whether they flaunted the new dyes in their everyday wear or wrote about colour to assert their expertise in the field of fashion and colour harmonies” (Ribeyrol 2020, 4, emphasis in original). In other words, the new synthetic dyes gave women greater visibility within society, precisely because their society had deemed them to have an affinity for them.

Although aniline colours were produced in England and many other Western nations their origin, meaning the process of their production, still proved to be a great mystery to people. Aniline dyes stem from the distillation of coal tar, which is a by-product of the manufacture of coal gas, used at the time as a source of light (Field and Salter 161). It is also important to note again, that “the chemical revolution of the nineteenth century that emerged from the search of easily reproducible, cheap, standardized colors and drugs, not from the colonized world but from European and North American coal tar” (Taussig 2006, 48). This development liberated colour from colonial dependencies and tied its origin to a familiar place rather than an ‘exotic’ land. Nevertheless, the processes of generating the new colours, meaning chemistry, were to most almost as unfamiliar as the distant colonies. In Thomas W. Salter’s revised edition of *Field’s Chromatography*, of 1869, he remarked upon aniline dyes with words of wonder, astonishment, and mystery. He voices a clear fascination that such beautiful colours could be gained from the “black evil-smelling substance” (Field and Salter 161) of coal tar. Salter makes aniline dyes out to be of an almost magical quality.

At a touch of the fairy wand of science, the waste land became a garden of tropic tints, and colour succeeded colour, until the whole gamut had been gone through. Never was transformation more dazzling or more complete. The once despised refuse was now a valued commercial product - indeed a trade in itself. [...] The world rubbed its eyes with astonishment; and truly it seemed almost as wonderful to produce the colours of the rainbow from a lump of coal, as to extract sunshine from cucumbers. (ibid. 161-3)

However, mauve or magenta are not the products of magic, but science, providing, for the first time, a source of colour far removed from nature. Salter’s enthusiastic reception of aniline dyes and his admiration for the chemical processes that produced them is connected to a general increasing fascination with science in the mid-nineteenth century, that worked to apply scientific knowledge to daily life (Nicklas 219). The new colours are compared to a “beautiful butterfly” (Field and Salter 161); they sprung from coal-tar “like flowers from the earth at spring” (ibid.), achieving to reproduce the colours of the rainbow (ibid. 163). However, the new

synthetic colours were not organic. On the contrary, for the first time nature was far removed from the production of the new colours, which was a cause for great distrust. The opposition between organic and synthetic dyes and the debates ensuing from it must be regarded in light of broader historical developments. For instance, the cultural discourses that arose due to “religious doubts” (Langland 382) triggered by the impact of Darwin “whose singular contribution to the natural sciences marked a paradigm shift in the cultural landscape” (Hewitson 61). Therefore, a rejection of synthetic dyes in favour of naturally produced dyes potentially foreshadows an anxious apprehension of the latest developments where scientific discovery was distancing men from God-given nature.

Many of the Victorians previously discussed for their defence of colour and their lamentation of a lack thereof in their day-to-day lives, did not happily welcome the arrival of aniline dyes, reflecting a far-reaching anxiety induced by the shift in society away from a familiar worldview. Visual artists and art critics like Morris, Ruskin and Burges, all rejected the euphoria of the bright aniline-dyed materials replacing those that had previously been dyed laboriously with organic dyes. Kalba underscores that before the revolution in the chemical industry, there were “no more than fifteen to twenty commercially viable dyestuffs” (2017, 29), meaning that there was a limit to the variety of organically dyed materials and their commercial use. However, from “the late 1870s to the First World War, the number of tradable dyes increased by close to the same number each year” (ibid.), which meant that in England and the rest of the Western world, colour had rapidly become much more accessible and tangible. This resulted in people like Ruskin, Burges and Morris, as well as the art critic Alice Meynell (H. Fraser 49), who were all concerned with the subject of colour and actively engaged with it, distrusting the new development which was quickly spreading and “supplanting [...] traditional dying techniques” (ibid.). It is another form of anxiety triggered by change that brings with it a nostalgia for “the colours of an often idealized past” (Ribeyrol 2016, 10) discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

The rise of synthetic dyes that began with the discovery of the first aniline dye in 1856 was a major development that is tied to the emergence of consumer culture. Tanushree Ghosh points out that “the latter half of the nineteenth century was characterized by the general public desire for the spectacular” (94), which has multiple cultural and historical reasons, including “urbanization, the rise of consumer culture, and colonial exploration” (ibid.). As cities grew, a new variety of sights became familiar to urban citizens, including “visual displays to incite spending [which] became the norm of nineteenth-century consumer culture” (ibid.). Colour, of

course, plays a vital role in these visual spectacles. An important contribution to the increase of colourful sights in the cities was the development of synthetic dyes. Bright colours revolutionised women's fashion. One example of the new fashion, made possible by aniline dyes, is a day dress worn by Mary Eleanor Cunliffe (fig. 12). Blaszczyk argues that in "the English-speaking Atlantic world, the rise of consumer society [...] whetted the middle-class taste for fashion" (2012, 24). In addition, there was a growing awareness and public attention paid to the "fashionable consumption among middle- or upper-class [women]" (Yan 348). This explains the growing number of articles and illustrations dealing with fashion in *Punch* magazine, for instance, predominately written by and for men. Fashion and its increased consumption were cause for agitation for men.



Fig.12 Day dress worn by Mary Eleanor Cunliffe (1846-1896), late 1860s

Women's colourful fashion in the second half of the nineteenth century was a significant part of capitalist consumer culture, though commodity culture was, of course, not limited to women's dress. In 1896, the Frenchman, Pierre de Lano, connected colour not only to women and their fashion but also to a development he was anxiously observing in his contemporary society where "the taste for colour [is] a symptom of the feverishness and fundamental corruption of modern life - a tormented psychological state marked by the constant desire for more" (Kalba 2017, 32). This need for 'more' and the "quest for novelty" (ibid. 44) is of course nothing but a characteristic of commodity capitalism that arose out of the Industrial Revolution in Western countries. Thus, colour and modernity come to be intertwined and the anxieties caused by colour are more often than not reflections of general fears that were caused by the recognition of how society was driven by capitalist forces.

3.10. Democratisation through Colour

Prior to the introduction of aniline dyes and the chemical revolution that followed, colour was still an expensive commodity reserved for the wealthy, thereby functioning as a marker of class distinction. As colour "does not come cheap in terms of human toil or natural resources" (Taussig 2008, 5), it could only be afforded by the wealthy in the West. Therefore, colour was an important marker for wealthy women to demonstrate their household's riches. However, it was not just colour that indicated wealth, but also impractical dresses with wide crinolines, for instance, as well as several dress changes in a day (Forster and Christie 3). These preoccupations demonstrated "aristocratic idleness" (ibid. 2). Colour and impractical dress were therefore also a marker of class distinction, which preoccupied the Victorian society (Harvey 147). Indeed, there was a "cruel divide" between the rich and the poor citizens, "which became more extreme as Britain 'prospered'" (both, ibid. 168). This tangible division in society in itself was cause for anxiety, one where colour plays a role. The distinction between rich and poor through colourful clothing, played a key role in the second half of the nineteenth century when aniline dyes made brightly coloured fabrics available to a much wider range of people.

The discovery of synthetic colours resulted in a democratisation of colour as more people saw it daily and were able to afford to buy brightly coloured fabrics. An important development was brought forth by the introduction of aniline dyes, as Kalba clarifies, "the transition from natural dyes to synthetic ones heralded [...] the democratization of earlier visual experiences and pleasures associated with color" (ibid. 30). With the rise of synthetic dyes, the material world became more colourful, especially in urban settings, where shop windows displayed their range of goods and a larger number of brightly dressed women could be

observed. The Great Exhibition of 1851, as well as the International Exhibition in 1862, both had “shilling days” (Forster and Christie 3) which meant that working-class people could attend owing to the low entry costs. More than six million people visited the Great Exhibition (ibid.), and the following exhibition superseded that number of visitors (ibid. 9). This meant that a large number of people from different class backgrounds came in touch with the innovations of the chemical dye industry. Women were tangibly influenced in their “colour choices” by the “popular and aesthetically pleasing display” (both Ibid.) of Perkin’s aniline dyes in the 1862 exhibition, which resulted in synthetic dyes becoming recognisable and familiar as well as desirable to a wide range of potential buyers.

The popularity of the newly aniline-dyed garments began, as fashion trends in the nineteenth century usually did, with its adoption by royalty, but soon became accessible to a wider range of women. The aniline colour mauve was worn by Empress Eugénie of France as early as 1857, which garnered much journalistic attention and promptly set a trend amongst wealthy people all over Europe (Kalba 2017, 29). Queen Victoria, too, was seen wearing a mauve gown, while visiting the International Exhibition of 1862 during a “shilling day” (Forster and Christie 3), even though she had already started wearing black mourning clothes to commemorate her late husband¹¹(ibid. 9). However, unlike the organically dyed materials, aniline dyes rapidly became reproducible and were soon produced on an industrial scale. Kalba explains that “[a]fter this initial phase, however, during which aniline dyes were the preserve of wealthy fashionable women, prices quickly dropped” (2017, 29), introducing brightly coloured garments into the lives of more women than just the wealthiest. As prices of aniline-coloured fabrics dropped more and more women tried to imitate the fashion of Empress Eugénie and Queen Victoria. Of course, the popularity of synthetic dyes did not go unnoticed by contemporary observers. Already in September of 1859, Charles Dickens wrote in his periodical “All Year Round”,

¹¹ It is widely known that after the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria always wore black. There are multiple reasons why Queen Victoria could have chosen to wear the mauve dress while visiting the International Exhibition in 1862. First of all, it must be noted that the colour purple is a colour of half-mourning (Bartley 177-178), though mauve does not match the customary shade of lilac for half-mourning. Furthermore, the time of the International Exhibition was too early for Queen Victoria to be following the etiquette of half-mourning. Seeing as Queen Victoria refused to attend the opening ceremony of the International Exhibition (Ribeyrol, “Colours of the London Exhibition” n.p.), as she was still in a state of deep mourning, it seems that she did not aim to make an official appearance at the exhibition when she was seen on a “shilling day” (Forster and Christie 9) and possibly aimed to be more conspicuous wearing a colourful dress rather than her usual widow weeds. Or else, Queen Victoria could have been making her own kind of colourful commemoration to her late husband, for his involvement in the Great Exhibition of 1851.

As I look out of my window, the apotheosis of Perkin's purple seems at hand - purple hands wave from open carriages - purple hands shake each other at street doors - purple hands threaten each other from opposite sides of the street; purple - striped gowns cram barouches, jam up cabs, throng steamers, fill railway stations: all flying countryward, like so many birds of purple paradise. (qtd. in Forster and Christie 8)

Dickens's observation does not seem to be criticising the new popularity of the particular shade of purple that is mauve, it rather appears to be a playful fascination with the new colourful quality of urban life. Until the mid-nineteenth century keeping up with fashion could only be afforded by people who had sufficient wealth (ibid. 1). However, with new developments like the railways increasing the mobility of people and goods; the invention of the sewing machine and paper patterns; fashion magazines; advances in the ready-made clothing industry with emerging department stores and the crowning jewel of the new synthetic dyes for textiles, fashion entered a new era that meant it was not solely a prerogative of the wealthy (ibid. 3). A new target for producers of synthetic dyes were the "cost-conscious middle-class consumers" (Kalba 2017, 30), with the result that a "new system of design emerged, in which color mattered more than other qualities of the fabric" (ibid.). Colour, in its enhanced visibility, began to be the most important part of fashion. With all the innovation of the second half of the nineteenth century, clothes became easier to produce and therefore cheaper, with the consequence that "the lower classes [could] afford new garments that were similar in both quality and colour to those worn by the higher classes, including their employers" (ibid. 12). Hence, colour had a democratising effect in mid-nineteenth century English fashion.

The developments in fashion meant that there was a brief time when women of all classes subscribed to a similar fashion, made possible by the overwhelming popularity of synthetically dyed fabrics. Once again, domestic servants, serve as a useful example. It was very common for female domestic servants to inherit damaged or no longer fashionable dresses from their employers (Forster and Christie 3), meaning that they were often dressed in clothes that were simply out of fashion. This marked them as belonging to the working class and setting them apart from their employers. "Working class, unmarried women commonly spent a large proportion of their income on [...] garments, in attempts to emulate the perceived style of the British aristocracy" (ibid.), which means that fashion played an important role in the lives of these women. Aniline dyes made it possible for the difference between upper and lower classes' attire to minimise. In other words, colour was the common denominator. However, this merging of class differences in fashion was followed by a reaction of "wealthier individuals seeking to set themselves apart by rejecting the synthetic bright colours, or alternatively by combining

them with other colours in a more ‘intellectual’ way” (ibid. 13), in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The new prerogative of the wealthy was to exhibit good taste in the choosing of colours.

3.11. The Question of Taste and the Concept of Harmony

The rapid innovation in the chemical dye industry brought about a visual chaos of colour, but even before aniline dyes, efforts were already made to control and contain colour with a reliable system. One attempt was the aforementioned book *De la Loi du contraste simultané des couleurs*, by Chevreul, published in 1839. There were multiple translations of this influential work into English. Interestingly, Charles Martel gave his translation the title, *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and Their Application to the Arts*, published in 1854, with the revealing addition of the word harmony, which is “an essential word in Anglophone discussions of nineteenth-century fashion and taste” (Nicklas 222). In the second half of the nineteenth century, when aniline-coloured fabrics flooded the market issuing a “chromatic cacophony” (Kalba 2017, 17), the need for colour harmony and principles of good taste became even stronger. Although Chevreul never directly intended his theories about colour harmony to be applied to women’s fashion, his ideas were readily extended to encompass the domain by fashion writers (Nicklas 223). Chevreul did not claim his work to be scientific, but he was a chemist, which lent his work scientific authority (ibid.), thereby strengthening its appeal. In addition, he was a Frenchman, which automatically connected him to Paris, a fashion capital and “mecca for ladies and gentlemen of taste and refinement” (Błaszczuk 2012, 7). Therefore, Chevreul’s theories, gifting advice on harmonious colour combinations, were readily soaked up and distributed through fashion writers.

To control the whims of fashion, so-called tastemakers tried to influence and manage public tastes, meaning that they largely sought to dictate what was considered good or bad taste, which was often connected to colour. Nevertheless, retailers often challenged their principles for the sake of profit (Kalba 2017, 35). In the latter half of the nineteenth century many people earned their living “commenting on matters of taste and style” (ibid. 32), which highlights the importance of the discourse on fashion and taste in Victorian society. This, in turn also explains why the subject of colour elicited greater discourses that often polarised opinions and caused anxiety. The tastemakers advocated the idea that colour was not something that could only be understood based on instinct, while drawing, for example, could be taught, which had been a widespread notion in the nineteenth century (Kalba 2017, 33). They made use of Chevreul’s colour theories and his advice on colour harmony and extended his principles to teach their

readership (Nicklas 223), mostly made up of women, how to exhibit good taste. The most efficient medium to distribute recommendations on style and taste was, of course, the press, which was essential in distributing ideas of fashion. As previously pointed out, the nineteenth century saw the proliferation of the popular press and the quick spreading of literacy (Logan 1), which also meant a larger and more diverse readership. By the mid-century, middle-class women were the main target for periodicals (Nicklas 219), precisely those women who were targeted by the producers of the chemical dye industry. Magazines, periodicals and etiquette books propagated guidelines on good taste, devoting large sections to dress and appearance (ibid.). Colour played a key role in these etiquette books, especially after the mid-nineteenth century when aniline-dyed fabrics appeared on the market.

The cultural importance of the discovery of synthetic dyes can be recognised as the Victorian concept of ideal femininity adapted to encompass a proper engagement with the new colours. The rise of the aniline dyes ensued a new requirement to which women should aspire to achieve an ideal femininity. They had to exercise precise control over their choice of colours, “as the ideal woman’s appearance and home formed part of a harmonious whole” (ibid. 225). Therefore, a woman’s choice of clothing and its colours was read by some as a reflection of her character and her personal qualities. Dismissing notions of colour harmony was like a visible brand of unrefined taste and resulted in “ill-dressed and gaudy-looking women” (ibid.). In other words, the choice of colours was a vital aspect in perpetuating propriety and respectability.

The question of taste and harmony concerning colour constitutes an effort to control the anxiety-inducing chaos that the new synthetic dyes sparked in the 1850s. A foreign observer, Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, criticised the “terrible glare” (qtd. in Harvey 203) of the colours of women’s dresses, he witnessed during his stay in England. He recounted his observations in *Notes on England*, published in 1872, which relates how he was “repeatedly struck by the ‘outrageously crude’ colours and ‘want of taste’ in the dress of British women” (Forster and Christie 10). It was, however, not only the foreigners who noted the revolution of colour in women’s dress but the English themselves observed the developments with growing unease, as can be seen in the example of the following *Punch* illustration by George du Maurier, titled “True Artistic Refinement” published on the 17th of February 1877 (fig. 15).



TRUE ARTISTIC REFINEMENT.

"Died of a colour, in aesthetic pain."

Hostess. "WE'RE GOING DOWN TO SUPPER, MR. MIRABEL. LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO MISS CHALMERS."

Mr. Mirabel. "A—PARDON ME—IS THAT THE TALL YOUNG LADY STANDING BY YOUR HUSBAND?"

Hostess. "YES. SHE'S THE MOST CHARMING GIRL I KNOW."

Mr. Mirabel. "I'VE NO DOUBT. BUT—A—SHE AFFECTS ANILINE DYES, DON'T YOU KNOW? I WEALED COULDN'T GO DOWN TO SUPPER WITH A YOUNG LADY WHO WEARS MAUVE TWIMMINGS IN HER SKIRT, AND MAGENTA WISCONS IN HER HAIR!"

Fig. 15 George du Maurier, "True Artistic Refinement", 17 Feb 1877

The introduction of synthetic dyes to a growing market had distinct social dimensions as women belonging to a range of classes donned brightly coloured fabrics, meaning that it became increasingly difficult to recognise their class background. The caricature above "True Artistic Refinement" is complete with the subtitle "Died of a colour, in aesthetic pain" (both Maurier n.p.). The pun toys with the similarity of the words 'dying' and 'dyeing', aiming to epitomise the tumult the aniline dyes caused for tastemakers who promoted a 'refined taste'. The two colours mentioned in the subtext are mauve and magenta, the first two aniline dyes that appeared on the market. The character of Mr. Mirabel clearly values notions of refined taste, that are disturbed by Miss Chalmers who exhibits both of the new aniline colours in her evening dress. Despite her charm, assured by the hostess, she is dismissed for her 'grave mistake' of dressing in the wrong colours, especially for the appalling combination. This caricature reflects a development in the society of Victorian England to interpret colour and its use in dress as a marker of social class. However, as previously mentioned there was a brief period when synthetic dyes were immensely popular and bourgeoisie women as well as lower-class women

wore the new bright colours. There was a “levelling out of class differences [in Victorian women’s] attitudes towards Western fashion” (Forster and Christie 13) in the early years of the synthetic dye innovation. This development did not go unnoticed by Victorian observers and was a cause for anxiety. Kalba highlights the social concerns arising from the wide appeal of the new colours, claiming that for “tastemakers, who sought to contain and control color, the struggle for aesthetic harmony was also very much a struggle for social order” (2017, 3). The colour chaos introduced by aniline dyes translated into a fear of social anarchy.

The widespread craze for bright colours in women’s fashion did not persevere as an equalising force, as upper-class women insisted on distinguishing themselves as such by exhibiting their superior taste. Blaszczyk explains that wild and bright colour combinations became denominators of working-class people, while “pale hues,” came to be associated “with gentility and refinement, ‘good taste’, and spiritual purity” (both 2014, 204). Blaszczyk further illustrates this point,

Tastemakers reacted in a backlash that emphasized either the neoclassical look (achieved with white and other light paints) or the earthy arts-and-crafts look of fumed oak. Color came to be a mark of social class: the upper crust set itself apart from the unwashed masses by distancing itself from bright, bold color. (2012, 8)

This passage exposes the role of tastemakers with their influence on fashion developments, which had a considerable social impact and their role in advocating ideas of the educated elite who sought to set themselves apart from the masses. With the new developments of the nineteenth century, fashion was no longer solely a preoccupation of the highest classes of society, but rather meant a great deal to a number of people from different class backgrounds. It must also be noted that as the nineteenth century neared its final decades the Arts and Craft movement popularised an approach to colour that emphasised “[h]armonies’, ‘tasteful’ combinations and palettes that corresponded with surroundings” (Forster and Christie 13). Like an inescapable cycle the upheaval caused by artificial colours came to be followed by a return to nature’s colours promoted by “the upper classes of England’s and Europe’s industrialized cities”, who sought to “escape the chemical pollution permanently altering nature’s palette” (both Taussig 2006, 48). The euphoria for aniline-dyed clothes was thereby followed by a return to a more restrained and ‘natural’ array of colours for women’s clothing, following notions of good taste.

An aversion to colour based on taste reflects bourgeoisie ideologies that seek to maintain authority over lower classes and thereby mirrors an apprehension of the upper classes to

maintain their social position. When Morris calls the aniline colours “hideous” (Morris 257-8), when Lano connects colour to a “fundamental corruption of modern life” (Kalba 2017, 32), when Burges marks them as “unfit for art purposes” (Burges 171) and Taine describes their “terrible glare” (qtd. in Harvey 203), all of these Victorian men align their opinions with notions of good taste, which ultimately works to minimise the new colours’ power to overwhelm. It must be noted that the complexity of their individual approaches towards colour is submerged in the adaptive concept of ‘taste’, especially considering that both Burges and Morris were strong defenders of colour in other contexts. The notion of taste, however, is irrevocably bound to the Bourgeoisie. Burges himself argued, from his intellectually informed position, that taste can and should be taught, proposing education as a solution to bad taste (Burges 172). It is clear that in the course of the nineteenth century, taste was used as a tool to discern and maintain class differences. Therefore, as the lower classes adopted the new aniline-dyed fabrics with their shimmering and bright quality, this kind of colour came to be read as a brand of bad taste.

At the given period, there was a rejection of colour based on its supposed feminine quality. Anxieties related to this stance are part of a broader gendered anxiety that was undeniably relevant to Victorians with their discourses on the “woman question” (Korte 440). Fears triggered by fashion and its colours are also often tinged with gender anxieties and repeatedly circle around the fear of losing control. Fashion was met with ridicule and laughter, discrediting it as something that has no real importance and should not be overindulged in. This reaction in itself works to dismiss fashion as a threat and instead frames it as inconsequential. May it be a manifested or latent thought, fashion was perceived to be a convergence of threats to Victorian society’s patriarchal values. It kindled anxieties over the loss of control over women and social class. In both of these precarious states of exerting control, colour plays a key role. The late nineteenth-century rejection of synthetic dyes according to taste is a reflection of political and social anxieties. Moreover, the aversion to synthetic colours also reflects religious anxieties, as the English society distanced itself from a theological worldview. The artificial was beginning to play a bigger role, superseding the natural and colour also plays an important part in the realm of the artificial and superficial, which will be further investigated in the next chapter.

4. “The Fall into Colour” (Batchelor 24)

The historical impact of the introduction of artificial colours to English society, sourcing from the utilisation of coal tar to produce the first aniline dyes, is pivotal, as natural colours were quickly surpassed by artificially produced brighter colours surrendering the perceived world to

a new kind of visual sensation. This shift from natural to artificial colours that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century allows us today, to live in an “artificial paradise” (2006, 49) as Taussig terms it. As with any great cultural development, the shift did not occur without causing anxiety. To contextualise those related to colour in nineteenth-century England, it is necessary to consider the role of science in Victorian society, seeing as the new colours are unavoidably bound to the scientific inquiry, which made them possible. The discourses surrounding science in the second half of the nineteenth century often illustrated an opposition between science and nature, which was a religiously charged concept. The subject relates to this opposition, as the new artificial colours quickly replaced natural ones and produced a noticeable visual change in urban landscapes. This chapter further contextualises the conflict between religion and science by regarding the principles of the decadents of the late nineteenth century, as they celebrated artificiality and artifice, which was often exhibited through colour. Another important exploration of this chapter is the relation between colour and the body, may it be in the form of coloured cosmetics, which is characterised by another opposition between natural beauty and cosmetic interference, or the sensuality that colour gifts to the human figure. The insistence that colour promotes a sensual appeal leads to an examination of Victorian moral values that allowed colour to be framed as something sexual and morally questionable which, in turn, fostered chromatic anxieties.

4.1. Artificial Colours and a “New Nature” (Loeb 101)

The second half of the nineteenth century saw significant cultural changes as the educated class increasingly acknowledged the teachings of science. Lori A. Loeb highlights the “conflict between science and religion” (101), which increasingly characterised cultural debates at the time. Darwin published his evolutionary theory, *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859, which, entailed a drastic shift away from a theological conception of the world and towards a recognition of scientific knowledge. Of greater importance for the study of colour, he published *The Descent of Man*, in 1871, which establishes a link between colour and sexual selection in the animal kingdom (Evangelista 2023, 197). Numerous Victorian scientists from different fields supported Darwin’s theories, thereby advocating “a shift away from Christian tradition” (Loeb 101). One of these scientists was the biologist and anthropologist T. H. Huxley, who recognised the emergence of a “New Nature” (ibid.), granted by science. Loeb argues that outspoken scientists like Huxley encouraged “ordinary Englishmen to use rational, scientific ideas to solve their problems” (ibid.), rather than looking for guidance in their belief. The growing popularity of scientific knowledge applied to daily life, mostly viable for the educated

middle and upper classes, even extended to include women, who as has been discussed in the previous chapter, readily adopted Chevreul's theories of colour harmony, for instance, on the very basis of his given "scientific authority" (Nicklas 231).

The concept of nature in the nineteenth century was strongly tied to a Christian tradition. Nature was understood to be created by God and granted for humankind to cherish. Similarly, the romantic movement, the ideas of which still lingered well into the nineteenth century, highly valorised the natural and nature itself (Doran 3), including its colours. Given the rise of science in the second half of the nineteenth century, Huxley's proclamation of a "New Nature" (Loeb 101) demonstrates a significant cultural development as it was "created by science, which, in transforming the quality of life, also required an almost complete reorientation in thought and expectations of people and society" (ibid.). British society had to adjust to the rapid changes brought forth by scientific inquiry and the Industrial Revolution. Thereby, the Christian concept of nature was overshadowed by a new kind of artificial nature, one that was not tied to God's creation but increasingly reflected scientific advancements. The mid-century discovery of aniline dyes that rapidly developed into a vast range of artificially produced colours not only changed the visual world but also how the world was perceived. Taussig appropriately highlights the significance of this change, asserting that "[c]oal-tar color became the light of the world, the ultimate mimetic camouflage that allowed second nature to pose as nature" (2006, 49). He thereby refers to the shift in consciousness which allowed for new approaches to societal developments.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, thanks to the invention of synthetic dyes a much broader range of people encountered colour in their daily lives. Furthermore, by the 1860s steam-powered printing presses were increasingly adopted (Winterbottom and Ribeyrol 27-8) and advances in chromolithography made it possible for colour to conquer "all aspects of printed life, from books and magazines to greeting cards and calendars, from food packaging and sheet music to scientific illustrations, charts, and maps, as well as reproductions of paintings" (Dootson qtd. in Ibid. 29). It is not surprising that such a perceptible and far-reaching change, as bright colours appearing everywhere, would cause significant anxiety. However, the "colour revolution" (Prettejohn 13) of the second half of the nineteenth century was much more than a drastic advancement in the production of synthetic colours, it also entailed new ways of perceiving colour (Winterbottom and Ribeyrol 25). In other words, the "experience of colour" (ibid.) was changing. This development is best explained by the example of the very first aniline dye, mauve.

The leap of advancements in biochemistry that was brought forth by the invention of the first synthetic dye also triggered cultural changes as artists reappraised their observations of their surroundings. Ribeyrol states that “[t]he colour mauve had of course existed before 1856 but the invention of its aniline version increased its visual presence and raised it to the prominent and yet ambiguous status of the artificial colour par excellence” (2018, 6). The ambiguity of the position of the colour mauve at the time lies in its synthetic origin. The aniline mauve was artificial and disconnected from nature and thereby stood at the convergence of the friction between religion and science, present in Victorian society. Ribeyrol asserts the significance of this position by stating that “mauve became a cultural event, a social fact” (ibid.), one that influenced later conceptions of the age as the late 1870s until the 1890s came to be labelled as the “mauve decades” (ibid. 5) during the 1920s and 1930s. The artificial colours emerging during the second half of the nineteenth century not only “affected the textile industry but also the materials of artists and the terminology of poets” (ibid. 6). This implies that people who actively sought to perceive and discuss their surrounding world were changing their approach to their art. Mauve shadows appeared on the canvases of impressionist painters and found their way into Wilde’s vocabulary (ibid. 8), for instance, signifying that the synthetic colour sparked “new ways of seeing” (ibid.). The new synthetic colours seeped into the cultural production of artists which in turn is what Taussig referred to when claiming that aniline colours made it possible for a “second nature to pose as nature” (2006, 49).

The “culture of mauve” (Ribeyrol 2018, 5) took hold during the *fin de siècle* of the nineteenth century, which was also the age of decadence (ibid.). Sabine Doran refers to the decadent movement as a celebration of “artifice, even the superficial, particularly as a form of self-fashioning” (3). The dandies and aesthetes of the late nineteenth century manifested these qualities, with their “aesthetic opposition” (ibid. 4) to the norms of their time. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word ‘decadence’ refers to a “process of falling away or declining” (2024, n.p.), and to many conservative contemporary observers the dandies and aesthetes of their time were indeed a symptom of a greater cultural decline (Doran 4). The celebration of artifice of the decadents is exemplified by the famous dandy, Wilde, whose trademark was a green carnation¹² (Ribeyrol 2018, 11). Such a colour for carnations was not a natural occurrence, instead, the flower was artificially coloured by letting its stem soak up

¹² The green carnation is also recognisable in Frith’s painting *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881*, (1883). See figure 8.

aniline malachite green (ibid.). The aniline green carnation that Wilde chose to wear became the symbol of decadent aesthetics (ibid.), precisely because it embodied a celebration of artifice and superficiality. Wilde's green carnation could also be interpreted as a symbol epitomising the previously discussed conflict of science and nature as it is both a flower stemming from nature but is irreversibly removed from it, through human intervention in the form of colour.

4.2. Cosmetic Colour and Natural Beauty

The decadents' interest in the superficial and the artificial may not be solely focused on colour, nevertheless, the two terms relate to the subject. In the previous section, I aimed to show how artificial (as in man-made) colours stood in opposition to natural ones and thereby gave rise to criticism. Even before the rise of artificial colours, colour was already denounced to be superficial, for instance in the old "*disegno* versus *colore*" (Gage 2005, 137) debate. The supposed superficial quality of colour reappears in cultural debates about cosmetics in the second half of the nineteenth century. Smith argues that the rise of consumerist culture generated a change in the concept of beauty in the Victorian period (5), which is strongly tied to colours. The nineteenth century's ideal of female beauty was mainly determined by "natural, healthy and God-given [...] qualities" (ibid.), which were, of course, not easily marketable. The mid-Victorian ideal beauty would at once exhibit pale skin and brilliant colours in her blushing cheeks and red lips (ibid. 11). This ideal was promoted in portraiture painting where bright colours were often used in disregard of the actual colouring of the sitter (ibid.). However, these colours had to appear natural, as that was the source of their valour (ibid.). Despite the obvious challenges, women were not exempt from consumerist culture. Instead, middle-class women were targeted, particularly from the 1880s onwards (ibid. 4), and beauty culturalists ultimately shaped the beauty standard to incorporate "beauty products into a daily regimen" (ibid. 5). Before this change, appearance, which was God-given, was interpreted as a reflection of the person's character and morality (ibid.). In this sense, the rise of consumerism created a possibility of self-improvement, which was often achieved through colour cosmetics. Therefore, colour in the nineteenth century is a determinant of beauty, as well as a means to improve it, which ultimately remains superficial and is imbued with a measure of deceit.

For most of the nineteenth century, the use of coloured cosmetics to improve appearance constituted a moral problem, as it promoted the act of hiding, which in turn translates to dishonesty. Colour is not trustworthy but deceptive, or, as Taussig suggests, "[c]olor amounts to crime" (2006, 32), as one of its qualities is not only hiding but trickery. These negative connotations also extend to make-up. As the word already suggests, cosmetics are a means to

‘make up’ your appearance, which means to improve it, making it better than it truly is. This in part informs what made coloured cosmetics morally questionable to Victorians. During the mid-nineteenth century, the “pseudoscience of physiognomy” (Smith 15) was still common in assessing beauty. This supposed science “suggested several mutual relationships between intelligence, character, morality and beauty; in the case of women, beauty was firmly connected with ‘goodness’” (ibid. 16), which meant coloured cosmetics, that worked to enhance or conceal natural colours were seen as a measure of deception of one’s true qualities (ibid. 15). If women were to cover-up their skin with cosmetics, they sought to hide their true character which, of course, was morally reprehensible (ibid.). However, with the advent of the beauty industry in the final decades of the century the renunciation of coloured cosmetics changed. Nevertheless, “fundamental contradictions surrounded expectations of female beauty in Victorian Britain” especially in the opposition of “the natural and the artificial” (both ibid. 10), as it was accepted to improve one’s appearance with make-up but solely if the artificiality of the improvement was not detectable. In other words, there was a need for “an ‘artificial naturalness’, that posed no threat to Victorian values” (Clark qtd. in ibid.), which allowed for beauty products to be marketable. A novel that demonstrates both the use of coloured cosmetics to improve one’s appearance and the implicit danger in overindulging in them is Mary E. Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* which first appeared in 1862. Early on in this novel, the character Lucy Audley advises the plain-looking Phoebe to use cosmetics, as all she lacks to become as good-looking as herself, are the right colours.

Not at all, Phoebe, [...] you are like me, and your features are very nice; it is only colour that you want. My hair is pale yellow shot with gold, and yours is drab; my eyebrows and eyelashes are dark brown, and yours are almost - I scarcely like to say it, but they’re almost white, my dear Phoebe; your complexion is sallow, and mine is pink and rosy. Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you’d be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe. (qtd. in Kling 560)

Lady Audley knows how to improve her appearance with the help of artificial methods. Her hair is luminous, her cheeks and lips are rosy, and her brows and lashes are dark. It is those colours contrasting with her pale skin that make her beautiful. However, the moment her colours vanish, meaning when she is not wearing her make-up her *façade* crumbles and she becomes unrecognisable even to her husband (Kling 573). Throughout the novel Braddon changes her presentation of Lady Audley as naturally beautiful to a portrayal of a woman who cleverly uses coloured cosmetics to maintain her lady-like appearance (ibid.), exemplifying the dubious quality of cosmetics and colour itself. Although colour is recognised as something appealing,

in its cosmetic agency it also holds the power to disguise, which, of course, fosters mistrust. This treatment of colour frames it as something superficial and therefore secondary. However, if colour is not understood as something trivial if the supposed dangers it holds are recognised, it becomes something that is feared as it threatens contamination and corruption.

4.3. Corrupting Colour

In the discourses surrounding colour during the nineteenth century, colour was often cast as a corrupting force (Batchelor 22, Blaszczyk 2014, 204). This stance is a clear reflection of prejudice against colour, and as Batchelor words it, “[a]s with all prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of contamination and corruption” (22), in other words, a chromatic anxiety. One Victorian example that observed the proliferation of the colour mauve in the day-to-day visual landscape of urban Victorian England is the brief article titled “The Mauve Measles” published in *Punch Magazine* in 1859 under the pseudonym Dr Punch. As the title already suggests, the satirical newspaper draws a connection between the new aniline dye, mauve, and a contagious malady. Although this article is a humoristic observation of a new trend it nevertheless reflects a certain scepticism towards the artificial colour.

One of the first symptoms by which the malady declares itself consists in the eruption of a measly rash of ribbons, about the head and neck of the person who has caught it. The eruption, which is of a mauve colour, soon spreads, until in some cases the sufferer becomes completely covered with it. Arms, hands, and even feet are rapidly disfigured by the one prevailing hue, and strange as it may seem, the face even looks tinted with it. (81)

In this article, the colour mauve is framed as a source of disfigurement, a sickness that contaminates the body until it is entirely covered in the particular shade of purple. The implicit criticism appears to be directed at women, with the reference to ribbons. The author irrevocably frames colour, in this case, the new aniline colour mauve, as a figurative sickness overwhelming the body. Even though the “mauve measles” (ibid.) might appear on the body, they are a symptom of a corrupted mind. The fact that the article frames the sudden enthusiasm for the colour mauve as a sickness of the mind that “must be treated as a form of mild insanity” (ibid.) is underlined by the fact that Dr Punch frames the origin of the ‘sickness’ not in England, where Perkins discovered mauve in 1856, but rather in France where Empress Eugénie popularised the colour (ibid.).

Another Frenchwoman framing colour as a sickness of the mind was Emmeline Raymond, director of *La Mode Illustrée*. Writing in 1862 she describes “the orgy of colours” (qtd. in Kalba 2017, 33) that proved addictive to many women (Kalba 2017, 33). Raymond’s

wording demonstrates the moral dimension of the threat that colour poses. The subject of colour perception also solicited the opinions of pseudo-scientists who connected the psychological state of artists and their use of colour (Ribeyrol 2016, 7). Max Nordau, for instance, interpreted the “excessive colour sensitivity of certain poets and artists as an index of their troubled, if not hysterical nature” (ibid. 2017, 10). He subjugated renowned writers and artists such as Morris, Wilde, Ruskin and Holman Hunt to his criticism, as well as famous French artists like the painter Édouard Manet (for his excessive use of purple) and the poet Baudelaire (for his outspoken defence of colour) (ibid.). These examples demonstrate chromatic anxieties and work to frame colour as a danger threatening contamination and corruption, by equalling the excessive use of colour in art or fashion as a sign of mental illness.

Although there was much apprehension regarding colour’s supposed ability to affect the mind there were, however, also cases when colour did cause physical ailments and even poisoning due to new artificial dyes (Winterbottom 96). Certain artificial green dyes, in particular, posed a serious threat to health, as they possessed arsenic compounds, which are highly toxic (Evangelista and Ribeyrol 184).



Fig.14 “The Arsenic Waltz or, The New Dance of Death”, 8 Feb. 1862, *Punch Magazine*

In 1861, artificially dyed flower wreaths caused the death of a young flower-maker, Matilda Scheurer (ibid.), which prompted another *Punch* cartoon, titled “Arsenic Waltz” (fig. 14), published in 1862, featuring two finely dressed skeletons. On the female skeleton’s dress, collar and crowning her head are the poisonous flower wreaths that caused the scandal of the previous year. This sketch provides a humoristic depiction of a subject that caused outrage and anxiety, directly related to colour. Both real or perceived colour posed a threat to some Victorian observers who thought their mental or physical health was under attack. The discussion surrounding colour as a threat to mental or physical health ties colour to the body and establishes that colour holds the power to influence it.

4.4. Colour and the Body

As was demonstrated by “The Arsenic Waltz” illustration and “The Mauve Measles” article, colour was framed as a threat to the human body. Mauve is described as overtaking the body and engulfing it until even the face, which is not covered in fabric, has taken on a mauve tint (“Mauve Measles” 81). The article conveys a general sense of unease regarding colour as it was rapidly conquering the bodies of enthusiastic citizens. However, there are also numerous Victorians who noted that colour was an essential element of the human body. The small temple, designed by Jones that housed Gibson’s *Tinted Venus* at the 1862 International Exhibition, was inscribed with the words “[w]ithout colour no life, nor health, nor beauty, nor youth” (Hatt 189). In this case, colour is the binding element that characterises life, health, beauty and youth. In other words, colour is a vital element of human life.

The connection between colour and vitality did not originate in Victorian discourses but is much older. Pastoureau argues that in the early eighteenth century, colour seemed to win its reoccurring battle with drawing (119) as “color could be employed to show what drawing alone could not express” (ibid.) and this unique ability of colour was that “color could give the aura of life to bodily creatures” (ibid.). Pastoureau goes on to highlight how the “first color engravings were used for anatomical images: color was equated with carnality” (ibid. 120). Again, colour is irrevocably tied to life and the body. The Victorian connection between colour and life is a continuation of an old tradition which is also highlighted by Taussig who refers to the French philosopher and art critic, Denis Diderot, who argued that “[d]rawing gives shape to all creatures, color gives them life. Such is the divine breath that animates them” (qtd. in 2006, 36), in the eighteenth century. In this instance, colour is the form of the “divine breath” (ibid.). However, it should be noted that these colours of life are natural, not artificial ones.

There is a sense of ambiguity when it comes to colour, life and the body, which is related to coloured cosmetics and colour's ability to essentially make non-animate objects appear animate. Batchelor highlights this versatility of colour, "[i]f colour is a kind of corruption which heralds disease and death, corruption is also a kind of colour which gives life" (60). In this sense, colour is both a negative and a positive force. One interesting example where colour is a deciding agent in the question of life and death is given by the antihero Des Esseintes in the novel *À Rebours*, by Joris-Karl Huysmans. The novel, translated into English as either *Against the Grain* or *Against Nature*, was published in 1884 and exemplifies decadent sentiments in Des Esseintes' quest to free himself of nature (ibid. 55) and his celebration of artifice and superficiality. At one point in the novel Des Esseintes purchases a tortoise shortly proceeding to cover it "with gold and encrusts it with coloured gemstones, effectively turning the creature into a work of art" (Evangelista and Ribeyrol 185), which causes the death of the animal. In this context, Batchelor concludes, "[w]hile cosmetics can both enhance beauty and conceal ugliness, they can also suffocate life. They really are against nature; they can be used to decorate a corpse, but they can also make a corpse" (Batchelor 57). This example highlights the corrupting force of colour which in turn stems from artificiality. The fact that colour is what makes bodies look alive is not the issue as shown by the discourses of the eighteenth century. The source of anxiety stems from human meddling with the colours of the body, which has the result that colour becomes artificial, superficial and cosmetic, a form of corruption.

4.5. The Sensuality of Colour

Another cultural instance in which colour was interpreted as a form of corruption was again Gibson's *Tinted Venus* (1861-1865). The sculptor Westmacott severely criticised Gibson's Venus, precisely because he had applied colour to the white marble (Hatt 186). To Westmacott, Gibson's coloured statue was an affront to one of the main principles of sculpture which was its supreme moral quality. Regarding sculpture, he "claimed that colour had the power to deprave and corrupt [...] rendering the female form voluptuous and sensual" (ibid.), which removes it from a moral high ground and instead allows the statue to become an object of desire and thereby of lesser moral value. Furthermore, his fellow sculptor Weekes similarly believed that "[t]he absence of colour in a statue is, in short, one of the peculiarities that remove it so entirely from common Nature that the most vulgarly constituted mind may contemplate it without causing any feeling of sensuous kind" (qtd in ibid.). What is of great interest in this treatment of colour is that it is connected to sensuality, sexuality as well as nature. It seems that to artists like Westmacott and Weekes, mankind in a state of nature meant mankind that desired,

which to them has no place in sculpture as the consequence is a diminishing of moral purity. Sexual desires that arise due to the introduction of colour, are admitted to be ‘natural’ but also framed as vulgar and morally questionable.

It seems self-evident that colour is connected to sensuality since its perception is only possible through the visual sense. However, the treatment of sensuality in the Victorian period, as it is tied to colour, is not neutral. Gage argues that colour and its inherent sensuality posed a threat to the “rational traditions of Western culture” (2005, 10). Colour thereby is recognised as something that causes the loss of control over rationality and threatens a pursuit of sensual and carnal experiences, which oppose Victorian moral values. As shown in the case of Westmacott and Weekes, sensuality is perceived as having no place in their art and therefore colour should be abstained from to foster moral behaviour. A similar treatment of colour is reflected in the choice of colours for women’s clothing. Provided that a woman had enough wealth to be able to ‘indulge’ in fashion, there were certain social codes reflected in the choice of colour for their garments. These colour decisions reflect an understanding of colour as something sensual as well as enhancing sexual appeal. Therefore, rich and strong colours were mostly worn by married women (Forster and Christie 2). Whereas unmarried women, dressed in pale shades and white, aimed to signal their virtue, morality and respectability (ibid.).

Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* of 1862 (fig.15), exemplifies the treatment of white as a colour that signifies purity and virtue. The young woman in a long white dress has almost equally white skin. Indeed, the most popular cosmetic items at the time were “skin lighteners such as pearl powder and violet powder” (Black qtd. in Lennox 14), which may have contained toxic components (Ribeyrol 2018, 14). Together with the white curtain in the background, the entire painting is predominantly white. Solely the model’s hair, the patterned floor and the bear rug allow colourful contrasts into the composition. Even though it is now known that the model for the painting was Whistler’s mistress, Harvey contests “yet the *White Girl* holds her lily, and it seems that white, in the world of Whistler’s paintings, is, chiefly, purity” (205). Indeed, the flower in the woman’s hand, is an important signal, as the lily was strongly associated with the Virgin Mary (ibid.). Furthermore, Harvey writes “[t]his painting pays its odd oblique tribute to the age’s wish for women to be angels; while men, who move in the soiling world, might turn its stain to a black sober smartness” (ibid.), which poses the colours black and white as opposites, reinforcing a visual gendered divide. However, this division did not last, as towards the end of the nineteenth century, women conquered the authority and seriousness of the colour black that was mostly delegated to men’s clothing, as can be seen in

Sargent's portrait of the French Madame Pierre Gautreau of 1884, also titled *Madame X* (fig. 16).



Fig. 15 J. A. M. Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, 1862



Fig. 16 J. S. Sargent, *Madame Pierre Gautreau (Madame X)*, 1884

Sargent's *Madame X* portrays Mme Gautreau in a long black dress that leaves her shoulders, neck and arms bare. Just like Whistler's *White Girl*, her skin is very pale and builds a stark contrast to her dress and dark and neutral surroundings. The portrayal of Mme Gautreau does not aim to signify a woman's innocence or purity with the choice of colours, instead, she is rendered with "an awareness of personal and social force, with the added vibration of confident daringness, playing off the potency of sexuality against the power of the serious" (ibid. 225). The woman in black is aware of her elegance and sensual allure and exhibits it with confidence. She is not wearing the black of mourning or a "moral or puritanical, or modest or humble"

(ibid.) black. Mme Gautreau is claiming the assertive black of men, thereby demonstrating an instance when social codes were undermined towards the late nineteenth century, which ultimately resulted in changes and readjustments of those codes dictating conduct. Sargent's painting demonstrates the versatility of colour and how it is impossible to affix certain meanings to a single colour, as colour meanings change throughout time. Whether dressed in black or white, Whistler's *White Girl* as well as Sargent's depiction of *Mme X* invite a certain gaze, one that Laura Mulvey would qualify as a "male gaze" (359), the object of which is a beautiful woman.

One essential difference between Whistler's *White Girl* and Sargent's *Madame X* is that the latter is the portrayal of a married woman. Being married at the time allowed women not only to wear colours, with their sensual appeal, it even allowed them to claim the colour black with such authority as Mme Gautreau. Had Whistler chosen to paint his beauty in a dress exhibiting a bright colour, or had Sargent decided to leave out the wedding ring on Mme Gautreau's left hand and not chosen such a renowned figure as Mme Gautreau (Ribeyrol 2018, 15), they would have created entirely different paintings. Being married, allowed women some leeway in the instrumentalization of their appearance. While Whistler's 'girl' is shown not only solely dressed in white, but her dress also covers her arms and reaches up to her neck¹³, which leaves only her hands and face bare, which too, appears to be 'naturally' coloured without any hints at the use of cosmetics. Mme Gautreau, on the other hand, is presented in a revealing black dress, and her face is painted with make-up. Ribeyrol attests that "[a]t the time, the peculiar colours of both the painting and the model were perceived as almost more scandalous than her risqué cleavage" (ibid.), proving how important chromatic considerations were at the time. Mme Gautreau was a "professional beauty" (ibid.), who used "excessive chromatic matter [...]" to construct her social persona" (ibid. 14), which was controversial. Even Sargent himself commented on the matter in a letter written to Vernon Lee¹⁴ in 1883:

In a few days I shall be back in Paris, tackling my other 'envoi' the portrait of a Great Beauty. Do you object to people who are 'fardées' to the extent of being a uniform lavender or blotting-paper colour all over? If so (sic) you would not care for my sitter; but she has the most beautiful lines, and if the lavender or chlorate of potash-lozenge colour be pretty in itself I should be more than pleased. (qtd. in Ribeyrol 2018, 14)

¹³ Similar to the young women shown in fig.7.

¹⁴ Vernon Lee was a woman, Violet Page, who went by the artist name Vernon Lee.

Essentially, Sargent asks Lee if she objects to women wearing make-up to the extent that is practised by Mme Gautreau. Sargent chooses the French word ‘fardées’ meaning make-up or to disguise, as though this was a particular French occurrence. The contemporary reactions to both Sargent’s painting as well as the sitter herself seem to have been anticipated by “The Mauve Measles” article of 1859, where it was observed that mauve was conquering society. In the case of Mme Gautreau, another shade of purple, lavender, comes to overtake the natural colour of her skin, which in turn did not escape the public’s notice and was cause for debate. As demonstrated by Sargent’s letter to Lee, the obvious use of make-up was still something that caused concern in the 1880s and could be objected to. Considering that during the mid-nineteenth century, physiognomy was still a common use of assessing a person’s character including their morality (Smith 15), which in turn, frames the use of cosmetics as deceitful, it is not surprising that Mme Gautreau’s painted appearance would cause unease. Indeed, it is not solely her use of cosmetics, but her position in public, that goes against what had previously been understood as acceptable conduct for a woman of her social position.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the female figure represented in a domestic setting was replaced in the 1870s by the figure of the woman entering a public sphere in aesthetic art (Psomiades 5). This appears to be symptomatic of broader changes within society, taking place in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Although more and more women were entering the public space, their position was, as seen in the case of Mme Gautreau, disputed. Smith highlights the ambiguous position of professional beauties in late Victorian society by referring to the article, “The Service of Beauty. Personal Beauty”, which appeared in *The Girl’s Own Paper*, in 1889.

The author describes the ‘Professional Beauty’ - personalities who obtained celebrity status primarily for their appearance - as ‘a reproach to English womanhood’ for her perversion of a ‘good and sacred gift’ (299). The notion that beauty could be used by women ‘as a key to open forbidden doors’ and ‘turned into a power for evil’ speaks to the sensitivity of the subject of artifice and the association of beauty with danger in certain circumstances (299). At once it is a girl’s or woman’s ‘duty’ to cultivate her ‘charm’ or ability to fascinate others, but similarly only a thin line separates this requirement from unnatural and corrupting practices. (2)

Again, colour plays a decisive role in the cultivation of beauty. It is the source of beauty but can easily lead to its demise as it can also easily be interpreted as unnatural and corrupting. Although the article appeared in 1889, it echoes the teachings of physiognomy where beauty and goodness are connected which frames the use of coloured cosmetics to improve appearances as deceptive and manipulative. In addition, a certain wariness towards female

beauty is exemplified by the author's condemnation of professional beauties as they use their "good and sacred gifts" (qtd. in *ibid.*) to actively step outside of a private and domestic setting which equates to the opening of "forbidden doors" (*ibid.*).

The reason why women venturing out into public spheres created unease if not outspoken hostility was that they were surpassing the bounds of the ideal femininity of the previous decades as they worked to evolve and change that very concept. This is also the reason why the use of cosmetics to paint the face in 'unnatural' colours and the conduct of actively seeking attention is called into question, as seen by the example of Mme Gautreau. Those activities were strongly associated with prostitution and immoral behaviour. This exemplifies another threat that colour holds, the threat of immorality. Amanda Anderson in her study *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, describes sexually immoral Victorian women as "the 'painted' woman, the 'public woman,' the woman who 'loses her character'" (2), these epithets "express the larger informing assumptions about the nature of the fallen state, its failure to present or maintain an authentic, private, or self-regulating identity" (*ibid.*). Similarly, Jennifer Phegley recounts the advice of Lucie H. Armstrong in her *Letters to a Débutante*, published in 1896, under the fictional persona of Priscilla, who "insists that maintaining a quiet demeanor in public is crucial and loud conversation in the street is 'simply unpardonable' as are loitering before shop windows, turning one's head to look around in the street, and wearing bright colors" (52). What is of interest is that both the wearing of bright colours and using excessive colour cosmetics, as well as the conspicuous conduct in public are represented as signs of impropriety if not prostitution. Therefore Priscilla's "prohibitions are striking for their clear aim of insuring that proper ladies are not confused with fancily dressed shop girls or prostitutes" (*ibid.*), which also highlights how in the advent of aniline dyes it had become harder to differentiate between 'moral' and 'immoral' women. What is of particular interest in the discussion of prostitution in the late nineteenth century is the involvement of colour. It appears colour, in its sensual appeal, is never far from immorality which relates to sexual desires. Colour is thereby again posed as a threat to morality. This can be detected in Westmacott and Weekes' discussion of colour and the art of sculpture, and it resurfaces in the discourses on coloured cosmetics and brightly coloured dresses. It is moral values that make colour concealing and deceitful.

Another gendered approach to colour of the nineteenth century is pointed out by Roque who argues that colour itself was in the nineteenth century often perceived as a *femme fatale* (5). He exemplifies how the framing of colour as a potentially fatal temptress is detectable in Victorian discourses about the subject, highlighting Blanc's ideas about colour (4). According

to Roque, Blanc's manner of discussing colour gives it the resemblance of a *femme fatale*, with his insistence on linking colour to femininity and design to masculinity, creating a structural opposition (6). Blanc evokes the union of Adam and Eve which is, of course, essential to humankind, but he thereby links colour to Eve (ibid. 5), the 'ultimate' *femme fatale*, who seduced Adam into eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge. This comparison employed by Blanc underlines his call for caution against letting colour overrule the design. Furthermore, Roque insists, "[s]i la couleur se lie aussi intimement à la femme, c'est qu'elles sont toutes deux censées posséder le même charme, user des mêmes ruses pour séduire, par le maquillage et le *fard*" (ibid. emphasis in original), describing how colour and women are linked by supposedly having the same ability to seduce, possessing the same charm, and making use of the same misleading ruses, meaning make-up and cosmetics. Again, colour is framed as seductive, misleading, cosmetic, superficial, deceitful and altogether dangerous. Making it out to be akin to a *femme fatale*, through discourse, allows colour, an originally neutral phenomenon, to be attacked based on the same principles as promiscuous women. It is a process of personifying colour and exposing it to the measure of contemporary morality.

4.6. Victorian Morality & "The Fall into Colour" (Batchelor 24)

As previously argued, the discourses on colour in England during the second half of the nineteenth century were significantly influenced by moral factors. Colour and scandal went hand in hand. This was precisely because colour is a culturally charged phenomenon and the connections that were often ascribed to it at the time were morally ambiguous if not reproachful like the subject of sensuality and sexuality. A repeated argument against colour was its supposed vulgarity. E. Fraser highlights that "during the course of the nineteenth century [...] hand-colored prints were devalorized as gaudy, vulgar, and cheap" (54), where they used to be praised as luxury goods. Indeed, before the mid-nineteenth-century invention of synthetic dyes, colour had qualified as a luxury (Braga 78). However, in the second half of the nineteenth century colour rapidly conquered all kinds of aspects of urban life, not just women's clothing. The rise of consumerist culture brought with it a significant proliferation of colourful advertisements that were made possible thanks to the advances in coloured printing (Winterbottom and Ribeyrol 29). The targeting of middle-class women particularly to introduce beauty routines also entailed a reorientation of what it is to be beautiful, which could safely promote coloured cosmetics. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the democratisation that occurred through the proliferation of colourful goods was then hampered based on notions of taste. Interestingly, it was precisely these notions of taste that allowed for

a denunciation of colour as “gaudy, vulgar, and cheap” (E. Fraser 54). Therefore, bright colours having previously been understood as a marker of wealth became signs of a lack of taste, may they occur in coloured clothes, badly painted faces, or tactlessly decorated interiors. This negotiation between what qualifies as good or bad taste is, of course, culturally dependent and reflects broader societal anxieties concerning the upkeep of class differences.

The consideration of colour in the second half of the nineteenth century not only relates to a fear of class transgression but also the subversion of boundaries in a broader sense. Who then, were the people framed at the time to be particularly partial to colours? In short, they were either women, homosexuals or artists, or indeed a combination of the three. What often connected these groups of people was not the observation that many of them were chromophiles, but that they all took up marginalised or oppressed positions within Victorian society, which allows room for the transgression of culturally evaluated boundaries. As explained in this chapter, the use of colour in women’s clothing and cosmetics was a sight of cultural conflict where moral values were evaluated and the transgression of what counted as moral behaviour was determined. Artists too were exposed to public criticism, as exemplified by Nordau who thought to recognise their use of colour as a sign of mental instability or even illness (Ribeyrol 2017, 10). Similarly, there was a “cultural construction of the turn-of-the-century homosexual as a chromophile - an individual marked by a heightened sensitivity to colour” (Evangelista 2023, 198), which worked to mark homosexuality as a social problem of “moral perversion or disease” (ibid.). Connecting homosexuality and colour also worked to discredit both. Homosexuality could thereby be met with the same attacks that colour faced and colour itself was again framed as a marker of social deviance and immorality. What women, homosexuals, and often the non-conforming artists, though they are admittedly very broad terms to describe groups of people, shared, was a position within late Victorian society that allowed for transgressions of the boundaries that kept them in that very position, which was recognised as possibly dangerous to the very basis on which the society was built. Furthermore, there was a “general cultural paranoia overtaking Britain in the late nineteenth century” (Loeb 101) resulting from the fundamental changes brought about by developments such as industrialisation and the rise of science, which signified a shift away from a religious worldview.

As seen in this chapter, colour was appraised as something sensual and in this sensuality Victorian commentators recognised the looming presence of sexual desire, promiscuity and lure, which is how something as trivial as a coloured flower, tucked into the lapel of a public

persona could become emblematic of the *Zeitgeist* of the *fin du siècle*. What I am referring to is the aniline-coloured green carnation, that Wilde wore, which “became an icon of the 1890s craze to perform and transgress” (Evangelista 2023, 202). In this instance, colour is both linked to homosexuality, as Wilde had become the “public face of the queer culture” (ibid. 203) of his time, “following his conviction for ‘gross indecency’ in May 1895” (ibid.), and decadent aesthetics (Ribeyrol 2018, 9). The green carnation, which garnered much public attention as it became a “sudden fashion” (Evangelista and Ribeyrol 186) is a “social provocation; it expresses a wish to subvert normative behaviours” (Evangelista 2023, 202), which was irrevocably tied to moral values. Thereby the fashion of wearing green carnations stands for an act of subversion of Victorian rules of conduct, it flaunts the complex paradox between nature and artifice, through the agency of colour. It is an example of the changes that were taking place within society that allowed for greater awareness and in some cases acceptance of conduct that would previously have been unthinkable. I argue that Victorian England experienced a “fall into colour” (Batchelor 24) during the second half of the nineteenth century, with the increase of its appearance in urban landscapes, however, that fall need not necessarily carry a negative connotation. It is a matter of perspective. Although colour may have been used as a tool for subversion and transgression of social and cultural norms, which induced anxiety, it can also be recognised as an agent of change and progress.

Conclusion

The main focus of this thesis is to demonstrate that chromatic anxieties, set within the rapidly changing visual landscape of England between 1856 and 1901, arose out of a ‘complex network of aversion’ against colour fuelled by moral considerations, particularly in connection to its supposed proximity to femininity and a ‘foreign other’. The new colours “of the nineteenth century’s ‘high-tech’ industries [...] whose dyes, paints and pigments were instrumental in transforming the look of the material world” (Błaszczuk 2014, 206), created a new awareness for visual experience and caused the “chromatic turn” (2020, 2) as theorised by Ribeyrol. However, as I have shown in this thesis these chromatic developments also triggered anxieties and brought forth “chromophobic” (Batchelor 23) attitudes in many Victorians. Batchelor states that there are two distinct ways in which “attempts to purge colour from culture” (ibid. 22) are made. Either “colour is made out to be the property of some ‘foreign’ body” (ibid.), making it unfamiliar, unrecognisable, untrustworthy, or it is delegated to a secondary position (ibid. 23), which makes it an unimportant byproduct of experience. Both of these approaches to colour deny its complexity and simplify the role that colour plays within society. One direction of

derision makes colour seem dangerous, the other makes it inconsequential. Both of these approaches to drain colour from culture were made in England in the second half of the nineteenth century. Embedded in these attempts to cleanse colour from culture are chromatic anxieties.

This thesis has highlighted multiple practices of othering during the given timeframe. ‘The foreign other’ was marked by colour. Men in their “imperial black” (Harvey 156) were faced with foreigners who donned colourful fashions, which marked them as belonging to some faraway land. Anxieties regarding England’s imperial position gave rise to assumptions about foreign cultures that are reflected in discourses on colour. Colour was made out to be primitive, childish, unfamiliar, threatening and even dangerous. Even the ideal Greeks of the past were attacked with such derision as was shown by Bell, who attested that only barbarians practised polychromy, not the artists (Hatt 194).

Moreover, within Victorian society, women were framed as ‘the other’. Again, contemporary anxieties about changing gender roles shaped chromatic anxieties. Colour was portrayed as having feminine qualities and women were compared to supposed characteristics of colour. Essentially the chromatic anxieties induced in connection to Victorian femininity framed colour (and or women) as seductive, sensual, alluring, tempting, bodily, vulgar, sexual, and emotional rather than rational, infantile and again primitive. The indulgence in colour and enjoyment of it was seen as a quality of ‘the other’ but certainly not a Victorian man. Whenever men deviated from the Victorian norm, overindulging in colour, they faced similar criticism as did some painters, poets, homosexuals and religious figures. Women were believed to have an affinity for colour, but if they used excessive cosmetics, for instance, to improve their ‘natural’ colouring, then colour took on deceptive, misleading, dishonest, and illusionary qualities. Additionally, framing colour as a marker of difference or ‘the other’ involved the propagation of dualisms. Thereby one property of the dualism was valued more than the other, which always aligned the weaker link with qualities that were assigned to colour.

An attempt to purge colour from culture by deeming it secondary was highlighted by the discussion of the Victorian role model, where the polychrome reality of Ancient Greek practices was resisted and debated as shown by the discourse surrounding Gibson’s *Tinted Venus* (1861-1865). Moreover, many Victorian discourses on colour reflected the ancient dualism of “*disegno* versus *colore*” (Gage 2005, 137), which automatically assigns colour a secondary position. This meant that women and children were often tasked with professional colouring in the Victorian period, as that occupation was believed to need less skill than the

conception of the artwork. Klinger's insights into the history of dualisms supplied this thesis with an approach to the dualisms that resurfaced in discourses on colour in the given timeframe, as does her theorisation of the inherent hierarchy of dualisms. When colour is framed as secondary, it becomes a luxury, excess, superficial as well as cosmetic. These qualities in turn were celebrated by the late Victorian dandies who seemed to some contemporary critics an embodiment of cultural and social decline. Moreover, on multiple occasions the direction from which colour was dismissed both framed it as secondary *and* foreign. For instance, in the case of the new invention of aniline mauve. In the article "The Mauve Measles" (1859) colour was described as a contaminating force, but at the same time, the humoristic article refers to women's fashion, which certainly aligned the subject to secondary importance in its lack of seriousness.

All in all, colour often posed a moral problem to Victorian observers. From a multitude of directions, colour appeared as an affront to moral conduct or else it raised moral dilemmas as was the case with the association of bright colours with 'the Orient'. Both Said and Bhabha's theories on colonialism were used to highlight "the ideological construction of otherness" (Bhabha 66), which often used colour as a recognisable marker of 'the other' that faced observers from Victorian England. Colour's proximity to the body, as a vital sign for health and in extension beauty, exposed colour to another level of moral scrutiny. Interfering with the colours of the body, in the form of coloured cosmetics, for instance, was morally reproachable. The recognition of polychromy in Ancient Greek practices posed a moral issue, as colour appeared at odds with the ideologically charged role model. The Victorian assumption that colour invites sensuality also posed a moral problem. To artists like Westmacott, Bell and Weekes, sensuality invited a sexual dimension to the contemplation of art which did not adhere to the moral aesthetic as it diminished the intellectual value of an artwork. Moreover, an immoral woman, for instance, was not only branded as such by her conduct but also by colour, as she would dress in bright 'gaudy' colours, without being married. Meaning that the choice of colour for a woman's dress was a serious consideration, one that could signal her morality or lack thereof to her society. Furthermore, with the advent of synthetic dyes, colour in women's dress also became a tool for class transgression, which also constituted a moral problem. Bright aniline-dyed dresses worn by lower-class women gave them the appearance of upper-class members, as was demonstrated in the illustration, "True Artistic Refinement" of 1877. However, respectable women dressed in the new colours were also mistaken for prostitutes (Phegley 52). All of these instances where colour was interpreted as a hindrance or even threat

to morality, especially in its sensuality and supposed proximity with women, allowed for the emergence of chromatic anxieties that are woven into a ‘complex network of aversion’ against colour.

When regarding the different attitudes towards colour throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the ambiguity of colour becomes clear. Although it can be framed in one way or another, it essentially eludes clear characterisation or categorisation which is the cause for both wonder and anxiety. Colour in connection to the complexion was recognised as a sign of health, vitality and beauty, but it was also often accused of dismantling those positive attributes. Colour was the cause of a levelling out of class difference, but it also worked to create a stark contrast between men and women. It was also colour that was then used to reinstate class differences through notions of taste. Colour worked as an empowerment for women in the second half of the nineteenth century, as they were exerting their supposedly inherent sense of colour that men lacked. Nevertheless, it was precisely that same affinity for colour that worked to discredit women. Colour was both an emblem of nature and then artificially produced colours became a symbol of its corruption. This explains how people like Ruskin, Burges and Morris could be both defenders of colour and outspoken critics of it. Blaszczyk aptly remarks upon this elusive quality of colour, “[a]s the forces of bureaucracy and specialization ushered the West toward Modernity, colour eluded the best minds, who struggled to fathom its perceptual mysteries and cultural contradictions” (2014, 207). This shows how colour evades attempts to use it as a stable tool to signify, which again proves how colour is a “social phenomenon” (Pastoureau 10). As such, the treatment of colour reflects social and cultural circumstances and therefore chromatic anxieties are fuelled by fears about broader social and cultural developments.

The focus on Victorian colour discourses from a cultural perspective proves to be too broad for the scope of a single thesis. More research could be done on the role of colour in transgressions of Victorian gender norms, for instance, or the roots of the prevailing connection between femininity and colour. Nevertheless, this thesis has highlighted certain insights about colour that are still relevant today. It is important to reflect upon what informs our opinion when deeming bright colours as cheap, childish and unserious while a trend colour like ‘greige’¹⁵ is connotated as elegant, calming, clean and sophisticated, which does not appear far removed

¹⁵ A mixture of grey and beige.

from the Victorian valorisation of some colours as opposed to others. Colour as a sensory experience, is subjective, but its interpretation is culturally dependent and thus inscribed with a long history of fascination and repulsion.

34 470 words.

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Abstracts

English Abstract

This thesis highlights chromatic anxieties present in England during the second half of the nineteenth century as newly discovered synthetic colours changed the visual landscape of Victorian England. By analysing Victorian discourses revolving around colour it identifies multiple directions from which colour was dismissed to a secondary position, as a byproduct of experience or framed as a figurative danger to society. Many Victorian contemplations of colour are strongly influenced by moral considerations. Thereby colour posed a moral problem as it was connected to a foreign 'other', while also being associated with femininity, which was conceptualised in contrast to masculinity. These associations between colour and 'the other' give rise to chromatic anxieties that are fuelled by broader fears of cultural and social decline present at the time. By calling attention to the dualisms that structure the approach to colour as well as Victorian femininity, this thesis portrays how Victorian discourses often simplified the complex cultural phenomenon that is colour and assigned it a position of minor importance.

German Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit erläutert ‚chromatic anxieties‘, durch Farben ausgelöstes Unbehagen, die in der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts mit dem Aufkommen synthetischer Farbstoffe die visuelle Landschaft des viktorianischen Englands veränderten. Ausgehend von der Analyse spezifischer historischer Diskurse zum Thema Farbe werden verschiedene Strömungen aufgezeigt, in denen Farbe als Nebenprodukt der Erfahrung oder als abstrakte Gefahr für die Gesellschaft abgetan wurde. In den historischen Texten zum Thema Farbe nehmen moralische Bewertungen eine wichtige Rolle ein. Farbe wurde zum moralischen Problem, weil sie einerseits zum fremden ‚Anderen‘ in Beziehung gesetzt, andererseits mit Weiblichkeit als Gegenpol zur Männlichkeit konnotiert wurde. Die Assoziation zwischen Farbe und ‚dem Fremden‘ führt zu ‚chromatic anxieties‘, zum Unbehagen gegenüber Farben, dem tiefer liegende Ängste vor kulturellem und sozialem Niedergang zu dieser Zeit zugrunde liegen. Indem diese Arbeit die Dualismen aufzeigt, die den Umgang mit Farbe sowie das Thema Weiblichkeit im viktorianischen Zeitalter prägen, zeigt sie, wie die historischen Diskurse das komplexe kulturelle Phänomen Farbe oft vereinfachten und ihm eine untergeordnete Bedeutung beimaßen.