

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

*James McNeill Whistler,
“The White Girl”, and the
Animal(s) in Question*

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Abstract: James McNeill Whistler's painting, *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, has been the focus of much art historical analysis, but the animal rug beneath the feet of his model has received little attention. In this essay I suggest that Whistler represented a mounted wolf's head sitting on top of a large sheepskin rug, i.e., a wolf in sheep's clothing. Exploring the diverse meanings of this symbol within the context of the painting complicates how we understand the work and reinforces its importance as a reflection of the artist's life and ambitions at the time he created it.

Keywords: James McNeill Whistler, painting, wolf, sheep, iconography, symbolism

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In 1862, the first of James McNeill Whistler's many published retorts to art critics appeared in the *Athenæum*, when he wrote to protest the reviewer's association of his painting, *The White Girl* (Fig. 1), with Wilkie Collins's popular novel, *The Woman in White*. Whistler denied any connection, writing that:

The Proprietors of the Berners Street Gallery have, without my sanction, called my picture "The Woman in White". I had no intention whatsoever of illustrating Mr. Wilkie Collins's novel; it so happens, indeed, that I have never read it. My painting simply represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain.¹

In the same journal, the director of the Berners Street Gallery contradicted Whistler, explaining that the artist was both aware of and "pleased with the name".² Earlier that same year, George du Maurier quoted Whistler in a letter describing the work as featuring a female figure "standing against a window which filters the light through a transparent white muslin curtain – but the figure receives strong light from the right and therefore the picture barring the red hair is one gorgeous mass of brilliant white."³ Both of Whistler's descriptions fail to mention the striking objects included in the lower third of the painting where the model stands on a large yellow-grey animal skin that rests atop a blue and white floral carpet. The model appears to have dropped the colourful blooms from a nosegay onto the carpet, retaining only a single white flower in her left hand.

- 1 The reviewer also called *The White Girl* "one of the most incomplete paintings we ever met with". The author of the review is assumed to have been E.G. Stephens, and the review was published in *The Athenæum* on 28 June, 1862. Whistler wasted no time in responding, and his letter to the editor was published in the same journal on 5 July, 1862. See Young, MacDonald, and Spencer, *The Paintings*, cat. no. 38, and MacDonald and Petri, *Catalogue Raisonné*, YMSM 038. <https://whistlerpaintings.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/display/index.php?mid=y038>. The original letter is included in the online edition of Whistler's *Correspondence*, edited by Margaret F. MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort and Nigel Thorp, cat. no. 13149: <https://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/recno/display/?cid=13149>. Further references to this edition will be abbreviated "guw" (Glasgow University: Whistler) followed by the catalogue number.
- 2 Frederick Buckstone to William Hepworth Dixon, 19 July 1862. Guw 12979.
- 3 George du Maurier to Thomas Armstrong, February 1862, in du Maurier, *Letters*, 105; cf. Spencer, "Painting, Poetry and Meaning", 300n5.



Figure 1:

James McNeill Whistler,
*Symphony in White, No. 1: The
White Girl*, National Gallery of Art,
Washington D.C., 1861–2, 1872.
Harris Whittemore Collection.
Public Domain.

Surely the most surprising inclusion is the mounted animal head that confronts viewers with bared fangs. This striking detail is hard to miss, but few of Whistler's contemporaries remarked on it. Ernest Chesneau noted the inclusion of a wolf skin in his review of the Salon des Refusés, as did Horace de Viel-Castel.⁴ However, the inclusion of this remarkable animal, Whistler's omission of it in his own descriptions, and the failure of most contemporary critics to make any note of it warrants further investigation.

In fact, in the century and a half since it was first shown, this emphatically present animal has remained virtually invisible. An early biographer described Whistler as an "inveterate mystifier",⁵ and my focus in this essay is on demystifying this animal presence. I believe that in a characteristically audacious move, Whistler painted a mounted wolf's head sitting atop a large sheepskin rug. In other words, viewers of Whistler's painting stand nose to nose with a wolf in sheep's clothing. These animal artifacts, and the symbolic meaning produced by their combination, are the physical, metaphorical, and literal foundation on which Whistler's white-clad model stands. As this essay shows, recognizing and understanding the symbolic meaning of the animal elements in *The White Girl* produces a more nuanced interpretation of the artist, his relationship to his sitter, and the painting itself.

Whistler began painting *The White Girl* in Paris during the winter of 1861/2 and submitted it to the Royal Academy Exhibition in London in 1862 where, as he had anticipated, it was rejected.⁶ He then showed the painting at the Berners Street Gallery where the owners advertised it with the title *The Woman in White*. Despite his protestations, Whistler knew the gallery had changed the title and that it was done to capitalize on the popularity of Wilkie Collins's novel.⁷ Whistler admitted as much in a letter to his friend George Lucas which includes a humorous sketch of a man with a signboard

4 Chesneau, *Artistes modernes*, 191; Viel-Castel, "Salon de 1863"; cf. Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 540, n. 73.

5 Eddy, *Recollections and Impressions*, 47.

6 Joanna Hifferran to George A. Lucas, 9 April 1862. guw 9186.

7 Tsui, "The Phantasm", 460.

advertising the exhibition on which Whistler's name is misspelled: "Whisller's Extraordinary picture the WOMAN IN WHITE"⁸ (Fig. 2). Aileen Tsui notes Whistler's "strategic manipulation of the title in order to accommodate the contradiction between his claims for his art's purity—both its independence from literature and its aesthetic quality—and his dabbling in aspects of mass culture."⁹

In the letter to Lucas, Whistler put a positive spin on the Royal Academy's rejection, claiming that he was "waging an open war with the Academy".¹⁰ Yet few of the Academy's members knew that Whistler had cast them in the role of arch-enemies, nor would they have cared. However, acceptance by the English and French academies was a serious matter for Whistler, who, unlike many of his avant-garde contemporaries, was not independently wealthy. In 1863, Whistler asked Lucas to help him submit *The White Girl* to the French Salon, writing, "I have set my heart on this succeeding, and it would be a crusher for the Royal Academy here, if what they refused were received at the Salon in Paris and thought well of."¹¹ Whistler also noted that he was touching up the painting so "it will be fresh" for submission to the Salon.¹²

Henri Fantin-Latour then reported to Whistler that although the judges for the 1863 French Academy had found it difficult to reject *The White Girl*, they had nevertheless done so, and the painting was subsequently shown at the Salon des Refusés where it was listed in the hastily organized catalogue as the *Dame Blanche* (cat. No. 596).¹³ In Fantin's letter to Whistler he described the process that resulted in two exhibitions being held simultaneously at the Palais de l'Industrie, one with works accepted by the Salon's judges, and the

8 I have not seen this deliberate misspelling noted or discussed elsewhere. Whistler to Lucas, 26 June 1862, GUV 11977.

9 Tsui, "The Phantasm", 460. Throughout this essay I use the title Whistler originally gave the painting since my focus is on the period when Whistler used it. He gave the painting its current title in 1867.

10 Whistler to Lucas, 26 June 1862, GUV 11977.

11 Whistler to Lucas, 16 March 1863, GUV 10693.

12 Whistler to Lucas, 16 March 1863, GUV 10693.

13 Fantin to Whistler, 1 May 1863, GUV 1079.

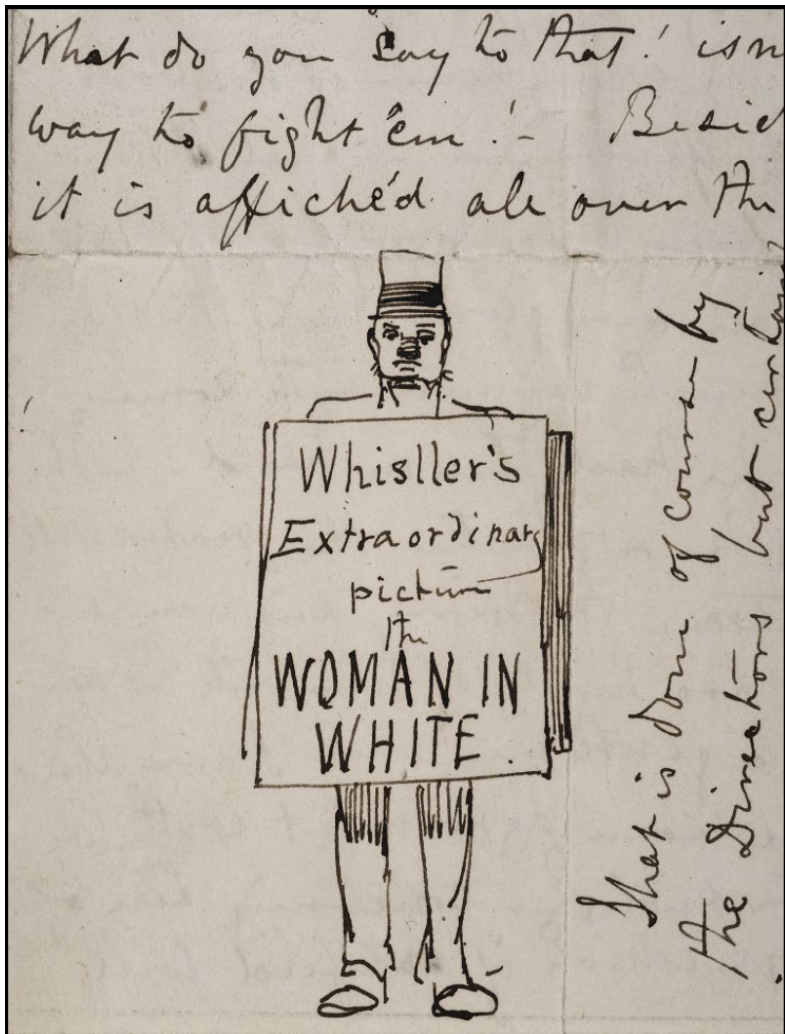


Figure 2:

Letter from James McNeill Whistler to George A. Lucas, June 26, 1862 (detail sketch of man wearing a sandwich board advertizing the "Woman in White"), Wadsworth Atheneum of Art, Hartford, CT, Gift of John F. Kraushaar, 1925.539.

other with rejected works. He assured Whistler that “the best things will be well placed and exhibited together, and certainly they are going to ensure that you are well placed.”¹⁴ Indeed, Whistler’s painting was installed near the entrance to the exhibition in “a sort of place of honour, before an opening through which all pass, so that nobody misses her.”¹⁵ Whistler sent several letters to Fantin asking about the reception of the painting by the public, the press, and their fellow artists.¹⁶ Fantin reported that Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Alphonse Legros, and Charles Baudelaire all admired the work.¹⁷ As a protective friend, Fantin was less forthcoming about negative responses by critics and the French public who had been primed by reviewers to see the works in the Salon des Refusés as both badly painted and a bit naughty.¹⁸ Whistler embraced good and bad reviews alike, seeing *The White Girl* as a *succès de scandale*, and in 1878, when he was building his libel case against John Ruskin, he was pleased to be able to refer to the painting as “most notorious”.¹⁹

Fabritzius’s caricature of the Salon des Refusés mocked both the artworks in the exhibition and the crowds who flocked to see them (Fig. 3). Three of Manet’s paintings, including the *Dejeuner sur l’herbe* (originally titled *Le Bain*) appear in the centre of the cartoon, with *The White Girl* to the right, high on the wall. Fabritzius included the

14 Fantin to Whistler, 1 May 1863, GUV 1079.

15 Fantin to Whistler, 15 May 1863, GUV 1081.

16 Whistler to Fantin, 25 May/10 June 1863, GUV 8044; Whistler to Fantin, 6–10 July 1863, GUV 8043; Whistler to Fantin, 16 August 1863, GUV 8032.

17 Fantin to Whistler, 15 May 1863, GUV 1081.

18 This can be gathered from reports by artists, critics, and others that are collected in Tabarant, *Histoire catalographique*, 95, and Tabarant, *Manet et ses œuvres*, 67. For a discussion of the reception of the exhibition as well an extraordinarily helpful timeline, see Wilson-Bareau, “The Salon des Refusés”, 313–7.

19 Whistler to James Anderson Rose, November 1878, GUV 8784. For readers unfamiliar with the libel case, in 1878, Whistler sued the famous and influential art critic John Ruskin for a review of his painting, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875, Detroit Institute of Arts) in which Ruskin accused Whistler of “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” Whistler sued Ruskin for libel, but he was also eager to burnish his reputation as a firebrand and to defend the Aesthetic art movement of which he was a part. The two-day trial was a public sensation, and thanks to his witty comebacks and convincing defence his artistic practice, Whistler won the case, but he was awarded only a single farthing and was thus bankrupted by legal expenses and other debts. As a result, he had to sell his home and all its contents.

flower held in the model's hand and the wolf's head at her feet. *The White Girl* also features in a caricature by Gillot, published in *La Vie parisienne* on 11 July 1863 (Fig. 4). Gillot arranged the exhibition's most scandalous works to conceal any objectionable nudity. At the top of the cartoon, a maniacal academician wields a flaming sword in one hand and a pair of scales in the other as he sits astride a cloud in his artistic heaven. The caption explains that this crazed artist is struggling to separate light from dark (or good from bad art), and the figure's dynamic pose copies Raphael's fresco in the Vatican Loggia showing God separating light from dark.²⁰ *The White Girl* features prominently in Gillot's caricature, but the lower portion of the painting is cut off and with it the wolf's head, an omission that anticipates the painting's historical reception. Together, the caricatures confirm that Whistler's *White Girl* and Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* were sufficiently well known to serve as recognizable signifiers of the Salon des Refusés.

Significantly, Fabritzius shows the paintings in the Salon des Refusés as consisting primarily of female nudes and domestic animals. In this context, hung high on the wall, surrounded by animals and women, it seems as though the wolf's head in Whistler's painting would have been particularly obvious.²¹ Instead, some critics commended Whistler for his adherence to tradition, praising his reliance on English, Italian, and French paintings. A few noted that it was common practice in art schools to paint a model draped in white against a white curtain and complimented Whistler for his treatment of this familiar theme.²² Others were so bothered by the lack of a clear narrative in the work that they came up with their own. For example, Jules-Antoine Castagnary wrote that Whistler had depicted "*the bride's morning after*, that troubling moment when a young woman reflects on the absence of yesterday's virginity."²³ Sexual overtones also dominated interpretations by other critics who believed that Whistler was representing a fallen

20 Krell, "Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*," 319, fig. 1.

21 See note 4, above.

22 Spencer, "Whistler, Manet, and Tradition", 60.

23 Castagnary, "Salon de 1863", qtd. in MacDonald and Petri, *Catalogue Raisonné*, YMSM 038.



Figure 3 (above):

Caricature view of the Salon des Refusés, 1863. Photograph by Camille Rensch, Photographie de la Madeleine, Paris, of a drawing by Fabrizius. Albumen Print.

Figure 4 (left):

Gillot, Caricature view of the Salon des Refusés, *La Vie parisienne* 11 July 1863.

woman, much like William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (Tate Britain, 1853), and other Pre-Raphaelite paintings.²⁴

In contrast to the attention the female figure garnered, however, the animals in Whistler's painting were almost entirely overlooked by his contemporaries, just as they have been by most later scholars of the work. The wolf's head and sheepskin at Hiffernan's feet, like Hiffernan herself, are absent referents. The objectification of the human and nonhuman elements in Whistler's painting obscures the identity of the living woman who modelled for the painting and the body parts of what may have been living animals. Whistler repeatedly asserted that the painting's central female figure was not a portrait of a specific individual, even though it was well known that his mistress was the model. The painting and its title(s) strip Hiffernan of her identity and transform her into an object. Hiffernan shares this objectified status with the dead animal skin on which she stands and the mounted wolf's head that menaces viewers of the painting. Stripped of their identities, the human and animal elements are transformed into vessels into which metaphorical meaning has been poured, and it is to this meaning that I now turn.

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

It is important to consider how it has been possible for so many viewers to overlook the animal elements in *The White Girl* for so long, and why this is the first essay to focus primarily on the animals in this otherwise much-discussed painting. The bottom third of Whistler's life-sized painting features a blue and white floral carpet on top of which a large, taupe and grey-tipped sheepskin rug is spread. Whistler's model stands near the centre of the rug, which is bordered by sanguine-coloured paint, perhaps indicating that the rug was backed with red wool felt, as was common at the time.²⁵ The red extends beyond the white edge of the fleece, and for some viewers the bloody hue may serve as a reminder of the violence required to transform a living animal into a decorative skin. Near where the sheep's neck would have

24 Lochnan and Jacobi, *Holman Hunt*, 96–110; Bronkhurst, *Holman Hunt*, 165–68.

25 It is also possible that this red is meant to be understood as blood, an idea I discuss below in the context of Whistler's self-portrait.

been, a mounted wolf's head has been placed on top of the fleece. Whistler made no effort to make it appear as if the head and the skin are organically connected, and he carefully differentiated the colour and texture of both skins to underscore the difference between the two. The wolf's head is modelled primarily in shades of grey, but Whistler also added several blue highlights to create the illusion that the head is projecting into the viewer's space. Orange-red brushstrokes define the wolf's nostrils, tongue, under the lower lip, and right eye. Detailed modelling and the careful application of primary colours on the wolf's head contrast sharply with the painterly facture and mostly taupe colouring of the sheepskin. The fur on the wolf's head is painted to appear shorter, straighter, and smoother than the texture of the fleece beneath it. Because the upper two-thirds of the painting are primarily white, the brilliant colour of the lower section draws the viewer's eye to the objects painted there. In addition, to the right of the wolf's head, the red paint seems to seep into the blue and white carpet. Whistler deftly used colour to establish both visual and conceptual relationships.

As our eyes travel left, along the edge of the sheepskin, we find brightly coloured flowers including white lilacs, and yellow and purple daisies with goldenrod centres. The red along the edge of the sheepskin changes into a browner hue near the wolf's head, a colour that closely resembles dried blood. Flowers resting on the blue and white carpet include red and white petunias, daisies, and some unidentifiable blooms. Using a brush and a palette knife, Whistler rendered the flowers vibrantly and energetically, and this is very much in contrast with the upper portion of the painting where Hiffenan's green eyes and red hair are the only areas of strong colour. Compositionally, Whistler created two primary areas of visual interest that vie with one another for the viewer's attention. Whistler thus establishes a visual connection between the woman and the wolf resulting, as we shall see, in one of at least three possible symbolic meanings for the wolf in sheep's clothing.

The animal head in the painting is undoubtedly that of a wolf, and comparisons with other wolf heads makes this clear (Fig. 5). I have consulted with wildlife experts and zoologists, including several who



Figure 5:

Top: The wolf's head in Whistler's *The White Girl*

Bottom: Mounted wolf's head, Stokes Nature Center, Logan, UT. Photograph by the author (2021).

specialize in wolves, and without any hesitation all of them agree that this is the head of a wolf.²⁶ Significantly, the wolf's head is not resting on a wolf skin. The pelt is larger than that of a wolf and Whistler gives the fur a fleecy quality that contrasts with the sleekness of the fur on the wolf's head. The suggestion that this is the skin of a polar bear is untenable, it is too small to be the skin of one of these enormous animals. A 1901 photo of Evelyn Nesbit by Rudolf Eckemeyer, Jr. shows the actress posing with her knee on the head of a polar bear whose skin is suspended behind her (Fig. 6). Not only is a polar bear's head far larger than that of a wolf, but the shape of the head and body are also completely different. The fur on the bear's head is the same colour as the rest of its pelt, and all of it is much whiter than the wolf head and what I identify as the sheepskin in Whistler's painting. The photo also shows the polar bear's head still attached to the skin of the body. In *The White Girl*, the wolf head rests atop the spot where the sheep's scapula would have attached to its spine, and there is no way that the head could be organically connected to the skin. Charles Brock suggests that the animal(s) under Hiffernan's feet could be a hybrid bear/wolf.²⁷ However, there is no precedent for, or meaning produced by the visual combination of a bear and a wolf, while a wolf in sheep's clothing is a well known metaphor, and one replete with meanings that would have been familiar to Whistler and viewers of the painting.

The identification of the skin as that of a polar bear is relatively recent. While there was a great deal of popular interest in polar exploration when Whistler was completing the painting, borrowing, or purchasing a polar bear pelt would have been prohibitively expensive, and had he attempted to obtain one, some record of his efforts might survive. Whistler's financial records show that he

26 I am deeply grateful to the wildlife and canid experts who were willing to discuss the identification of the animals in the painting, namely Dan McNulty (Associate Prof., Wildland Resources specializing in wolves, USU), Carol von Dohlen (Professor of Biology and Zoology, USU), Julie Young (Former Director of the Coyote Research Station, Associate Professor of Ecology and Wildlife Preservation, USU), and Chad Page (Professor of Agriculture, sheep and goat specialist, USU Extension). All agreed that the head is that of a wolf but were less certain about the identification of the pelt.

27 Brock, "Short History", 179.



Figure 6:

Evelyn Nesbit by Rudolf Eickemeyer, Jr., photo, 1901. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., The Rudolf Eickemeyer, Jr. Collection

rented an easel to paint *The White Girl*, a basic tool that was far more readily available than a polar bear pelt.²⁸ Brown bear skins were traded in significant numbers through the Hudson's Bay Trading Company in late-nineteenth-century England, but at the time, polar bear skins were quite rare.²⁹ Sheepskins, by contrast, were inexpensive and easily obtained, and when combined with a wolf's head, produced a rich variety of metaphoric meanings. A mounted wolf's head would probably also have been relatively easy to obtain. At the start of the nineteenth century, France had one of the highest wolf populations in Europe, but following an aggressive campaign to exterminate them which was incentivized with bounties, wolves were extirpated by the early twentieth century.³⁰ Thousands of wolfskins and heads were tanned and/or mounted, and it would have been a fairly simple matter for Whistler to have borrowed one to use as a prop.

Contemporary References to Wolves

Whistler wrote to Fantin early in the summer of 1863 to describe the Royal Academy exhibition and noted that one of three paintings shown by John Everett Millais is "a real picture! Well, something truly artistic."³¹ Whistler respected Millais's work and his judgment, and according to Hiffernan, Millais had praised *The White Girl* as "splendid, more like Titian and those old swells than anything he had seen."³² Although it's not known which painting Whistler was singling out for praise, it may have been *The Wolf's Den* (Fig. 7), the most modern of the three paintings Millais exhibited that year. The painting depicts four of Millais's children playing at being wolves using fur carriage rugs. They are shown beneath the grand piano in their home on Cromwell Place, with the painter's point of view on the floor alongside his children. The artist George Price Boyce saw the picture in Millais's studio on 22 March 1863, and wrote that "He

28 28 August 1862, GUW 2026.

29 See O'Regan, "Menageries and Bearskin Caps", 261.

30 Moriceau estimates that there were up to 15,000 wolves in France at the start of the nineteenth century. See Moriceau, "The Wolf Threat in France", 2–3.

31 Whistler to Fantin, 25 May/10 June 1893, GUW 1081.

32 Hiffernan to Lucas, 10 April 1862, GUW 9186.



Figure 7:

John Everett Millais, *The Wolf's Den*, 1863, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo.

has in hand an excellent picture of his children playing at Wolf".³³ Millais's oldest daughter Effie is lying on her back and contemplating a snowdrop, a traditional symbol of hope and innocence.³⁴ To Effie's right we see Everett, the artist's oldest son, who looks out of the picture toward the viewer and glowers with as much menace as a young child can muster.³⁵ His expression is far less sinister than that of the mounted wolf that meets the viewer's eye in Whistler's painting. The red felt backing of both carriage rugs is reminiscent of, yet more carefully rendered, than the red that traces the edges of the fleece in *The White Girl*.

Millais and Whistler met in 1860, the year Whistler showed *At the Piano* at the Royal Academy, and he claimed that Millais had said to him, "I never flatter but I will say that your picture is the finest piece of colour that has been on the walls of the Royal Academy for years."³⁶ *The Wolf's Den* was exhibited in London the same year *The White Girl* was shown in the Salon des Refusés, and although Whistler's earlier painting may not have been a direct influence on Millais, the artists knew one another and admired each other's work. We see in Whistler's broad artistic circles the kind of intertextual influence that Elizabeth Prettejohn has identified as critical to the Aesthetic movement's ability to make "art for art's sake" an international artistic phenomenon.³⁷

Currency of the Phrase "a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing"

With his strict religious upbringing and deep familiarity with the Bible,³⁸ Whistler would have known that the phrase, "a wolf in sheep's

33 Boyce, *Diaries*, 37.

34 For additional examples of contemporary symbolic interpretations of flowers see Ingram, *Flora Symbolica*, 156.

35 An interesting aside about painting is that the artist's oldest son, Everett Millais went on to become an expert on dog breeding, with a particular focus on Bassett hounds, which he was the first to import to England. His book, *The Theory and Practice of Rational Canine Breeding* was published in 1889. For more on Millais's theoretical approach see Worboys, Strange, and Pemberton, *Invention of the Modern Dog*, 164–70.

36 As reported by George du Maurier in a letter to his mother in May 1860. See du Maurier, *Letters*, 4.

37 Prettejohn, "Walter Pater", 36–58.

38 Meacock, "Whistler and Scriptural Persuasion" 24–30.

clothing,” originated in the Biblical passage, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15). The metaphorical phrase has never gone entirely out of favour, and even if Whistler did not see the specific images I illustrate here, they nevertheless indicate that the phrase was in common use when *The White Girl* was created. In 1860 *Punch* published a cartoon showing Napoleon as a wolf in sheep’s clothing (Fig. 8). A second contemporary cartoon shows Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, dressed in women’s white crinolines and a fancy feathered hat being hauled off to jail by two Union soldiers (Fig. 9). Davis tried to evade capture by dressing in his wife’s cloak, and the Northern press seized on this to humiliate the defeated general by depicting him in women’s clothing. These and other examples confirm that the phrase “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” was in widespread use when Whistler painted *The White Girl*. Additionally, they show that the phrase could convey a range of political, personal, and practical meanings.

In the sections that follow, I focus on three ways that Whistler may have intended the wolf in sheep’s clothing to be read by viewers of his painting. First, the animal presence is primarily correlated to Whistler’s model and mistress, Jo Hiffernan; second, it acts as a metaphoric self-portrait; and, finally, it references the painting’s radicality when shown in a deeply conservative exhibition setting. The wolf’s head and sheepskin should also be recognized as fragments of animals that may once have been living beings, and even if Whistler did not use a specific skin and a particular head as models, they are painted in a way that makes it appear that he did. I explore this at several points within this essay, but it is important to recognize that the metaphorical meanings of these animal fragments are not separable from their material reality, and that these two aspects work together to compliment my reading of them. There are, of course, many other ways for Whistler’s wolf in sheep’s clothing to be read and understood, but in the sections that follow, I discuss what I believe are the three most significant associations for the artist and his audience.



INJURED INNOCENCE AND HIS BILLET-DOO.

.. The Emperor Napoleon having been accused of entertaining designs on Savoy and Nio, disclaimed such intentions. Punch did not believe him.—August, 1860.



Figure 8:

“Injured Innocence and his Billet-Doo”, *Punch*, August 1860, Walker Art Library/ Alamy Stock Photo, D01A2P

Figure 9:

Unidentified Photographer, *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, or Jeff in Crinoline*, 1865. International Center of Photography, Gift of Charles Schwartz, 2012.

Joanna Hiffernan as a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

The first and most obvious connection is between the wolf in sheep's clothing and Whistler's muse, model, and mistress, Jo Hiffernan. With her striking coppery red hair and large green eyes, Hiffernan was Whistler's primary model during the first half of the 1860s. Although their romantic relationship ended around 1874, Hiffernan remained close to Whistler until her death in 1886, even raising the son Whistler fathered with another woman.³⁹ Friends describe the couple's relationship as stormy, and George du Maurier wrote in 1864 that Whistler was "in mortal fear" of Hiffernan, and that she was "an awful tie".⁴⁰ In 1863/4 Whistler's brother-in-law, with whom he was already quarrelling, refused to dine in Whistler's home, claiming it had been sullied by Hiffernan's presence.⁴¹ When Whistler's mother visited London, Hiffernan moved out of the home she and Whistler shared, staying elsewhere for the sake of propriety.⁴²

Friends described Hiffernan as passionate, intelligent, fiery, and fiercely devoted to Whistler. She was also financially dependent on him, and his mother urged him to "promote a return to virtue in her" by giving her the inheritance he had received from his aunt.⁴³ In the Victorian society in which Whistler and Hiffernan lived, some did not distinguish between those who lived with men outside of marriage, those who were paid for sex, and those who had sex for pleasure, seeing all unmarried, sexually active women as sinners.⁴⁴ Whistler's family saw Hiffernan as a fallen woman, and so did many viewers of *The White Girl*. A double standard applied to men and women that led one of Whistler's contemporaries to write that a "woman falls but once, and society turns upon her as soon as the offence is known. A man

39 MacDonald, *Woman in White*, 30.

40 du Maurier, *Letters*, 227.

41 Whistler to Fantin, 4 January–3 Feb 1864, guw 8036.

42 Guw 8036; cf. Meacock, "Whistler and Scriptural Persuasion".

43 A.M. Whistler to J. Whistler, 22 January 1866, guw 6527. Sutherland and Toutziari, *Whistler's Mother*, 139.

44 Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 170–75.

falls many times, habitually, confessed by; yet society changes her countenance on him but little, if at all."⁴⁵

Hiffernan's red hair, loose around her shoulders and in disarray, is the only element, besides her large, green eyes, that Whistler described as breaking from the otherwise all-white palette. In exploring the long association of redheaded women with sexual availability, Jacky Colliss Harvey writes that "there are very definite associations between long or loosened hair and sex,"⁴⁶ and one of the earliest and best-known sources to connect witchcraft, sex, and "young, nubile, redheaded, green-eyed women" is the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Heinrich Kramer's profoundly misogynistic fifteenth-century treatise on witchcraft, which describes women with red hair as evildoers driven by lust. Artists influenced by the *Malleus* produced countless images of witches and prostitutes with red hair, and in the process established enduring connections between red hair and sexual sordidness.⁴⁷ Manet's redheaded model, Victorine Meurent, posed many times for the artist, including for the *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, and *Olympia* (both 1863). Nineteenth-century audiences were accustomed to seeing paintings of nude women, but Meurent's red hair in combination with the radicality of Manet's paintings provoked scandalized responses from critics and the public. Hiffernan also modelled for Courbet who, like Whistler, revelled in his reputation for outrageous behaviour, and Hiffernan's tousled red hair is a dominant feature of the paintings he produced.⁴⁸ There are countless more examples, but suffice it to say that the idea that redheaded women were sexually available was well established for nineteenth-century viewers.

Visitors to the Salon des Refusés are repeatedly described as dissolving into peals of laughter at the sight of *The White Girl*. Émile

45 Miller, *Prostitution Considered*, 26.

46 Harvey, *Red*, 70.

47 Harvey, *Red*, 89.

48 Courbet's paintings of Hiffernan include *Portrait of Jo* (1865, Private Collection), *Jo, the Beautiful Irish Girl* (c. 1866/1868, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), *Jo, the Irishwoman* (c. 1866/1868, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO), and *Jo, la belle Irlandaise* (1865–66, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

Zola, who admired the painting, wrote that those who saw it in the exhibition “nudged each other and went almost into hysterics, there was always a grinning group in front of it.”⁴⁹ In his review of the exhibition, Philip Gilbert Hamerton described viewers as “struck with amazement. This for two or three seconds, then they always looked at each other and laughed.”⁵⁰ It is difficult to imagine what these early viewers found so funny about the painting, but the responses of the public were altogether different from those of the French artists Whistler hoped to impress. Fantin told him that “Baudelaire finds it charming, charming, exquisite, absolutely delicate, as he says. Legros, Manet, Bracquemond, de Balleroy and [Fantin himself]; we all think it admirable.”⁵¹

Whistler had produced a painting that was so radical that all but the most avant-garde viewers struggled to know how to respond. Robert Wilson Torchia writes that:

In the final analysis, the genre of the full-length portrait was adamantly resistant to Whistler's purpose of making a spontaneous formalist statement. [...] The subject was too similar to contemporary *femme fatale* types, the woman's sexually charged appearance was too highly suggestive, and attributes such as the wilted lily were too vulnerable to a traditional iconographic explication.⁵²

Michael Fried situated *The White Girl* among other contemporary nineteenth-century paintings in which the main figural subject is supposed to be unaware of the viewer's presence. These works attempt to “negate or neutralize the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld.”⁵³ However, like so many others, Fried's discussion of Whistler's painting fails to mention the wolf that gazes out at the viewer, not only acknowledging the viewer's presence but aggressively initiating engagement.

49 Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, 5, 533–34, trans., and qtd. in the *Catalogue Raisonné*, YMSM 038.

50 Hamerton, “The Salon of 1863,” 259–60, qtd. in the *Catalogue Raisonné*, YMSM 038.

51 Fantin to Whistler, 15 May 1863, GUW 1081.

52 Torchia with Chotner and Miles, *American Paintings*, 242–3.

53 Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 192.

Nineteenth-century critics provide some clues about what the public may have found so entertaining about Whistler's painting. In the absence of a clear narrative, viewers and critics devised their own stories, then evaluated the painting based on how well it illustrated the tales they concocted. As noted above, these narratives were almost always sexual, spiritual, or both. For example, the critic Paul Mantz asked:

Where does this white apparition come from? What does she want with her loose hair, her big eyes drowned in ecstasy, her languid attitude and that flower without petals on the fingers of her hanging hand? No one can say: the truth is that Mr. Whistler's work has a strange charm: for us, the *Woman in White* is the finest piece in the salon of heretics.⁵⁴

Figures that seem oblivious to our gaze invite us to project our own expectations and desires upon them. When constructing interpretations for Whistler's non-narrative painting, viewers resorted to familiar, sexualized tropes. It is therefore particularly interesting to consider why, with viewers champing at the bit for meaning, the presence of a wolf in sheep's clothing beneath the model's feet escaped notice. Such blatant disregard for the animal presence in a picture with so little else in it attests to the deep-seated human tendency to privilege representations of humans over those of nonhumans. Surely this is why so many of Whistler's contemporaries, as well as critics up to the present day, have failed to notice or mention this extraordinary and prominent part of the painting. The apparent invisibility of this highly visible element is a compelling argument for the benefits of integrating animal studies into art history.⁵⁵

Hiffernan's distracted expression is in stark contrast with the fierce, pointed stare of the wolf at her feet. Some critics believed that Whistler represented Hiffernan as a mystic or spiritual figure, and according to MacDonald, "both Whistler and Hiffernan attended seances at Dante Gabriel Rossetti's house. (Whistler thought Hiffernan was 'a bit of a medium')." ⁵⁶ Fernand Desnoyers described the painting as

54 Mantz, "Salon de 1863", 60–61; MacDonald, online *catalogue raisonné*, YMSM 038.

55 For an important argument on this point, see Aloï, "Animal Studies and Art".

56 MacDonald, *Woman in White*, 23.

“the portrait of a spirit, a medium,”⁵⁷ while Théophile Thoré called the model a “vision”, and Fantin reported that Courbet was annoyed that Hiffernan looked like “an apparition, with spiritual content”.⁵⁸ By juxtaposing his model’s glazed expression – which was interpreted by some viewers as showing the sitter in an sexual or drug-induced state of ecstasy – with the sharply focused gaze of the wolf, Whistler may have been warning viewers not to make assumptions about the innocence or sinfulness of his model.

Jo Hiffernan looks toward the viewer but denies us any real connection. She is tightly buttoned up, arms covered to the wrists, not even the tip of a shoe showing. In casual morning dress with her hair down, viewers may gaze freely at her face and clothed body, but this offers nothing of the titillation to be found in the profusion of female nudes that crowded the walls of the Salon. Hiffernan’s emotionless gaze, her physical impassivity, and her loosened red hair render her simultaneously restrained and unrestrained. Ann C. Colley, who identifies the skin as that of a wolf, describes some of *The White Girl*’s erotic charge as coming from the “possibility that his model is bare footed (she has after all let her hair down) and with her toes is caressing and feeling the wolf’s wild fur.”⁵⁹ Further, she writes, Hiffernan “digs her toes into the wolf and faces the viewer, who stares nervously, yet pleurably, at a representation of what those used to believing in the ultimate division between animal and human would rather not recognize.”⁶⁰ While I identify this skin as that of a sheep rather than a wolf and thus believe that Hiffernan is digging her concealed toes into a woolly fleece, I agree with Colley’s suggestion that the hidden erotic engagement with an animal body may have been part of what inspired viewers at the Salon des Refusés to titter uncomfortably when observing the painting. Whistler’s painting is unsettling thanks to the alignment of his living model’s dazed inertia and her unseen, erotic interaction with the uncannily alert, yet dead and inert, fragmented bodies of a sheep and a wolf.

57 Desnoyers, *Salon des Refusés*, 27–28.

58 Fantin to Whistler, 15 May 1863, GUV 1081.

59 Colley, *Wild Animal Skins*, 145.

60 Colley, *Wild Animal Skins*, 146.

Whistler as the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

James McNeill Whistler is among the most instantly recognizable nineteenth-century artists thanks in large part to his striking self-presentation and carefully cultivated public persona. His portrait was painted by several contemporaries, he was included in several group portraits, and he painted numerous self-portraits. Further, he understood that zoomorphism could be used to produce powerful meaning. This is most clearly seen in his famous butterfly signature, a symbol he used to embody himself and to which he added a stinging tail when he deemed it appropriate. As a visual sign the butterfly helped establish Whistler's brand.⁶¹ And well before the publication of his book, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), Whistler promoted himself as an outré bohemian wit and an artistic underdog; in addition to other interpretations, the wolf in sheep's clothing in *The White Girl* should be understood to function as a concealed self-portrait.

Although it has not previously been noted, the face of the wolf that meets the viewer's gaze resembles Whistler, and the inclusion of an image of the artist as animal/beast aligns both with Whistler's artistic practice and his position in the art world when the painting was made. The unknown taxidermist who prepared the wolf's head in *The White Girl* used a mount with an open mouth, pointed white teeth, and an animated expression that makes it appear as if the wolf is laughing at a joke (perhaps the joke is on us). The wolf seems to raise its left eyebrow slightly, giving it an ironic expression that bears a striking resemblance to Whistler's own self-portraits (Fig. 10). As a concealed self-portrait the wolf exemplifies Arthur Jerome Eddy's description that "There was nothing [Whistler] loved better than to surprise, mystify, confuse, and confound."⁶² The bloody-looking edge that borders the sheepskin and is similar in colour to the tongue in the wolf's head may also be an attempt by Whistler to call attention to himself as the creator of the work. Sarah Cohen has explored how

61 Several scholars have explored Whistler's deliberate cultivation of his public persona including Burns, "Old Maverick to Old Master" and Slifkin, "Invisible Man".

62 Eddy, *Recollections and Impressions*, 47.



Figure 10:

James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Gray: Portrait of the Painter*, c.1872, Detroit Institute of Arts.

artists, including Rembrandt and Chardin, recognized a correlation between actual blood and the red paint that they used to simulate it, thus producing a visual pun.⁶³ Artists who engaged the “paint-blood pun” used red paint and the animal hairs in their brushes to signal their creative and material presence to viewers of the illusionistic imagery they painted. For Whistler, placing this bloody smear near his own severed and snarling animal stand-in would have acted as a forceful assertion of his presence in a work that was especially significant for him.⁶⁴

In addition to branding his work with a butterfly logo and including himself as a wolf in *The White Girl*, Whistler showed himself and others in the guise of animals in several other paintings and drawings. One of the best-known examples is in the famous Peacock Room, now in the Freer Gallery in Washington DC. After he and his patron, Frederick Leyland, argued over payment for his work, Whistler painted a mural on the wall facing his *Princess in the Land of Porcelain* (1863–5), titled *Art and Money: Or the Story of the Room* (Fig. 11), the mural was the first of Whistler’s artistic efforts to humiliate Leyland. In the painting, Whistler substituted two fighting peacocks for himself and his detested patron, but he made sure the human identities of both birds would be immediately apparent: Whistler is the bedraggled bird on the left who is being abused by the frilly-shirted bully of a peacock on the right, a bird obviously meant to represent Leyland.

In 1879, Whistler produced an even more vicious attack on Leyland in *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy Lucre (The Creditor)* (Fig. 12), painted after the Ruskin trial and Whistler’s resulting bankruptcy. Whistler left *The Gold Scab* in his home to be found by those sent to inventory and liquidate his possessions. In the painting, Leyland, who fancied himself a musician, and to whom Whistler was deeply in

63 Cohen, “Chardin’s Fur”, 41.

64 Artworks that explore this blood-paint pun include Caravaggio’s *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (1608, St. John’s Cathedral, Valletta, Italy), Rembrandt’s *Slaughtered Ox* (1655, Louvre, Paris), and Chardin’s *Hare with Powder Flask and Game Bag* (1728-30, Louvre, Paris). In a gesture that is far more explicit than the blood near the severed head of the wolf in *The White Girl*, Caravaggio signed his name in the blood that shoots from John the Baptist’s severed neck. Many thanks to Sarah Cohen for discussing this fascinating concept and these works of art with me.



Figure 11:

James McNeill Whistler,
*Art and Money: Or the Story of the
Room, Peacock Room*, Freer Gallery
of Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington D.C.: Gift of Charles
Lang Freer, F1904.61, 1876–77.



Figure 12:

James McNeill Whistler,
*The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy
Lucre (The Creditor)*, 1879,
De Young Museum, San Francisco.
Gift of Mrs. Alma de Bretteville
Spreckels through the Patrons of
Art and Music.

debt, appears as a monstrous peacock playing the piano with scaly, claw-like hands while using Whistler's house as a piano bench. As he had in the Peacock Room, Whistler mocks Leyland for wearing fancy frilled shirts, but he also ridicules his musical pretensions, and characterizes him as obsessed with Chinese pots. The painting employs the same colour palette as the Peacock Room, and Whistler's butterfly signature in the top right-hand corner has a long, barbed tail poised to strike Leyland's back. This outrageously insulting picture beautifully illustrates Whistler's use of animals to characterize and caricature humans.

As a wolf in sheep's clothing in *The White Girl*, Whistler depicts himself as a hybrid; betwixt and between, neither fully a wolf, nor entirely a sheep, he is not truly accepted by high society nor entirely outcast. Whistler embodies this fractured duality in the headless sheepskin beneath Hiffernan's feet and the lively mounted wolf's head that engages viewers. In 1867, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote a limerick mocking the pugilistic aspects of Whistler's personality:

There's a combative Artist named Whistler
 Who is, like his own hog-hairs, a bristler:
 A tube of white lead
 And a punch on the head
 Offer varied attractions to Whistler.⁶⁵

Finally, the wolf in *The White Girl* may also be read as an oblique reference to Russia and the formative years Whistler spent there as a child. Whistler lived with his parents in St. Petersburg from 1843 to 1848, and it was at this time that he discovered his passion for art. So crucial was the time and place to him that during the Ruskin

65 Rossetti's limerick references an incident in which Whistler either tossed or pushed his brother-in-law, Francis Seymour Haden, through a plate glass window in Paris. Following Haden's complaints, Whistler was expelled from the newly formed Burlington Fine Arts Club. Rossetti and others appealed for clemency to the club's officers but were unsuccessful, and Rossetti and his brother eventually resigned in protest. Whistler's correspondence includes numerous letters about the episode, which clearly bothered him. Whistler's behaviour was outrageous throughout the 1860s and it is possible that it may have been caused by lead poisoning, also known as painter's colic, which would have been a result of his extensive use of white lead in paintings from this period. See Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 274.

trial, Whistler stated under oath that he had been born in St. Petersburg, rather than in his actual birthplace of Lowell, Massachusetts.⁶⁶ Wolves are deeply enmeshed in Russian national identity and they haunt the pages of many Russian texts, from folktales to great literature, including Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. As is so often the case with wolves, they can carry positive and negative meanings, but the power of the wolf's gaze and its effect on viewers is noted with exceptional frequency in Russian literature. Further, accounts of wolf hunts in Russia and elsewhere often emphasize the animal's worthiness as a foe.⁶⁷ Whistler believed that his life as an artist started in Russia, and wolves are intrinsic to Russian cultural identity, this connection may be embedded in *The White Girl*, a painting of great personal significance for the artist. As a concealed self-portrait, the wolf's head represents multiple aspects of this multivalent artist, from his artistic origins to his bohemian radicality and his flashy public persona. Channelling positive and negative meanings, Whistler as the wolf in *The White Girl* is underdog, predator, bristler, mystifier, and more.⁶⁸

The Painting Itself as the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

In the 1860s it was virtually impossible for any artist who was not financially independent to be successful outside established and traditional academic systems. As MacDonald notes, Whistler "was determined to make his mark and this required the exhibition of a major painting at the Salon in Paris and/or the Royal Academy in London. There was simply no alternative if he wished to become famous, and, incidentally, rich."⁶⁹ Whistler had to exhibit his work in conservative institutional settings, but his paintings were as profoundly radical as his public identity, and the two were inextricably connected. According to his own misleading descriptions, *The White Girl* was simply a painting of a woman dressed in white in a

66 Gregory, *World of Whistler*, 18.

67 Wolves were frequently the subject of polarized debates about animal cruelty and *no-lesse oblige* in nineteenth-century hunting journals. Numerous examples of wolf hunts in literature and hunting journals can be found in Helfant, "Contested Portrayal of Wolves".

68 Sutherland, *Life for Art's Sake*, 77.

69 MacDonald, *Woman in White*, 11.

white interior—a standard academic exercise—and the title he first gave it, *The White Girl*, asserted that there was nothing more to the painting. But beneath the work's seemingly innocuous white surface, Whistler embedded the beating heart and razor-sharp teeth of a wolf. The painting's covert yet radical modernity was intended to shake the foundations of the art world from within. Yet, to accomplish this, Whistler needed to show the work in deeply conservative English and French academic settings.

Whistler was well connected and he served as a pivot point and catalyst between the art capitals of Paris and London. Few of his contemporaries could boast of having an equally impressive group of artist friends on both sides of the Channel. For example, in 1863, Whistler travelled with Algernon Charles Swinburne to Paris where he introduced Swinburne to Manet and had his friend Baudelaire introduce him to the photographer Félix Nadar.⁷⁰ Such close connections with elite members of the avant-garde art world were not easy to establish and Whistler enjoyed the social cachet they provided. In the early 1860s, Whistler's artistic circle included numerous artists who were pushing both artistic and cultural boundaries.⁷¹ Influenced by the writings of Théophile Gautier and Baudelaire, these artists immersed themselves in Aesthetic ideas that valued beauty in art above morality and science. Swinburne's 1868 essay on William Blake, in which he introduced the phrase "art for art's sake", was dedicated to William Michael Rossetti, who wrote that,

the greatest ideas for the artist's purpose are not those which would be greatest for the theorist, the religionist, or the historian, but ideas of beauty, character, and expression; beauty of form, colour, and action, the material beauty which lies open to perception.⁷²

From 1859 to 1864 most of D.G. Rossetti's paintings were exhibited in private clubs and venues where viewers tended to look more favourably on his experiments, and thus, he could avoid public scandal.

70 Spencer, "Tradition of the Avant-Garde", 49.

71 Grieve, "Rossetti and the scandal".

72 Rossetti, *Fine Art*, 18–19.

Whistler was less financially secure, but he also gravitated toward controversy. He was indeed a bristler, and he embraced the opportunity to brawl with the Academy.

Whistler was not the only one trying to change the Academy. In 1860, the Royal Academy was engaged in a battle to maintain control over its annual exhibition, an event that broadcast its iron grip on the English artworld. Starting in the 1840s, the Royal Academy's stylistic monopoly was increasingly threatened by the rising middle class and politicians capitalizing on what they saw as a resulting decline in taste; predictably, a culture war ensued. Noting the small number of history paintings at the Royal Academy's 1862 exhibit and the corresponding increase in genre subjects, critic Tom Taylor wrote sorrowfully that contemporary British art was no longer "an organ of national feeling, a channel of national sentiment, or an expression of national greatness."⁷³ Responding to widespread complaints about Royal Academy exhibitions, in 1863 a Parliamentary Commission was established to examine the organization's inner workings and it recommended several ways for the annual exhibition to be more appealing to, and affordable for, middle class members of Victorian society. These recommendations were summarily rejected by members of the Academy who asserted that works of art would be damaged by riotous crowds if they offered days that were free of charge, and they were appalled by the idea that lay members might help with art selection and hanging. According to Lynda Nead,

The 1863 Commission exposes the struggles over the control of cultural production during this period; the middle classes began to assume *cultural* domination [...] and participation in high culture worked to define "respectability" for the industrial middle classes and to carve a common class identity from the disparate sections which made up the Victorian bourgeoisie.⁷⁴

When *The White Girl* was shown in Paris, according to Grischka Petri, Whistler "pointed his finger reproachfully at the Royal Academy in London: 'They are not a little disgusted [...] to think that the white

⁷³ Quoted in Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 166–7.

⁷⁴ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 168.

girl should be well received in Paris after having been mistreated here!”⁷⁵ Whistler had described the painting as “waging an open war with the Academy”, and this was a war he wanted and needed to win.⁷⁶ According to Aileen Tsui, “Whistler made the repudiation of ordinary viewers’ understanding a deliberate aim of his artistic programme.”⁷⁷ And, for Whistler, the insertion of a wolf in sheep’s clothing, an overt symbolic reference to his goals for the painting itself, must have been irresistible. Whistler tried to cloak *The White Girl*’s radicality with a traditional, white, innocent veneer, and it did penetrate the fortress of high art when it was shown in the Salon des Refusés. Once there, the true, dangerous modernity of Whistler’s painting was revealed, and like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, the painting shed its innocent disguise, eager to savage the Academy with its slaving jaws.

Conclusion

Recognizing the presence of the wolf in sheep’s clothing in *The White Girl*, and investigating its meaning, underlines the importance of incorporating Animal Studies perspectives into the history of art. As John Berger wrote, “the first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood. Prior to that, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal.” And if this is so, he continues, and the first metaphor was indeed animal, “it was because the essential relation between man and animal was metaphoric.”⁷⁸ Although they have received remarkably little attention to date, animals play essential roles in Whistler’s *White Girl*. Seeing and understanding the metaphoric presence of the wolf in sheep’s clothing in the painting enriches our understanding of the sitter, the artist, and the ideas that underpin one of Whistler’s most important early works. Because *The White Girl* is a painting and not a photograph, we cannot assume that the objects that appear on the canvas are “real”, but if the animals in Whistler’s painting were

75 Whistler to Fantin, 25 May 1863, guw 08044. Cf. Petri, *Arrangement in Business*, 71.

76 Whistler to Lucas, 26 June 1862, guw 11977.

77 Tsui, “The Phantasm,” 449.

78 Berger, *Why Look at Animals*, 16.

once living beings, he chose to show them as dead and preserved. Artist's choices have meaning, and in the case of Whistler's *White Girl*, the dead animals literally support the entire painting, yet these animals have remained virtually invisible and rarely been discussed. In addition to depicting animal bodies, Whistler used animal hairs in his brushes, insects were crushed and transformed into his paint, and his canvases were primed with animal skin glues.⁷⁹ The explicit and implicit materiality of animals in the painting contributes to its extraordinarily nuanced conceptual framework. In Whistler's *White Girl*, human and nonhuman subjectivity and materiality come together to produce both a powerful metaphor and new meanings that have been waiting all this time for us to see them, hiding in plain sight, just a bit like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

79 Hackney, "Art for Art's Sake", 86–87.

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