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doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1062155>

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ROMAINE BROOKS: EMBRACING DIVERSITY

by

RONDA L. ENSOR

Under the Direction of Dr. Maria Gindhart

ABSTRACT

While the majority of literature written in regard to artist Romaine Brooks has focused on her portraiture of cross-dressing women, I intend to focus on other aspects of her oeuvre which are often neglected. Therefore, I will examine works depicting women produced or exhibited by Brooks during the years 1910 and 1911 when her output was at its most varied. I have divided these works into four different categories: nudes, interior scenes, balcony scenes, and portraits. These paintings prove that while Brooks painted in a traditional fashion, she also subtly challenged the role of women in art and society.

INDEX WORDS: Romaine Brooks, portraiture, 1910, 1911, feminism

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RONDA L. ENSOR

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2008

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2008

ROMAINE BROOKS: EMBRACING DIVERSITY

by

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May 2008

DEDICATION

To my mother and my uncle Sam who always encouraged me to learn. Thank you for all your love, sacrifices, and support throughout the years. I hope I will continue to live up to your expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Maria Gindhart for all her support and input on this document. She has been invaluable as an advisor and friend.

I want to thank Dr. Akela Reason who introduced me to Romaine Brooks and to the love of American art.

I also owe my gratitude to Dr. Susan Richmond.

Special thanks to Dr. Glenn Gunhouse, Dr. Florenzia Bazzano-Nelson, and Dr. Nancy Deffebach.

Lastly, I could not have accomplished this or anything else without the encouragement and love of my friends and family.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A wealthy American who spent the majority of her life abroad, Romaine Brooks (1874-1970) is an artist who has only recently received critical attention in her native country. Her works were exhibited only twice in the United States during her lifetime: in 1925 at New York's Wildenstein Galleries and six years later at the Arts Club of Chicago.¹ It was not until after her death in 1970 that a long overdue retrospective exhibition was held at the Smithsonian Institute's National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. Living in Paris during the artistically vibrant decades of the early twentieth century, Brooks painted the portraits of numerous figures with social and artistic standing. She was well known for her ability to capture the essence of her subject, but her work has largely been associated with her portraits of women dressed in male attire and viewed in terms of her sexuality. While I believe those works are important, these connections ultimately limit her artistic significance. Too often women artists get categorized and marginalized in ways that their male counterparts do not. Therefore, I will examine other areas of her oeuvre that are commonly overlooked, focusing on the works from her first solo exhibition in 1910 or produced through 1911. I believe that these works are important because they provide more understanding of the diversity of Brooks' output as an artist. In looking at these paintings by Brooks through a critical and theoretical lens, I intend to showcase lesser-known paintings with an emphasis on style and content in order to give a fuller sense of Brooks as an artist.

¹ Adelyn Breeskin, *Romaine Brooks: Thief of Souls* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), 26, 28.

Although Brooks was born into wealth, her home life was not one of privilege. Her mother was emotionally unstable and focused the majority of her attention on her son, St. Mar, who was mentally unsound. Her mother never encouraged her artistic endeavors, and Brooks was initially primed for a conventional life of marriage. According to Brooks, she ran away from her mother and her financial support at the age of eighteen.² Brooks then took jobs such as artistic modeling in order to survive. Brooks chose poverty over the emotional neglect and abuse of her mother. As her biographer Meryle Secrest states, this move was pioneering because “for a wealthy woman to take up an independent life at any age would have been considered so daring as to be unthinkable in the 1890s.”³ To choose a life of freedom over financial stability was a brave and rare act for a woman of Brooks’ standing. Upon the death of her mother in 1902, however, Brooks inherited her fortune. With financial stability, Brooks was able to explore her artistic ambition and her sexuality without family reproach. Due to her maverick approach to life, it is no wonder that Brooks chose to challenge societal and artistic conventions in her paintings.

Although wealth made her artistic ambitions easier to accomplish, Brooks has long been misunderstood in terms of her painting and style. Because she chose to paint mainly portraits, historically considered a lesser genre in art, her significance has been diminished. Due to the fact that she did not incorporate cubism or other modernist innovations into her work, Brooks has often been criticized as being old-fashioned. In terms of style, her paintings are usually viewed in relation to the symbolist and decadent movements of the late nineteenth century. While I tend to agree that her work reflects

² See Meryle Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974).

³ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 83.

these stylistic tendencies, I also concur with art historian Bridget Elliot's claim that "most recent studies of decadence have tended to leapfrog over the early-twentieth-century modernist period in order to draw comparisons between postmodern cultural forms and those of the 1890s."⁴ Examining Brooks' work will show the importance of the continuation of symbolism and decadence in the early twentieth century. Many different movements can and do exist at the same time, which is a fact often overlooked in art history because of categorizing movements for surveys. Although living in Paris and aware of contemporary artistic innovations, Brooks chose her own style in accordance to personal taste. Therefore, to dismiss Brooks as old-fashioned and stylistically unaware is to ignore completely the reality of her situation.

In addition to her stylistic choices, there are other reasons as to why Brooks has been obscured in art historical context. Her wealth allowed her to make art that she wanted to create without the need for patrons. Elliot states that "lingering anti-aristocratic sentiments seem to have fostered the view that [Brooks was] an amateurish dilettante as opposed to a serious professional."⁵ However, Brooks received professional training and immersed herself in art, which she never saw as a mere pastime. Not only was she part of the Parisian avant-garde through her decades-long romantic partnership with Natalie Clifford Barney, but she also painted poets, dancers, musicians, and politicians of the circle, including Gertrude Stein, the poet Jean Cocteau, the writer Marcel Proust, the poet and playwright Gabriele d'Annunzio, and the dancer

⁴ Bridget Elliot, "Performing the Picture or Painting the Other: Romaine Brooks and the Question of Decadence in 1923," in *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 76.

⁵ Bridget Elliot and Jo-Ann Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses? Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and the 'Originality of the Avant-Garde'," *Feminist Review* 40 (Spring 1992): 12.

Ida Rubinstein.⁶ Brooks offers us valuable insight into this circle through her portraiture. This is yet another reason why her oeuvre deserves further analysis.

While the majority of literature written about Brooks has focused on her portraiture of cross-dressing women, I intend to focus on other aspects of her work.⁷ Brooks has chiefly been discussed in terms of her sexual identity as a lesbian. In particular, *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924; fig. 1.1) showcases the strong, cross-dressing woman brazenly holding the viewer's gaze that has become synonymous with Brooks' paintings. While I concede that works like these are visually and psychologically interesting, I believe that, through focusing on these and similar works, the majority of her oeuvre has been neglected. Although not as overtly, her earlier, more diverse works show that while Brooks painted in a traditional fashion, she also subtly challenged the role of women in art and society.

⁶ See Breeskin, *Romaine Brooks*.

⁷ The majority of the critical examinations of Brooks' work deal with her depictions of cross-dressing women, and the focus becomes lesbianism and gender ambiguity. These works include: Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, ed., *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Elliot, "Performing the Picture," 70-82; Laurel Lampela, "Daring to be Different: A Look at Three Lesbian Artists," *Art Education* 54, no. 2 (March 2001): 45-51; Sandra Langer, "Fashion, Character, and Sexual Politics in some Romaine Brooks' Lesbian Portraits," *Art Criticism* 1 (1979-1981): 25-40; Diana Souhami, *Wild Girls. Paris, Sappho and Art: The Lives and Loves of Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks* (New York: St. Martins, 2004); *Romaine Brooks* (Poitiers: Musée Sainte-Croix, 1987); *Romaine Brooks: Portraits, Tableaux, Dessins* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); and Secrest, *Between Me and Life*.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FEMALE NUDE

Until recent decades, art history has been almost exclusively androcentric. Images of female nudity have been rampant and a standard in art, although the figures are usually idealized and objectified.⁸ According to feminist art historian Rosemary Betterton, the justification of male production and enjoyment of this genre has been that it appeals “to abstract conceptions of ideal form, beauty and aesthetic value.”⁹ In viewing the female nude in this way, the reality of the objectification and sexualizing of the model is ignored by the male establishment. This traditional framing of the female nude as an object of aesthetic contemplation is challenged by more recent feminist assertions that the nude actually signifies a sexualized relationship between the male artist and the female model. This relationship generally depends on the containment and objectification of female sexuality. Feminist art historian Lynda Nead and others have successfully demonstrated that while there is no such thing as an unmediated representation of the body, women artists have suggested alternatives. Female artists have been able to render and define different kinds of relationships between artist and model, and also between viewer and image. Although she lived prior to the majority of feminist discourse that I will discuss, Brooks was aware of and defied patriarchal norms in her life and, subversively, in her art. When women paint female nudity, does this perpetuate the idea of woman as decoration or sexual object? In particular, if the artist is a lesbian, does this further the objectification of women? I believe the answer to both

⁸ I am referencing Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁹ Rosemary Betterton, “How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon,” *Feminist Review* 19 (Spring 1985): 5.

of these questions is no. While Romaine Brooks was a lesbian and painted the female nude, she used her depictions to challenge and critique the way women have been objectified by male artists. In 1910, Brooks painted three different female nudes, two naturalistic and one stylized, in which she uses compositional elements and color to challenge the notion of woman as decoration and sexually available in art.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, painting the feminine form was a significant part of being seen as an avant-garde artist while, Betterson asserts, “at the same time it had come to signify a sexualized relationship.”¹⁰ In these brief decades, the image of the nude figure changed from a femme fatale aggressor to a passive woman available for the male artist’s pleasure. Equating the naked female form with the masculine artist’s sexual potency reduced the women in these images to mere objects for consumption. In the words of art historian Carol Duncan, “The vogue for virility in early twentieth century art is but one aspect of a total social, cultural, and economic situation that women artists had to overcome...As an ethos communicated in a hundred insidious ways, but never overtly, it effectively alienated women from the collective, mutually supportive endeavor that was the avant-garde.”¹¹ Although she was a lesbian and a part of the avant-garde, Brooks portrayed the female nude with empathy and a dignity that is lacking in many of her male contemporaries’ depictions. Because of this, her works initially appear more conventional and less innovative in comparison to the male artists of this period. Brooks chose a less obvious approach than her masculine counterparts to represent modern subjects by subversively utilizing traditional iconography to challenge the patriarchal artistic establishment.

¹⁰ Betterson, “How Do Women Look,” 12.

¹¹ Carol Duncan, “Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Art,” in *The Aesthetics of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90.

In the first of two works depicting a naturalistic female nude, Brooks reinvents this classic tradition with what could be called a progressive feminist critique. In *White Azaleas* (1910; fig. 2.1), Brooks shows the decaying effect of valuing a woman's sexuality over intellect through her use of symbols, colors, and positioning. On first viewing, the work seems routine in its representation. Both the room and the female form appear very naturalistic. The nude is reclining in an interior space, neither engaging the viewer by direct gaze nor covering her body. Because the subject looks away, we are able to appreciate her naked form without a hint of reproach. She openly displays her chest by propping her head with an arm, and she appears deep in thought. This is in opposition to artists such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir who, according to art historian Tamar Garb, painted the female nude where "woman exists without thought, conflict, or even self-consciousness."¹² While Renoir and other male artists represent the female nude as a vapid body, Brooks portrays her subject as exhibiting intellect, through her pensive appearance.

In terms of imagery, there is a juxtaposition of the masculine and feminine elements in the painting. Contrasting male and female imagery will become the focus of Brooks' portraiture later in her career, especially in her depictions of androgynous lesbians. In this painting, the wall behind the model has panels showing ships at full mast (the masculine) with the fullest, most prominent ship appearing over the genitals of the nude. At the same time, the flowers, classic symbols of femininity, echo the lines of the model. Their whiteness and volume overcome the darkness of the room much like the nude woman adds an element of excitement to an otherwise drab interior space. While the paintings of masculine subjects are bland and blend with the background, the

¹² Tamar Garb, "Renoir and the Natural Woman," *Oxford Art Journal* 8, no. 2 (1985): 7.

feminine flowers and the nude female are the most dominant aspects of the canvas. The femininity of the work commands the focus of the viewer while the masculine elements are not as easily discernable.

While experimenting with gender representations, Brooks also uses her preferred monochromatic palette of blacks, browns, grays, and whites in *Aza/eas*. While the colors make a harmonious composition, they give the painting a somber quality, and further analysis of the color scheme provides some insight into the meaning of the work. Though the tradition of the nude in Western art has “epitomized the objectification of female sexuality,”¹³ Brooks has added elements in this composition that temper the eroticism of the subject. More specifically, she has shaded the woman’s stomach, arm, face, and legs with a greenish hue giving the appearance of bruised or rotting flesh. With the exception of the thighs, right arm, and breasts of the model, the rest of the body gives the semblance of decay because of this coloring. Furthering the image of decomposition, the skin on her lower legs and on her left arm seems translucent revealing the cadaverous form underneath. While the color in some ways mirrors the couch’s tonalities, the shading is deliberately placed on specific areas of the body. Brooks has highlighted the parts of the figure, the thighs and breasts, which could initially stimulate some viewers. However, she places the most obvious discoloration on the lower torso of the model, over the reproductive organs. This seemingly negates and corrupts the probability of motherhood, a traditional represented role for women in art. The left arm appears decomposed showing bone through the translucent skin. Although the hand propping up the head is a common pose, it also draws a connection from the figure’s breast to her brain. Because the arm simultaneously opens the nude’s

¹³ Betterton, “How Do Women Look,” 4.

chest to the viewer and supports her head, this shows a connection between the intellect and sexuality. While the breasts seem healthy, the face of the model takes on the greenish-gray tint of the arm. By exposing her chest, the nude emphasizes her sexuality at the expense of her intellect. Through this imagery, Brooks comments on the deteriorating effects of valuing a woman's body over her brain.

In portraying the sickly demeanor of the model, Brooks comments on a way in which women were frequently viewed in the late nineteenth century by society. Medical discourses of the time determined that women, because of their biology and monthly menstruation, were “permanently in a state of illness.”¹⁴ Studies such as these perpetuated the myth of woman as fragile. Art historian Whitney Chadwick argues that there was a trend in “fin-de-siècle and symbolist fantasies that linked female sexuality with death.”¹⁵ While a woman's menstruation—or the ending of this through menopause—rendered her sickly, death was the only way to render her sexless. With death or serious illness, English professor Bram Dijkstra asserts that women can make “no further overt erotic demands upon the male, guaranteeing him a restful respite from the energy-draining requirements of sexual involvement.”¹⁶ Because of the strenuousness of industrial society at the turn of the century, the “new woman” was seen as a threat to gender roles because she was in the workforce and beginning to demand additional rights. In the words of art historian Karl S. Guthke, the imagery linking feminine sexuality and death was an “ill-disguised fear of [man's] own

¹⁴ Garb, “Renoir and the Natural Woman,” 5.

¹⁵ Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 75.

¹⁶ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36.

unrestrained promiscuity and death.”¹⁷ Therefore, the depiction of women as sickly or deceased was a way to render a woman as saintly and sexless or without power.

Although this idea is an alternative reading for the unhealthy appearance of the model, the literature on Brooks’s life and opinions would dissuade this argument. By entering the workforce, Brooks was a part of the New Woman culture and thus would not have a need or desire to undermine her own authority or rights. While the exposed naked body of the model is depicted with various semblances of decay, I believe Brooks utilizes this effect as a way to comment on and criticize the image of the fragile woman painted by male artists. Brooks essentially shows how an ailing woman could appear, discolored skin and all, instead of idealizing the subject.

While depicting the body in this decomposing manner, Brooks also shows a technique which is used to diagnose and treat illnesses, the x-ray. In *Aza/eas*, the left arm and the lower legs of the model appear almost clear; the skeletal form is alluded to through the skin with darker hues outlining the bone. This effect is similar to x-rays due to the “characteristic translucent border of flesh around the opaque bones.”¹⁸ Not only did this innovation positively affect the scientific and medical communities, the x-ray also had a profound influence on the artistic avant-garde. According to art historian Linda Dalrymple Henderson, the discovery of the x-ray in 1895 became “one factor contributing to a changed concept of the relation of space and objects in modern culture.”¹⁹ The ability to see through clothing and skin to the bone was an idea that changed the way even laymen thought of matter. The x-ray was widely publicized and

¹⁷ Karl S. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 216.

¹⁸ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “X-Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists,” *Art Journal* (Winter 1988): 325.

¹⁹ Henderson, “X-Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality,” 323.

affected the way modern artists such as Marcel Duchamp and František Kupka painted the human body prior to World War I. Her experimentation with skin and bone suggests that Brooks was aware of modern inventions and their significance in art and the world. Living in Paris at the time and surrounding herself in intellectual and artistic circles, Brooks would have been aware of these developments in science and art. Utilizing information such as the x-ray proves Brooks chose which stylistic elements to incorporate in her paintings. Although she still used figurative representation, she subtly played with the way she portrayed her subjects. In depicting the body in a deconstructive way, Brooks joined her fellow artists in experimenting with space and matter.

While seemingly incorporating new discoveries in her work, Brooks additionally utilized standard iconography to enhance the meaning of her painting. With the use of flower imagery, Brooks further critiques the traditional nude. Although the elongated figure is the central focus of the painting, she is juxtaposed with healthy, blooming azalea bushes. Because the composition is named for the flowers, and which are in the foreground and are the brightest element in the painting, the importance of the figure is lessened. She almost becomes secondary to the flowers. At the turn of the century, art historian Annette Stott asserts that the flower's "main usefulness to humankind was perceived to reside in the aesthetic pleasure given through stimulation of the senses—visual, tactile, and olfactory. By this time, the image of the woman in fine art had also become associated with pure beauty and aesthetic pleasure."²⁰ Furthering this affiliation, Brooks has mimicked the slight curve of the female figure with the outline of the flowers. The flowers are almost purely white while, as already discussed, the flesh

²⁰ Annette Stott, "Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition," *American Art* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 62.

of the model seems partially discolored and in decay. Although the outline of the flowers is more curvaceous, the woman also appears slender and elongated in contrast. Brooks seems to have inverted a traditional scene of a woman in an interior space with cut, fresh flowers. Here, the azaleas are potted, not cut, therefore continuing to live, while the woman seems in the process of death. Although the flowers thrive in this controlled interior space, confining her to this environment produces the opposite effect on the woman. Unlike the potted plant, women cannot flourish when limited in roles or constricted in accessibility to society. In considering the woman as equivalent to the flowers, the viewer becomes aware that while both are living, the figure of the woman suffers in this comparison.

Through the juxtaposition of the subject to the room, Brooks examines the contradiction in correlating women to decoration. During the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art historian Bailey Van Hook states that artists “equated the women in their paintings with the beautiful objects with which they were pictured, inviting the viewer to contemplate both.”²¹ In *White Azaleas*, Brooks depicts a simplified room, in keeping with her personal taste. While Brooks has carefully outlined the figure, the hair of the nude merges with the pillow making her part of the room adornment. The body is intact while the head of the nude becomes one with the inanimate object behind her. Through fusing the model with the furnishings of the room, Brooks comments on the female in art. By valuing the female’s naked form over her intellect, the model becomes nothing more than room decoration.

²¹ Bailey Van Hook, “Decorative Images of American Women: The Aristocratic Aesthetic of the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 60.

A comparison to James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *Nude Model Reclining* (1900; fig. 2.2) demonstrates how Brooks offers an alternative way of picturing the nude. Whistler was a favorite of Brooks', and his drawing is similar to *Azaleas*. With his title and unfinished background, Whistler places his attention on the female figure. She is the object; no other item in the background is as clearly painted or as identifiable. Brooks is less overt; she shifts her focal point to the azaleas via the title and the sheer mass of the flowers in the composition. While both nudes appear available in relation to their positioning on the canvas, Brooks has made her model less enticing than in Whistler's *Nude*. In *White Azaleas*, the model turns her gaze away from the viewer while *Nude Model Reclining* meets that gaze in an inviting way. Because of this, the subject of Brooks' painting appears less sexualized and more intuitive than in Whistler's. The model in Brooks' work appears less classically idealized through her more slender shape and smaller chest. Unlike *Nude Model Reclining* whose breasts are rather perfectly round and voluptuous, the nude in *White Azaleas* has natural breasts that follow the laws of gravity. Also, Whistler produces a voluptuous woman while Brooks paints a more elongated and lean figure. The stomach and hips of Whistler's figure appear full indicating fertility while, as explained earlier, Brooks discolors this area seemingly negating the possibility of motherhood while also giving her the appearance of disease and decay. Although both Whistler and Brooks paint the feminine nude, Brooks portrays a more naturalistic woman who is more than just an object of lust. In comparison, Whistler has portrayed the female as exotic by the placement of the turban on her head and the hookah beside the couch. He perpetuates the odalisque tradition in art in that uses "the harem setting which has connotations of extreme sensuality,

represented by the rich materials and jewelry, and of slavery.”²² While the woman in Whistler’s work must submit due to her status as a slave, Brooks’ model assumedly has a choice. In comparing the two, Brooks critiques the feminine objectification of the female through color and symbols while Whistler reinforces this practice with *Nude Model Reclining*.

In *The Red Jacket* (1910; fig. 2.3), Brooks again painted a naturalistic female nude in an interior space. Here, Brooks uses a vertical composition in contrast to the horizontal orientation of *White Azaleas*. Since the model is partially clothed, and standing upright, she seems less eroticized than the subject in *White Azaleas*. Because of her stance and averted gaze, the subject appears preoccupied. Her melancholic countenance combined with the somber palette gives the painting a sense of sadness. The environment is sparse and depressing; it has hardly any furnishings, only a screen and a table. The rest of the seemingly random objects become decoration. The brightest object in the painting is a gleaming silver dish which seems to point directly to the nude body. The table has no chairs to sit on, the dish is empty, and the jacket does not cover the model. The objects in this composition appear more incomplete than in *White Azaleas*. The canvas is lighter in terms of color but more confusing because of the décor.

As in *White Azaleas*, Brooks’ choices of color are also significant in *Red Jacket*. As mentioned earlier, the correlation of female sexuality to sickness or death was a trend during this period. Much like the obsession with a thin body image today, women, realizing that a “consumptive look...was thought to be evidence of a saintly disposition, began to cultivate that look of tubercular virtue by starving themselves...which gives the

²² Betterton, “How Do Women Look,” 5.

sufferer a false sense of virtuous self-control.”²³ Because much of the literature and art of the period perpetuated this view, women began literally making themselves sick to present physical divinity. As stated by Chadwick, some contemporary critics felt the girl in *Red Jacket* appeared sickly, to which Brooks responded that the model was “a poor girl who was cold.”²⁴ By making this comment, Brooks characterizes this work as a portrait of a model rather than a painting of a traditional nude. While a traditional nude would be eroticized and idealized, Brooks has depicted a real woman who gets chilled and sick. The monochromatic and dark colors help validate the diseased reading of the model, while the yellow and green tonalities of the model’s skin give her an unhealthy appearance. If taken in context with other elements of the painting, a subversive element emerges. Brooks chooses to portray real women, not idealized images of women. By doing this, she begins to demystify the representation of the female in art.

While in *White Azaleas* she utilizes the flowers for juxtaposition with the nude, Brooks uses a gleaming silver dish in *Red Jacket*. In terms of representation, Thomas Munco asserts that a “host of concave objects, such as cups, vases...are traditionally associated with the female reproductive organs.”²⁵ By placing the dish in the composition, Brooks echoes the femininity of the woman in the same vein as *Azaleas*. This is reiterated through the dish pointing to the area of comparison, the model’s genitalia. However, the silver dish as an inanimate object conflicts with the living model. The very nature of the silver metal makes it cold and formal which is the opposite of traditional feminine or maternal instincts. A woman does not necessarily have to be a

²³ Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 29.

²⁴ Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 75.

²⁵ Thomas Munco, “Suggestion and Symbolism in the Arts,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 2 (December 1956): 162.

mother or nurturing just like the dish does not have to be a vessel for anything other than itself. Because Brooks shows an empty container, it becomes decorative instead of utilitarian. While the silver is shiny and pristinely on display, the nude appears neither as bright nor as clean. Both the model and dish become decoration, although the model does not flourish in this role.

In contrast to *White Azaleas* and *Red Jacket*, Brooks breaks with her previous naturalistic nudes and portrays a more stylized figure in the *Masked Archer* (1910; fig 2.4). This work shows Brooks' debt to the symbolist and decadent movements of the late nineteenth century. In comparison to the other paintings of this year, the *Masked Archer* is the most dream-like and different of the paintings Brooks executed. Nothing in the painting appears rational, although the combined elements provide visual and compositional interest. The scene appears to be set over a body of water rippling from the horizon towards the viewer while a stylized naked female is tied to a post at left. A bizarre masked dwarf stands on a table on the right side of the canvas shooting arrows at the female. The oddity of this image gives the painting an eerie, dream-like quality. Although similarly slender and androgynous, the nude represented here appears less real and more impersonal than the one in either *White Azaleas* or *Red Jacket*. Furthermore, the *Masked Archer* has more of a narrative than the previous paintings. While the masked archer attempts to penetrate the female with an arrow, she appears uninterested and defiant. Two odd horizontal lines, perhaps clouds, in the top right of the canvas direct the viewer's gaze to the bound nude. Because the whereabouts of the work are unknown and the only reproductions are in black and white, the meaning of the lines remains unclear.

The *Masked Archer* involves a direct narrative which is lacking in the two previously discussed nudes. In this work, Brooks based the painting on the Gabriele D'Annunzio play, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*. According to scholar Dr. Jean-Pierre Lafouge, Saint Sebastian was a wealthy Roman soldier and close friend to the Emperor Diocletian, "the Roman ruler who hated and, subsequently, persecuted Christians."²⁶ While it is unknown when Sebastian became a Christian, he began speaking out against their persecution. Diocletian eventually condemned Sebastian to death by archers at the Palatine Hippodrome. Sebastian survived the assault then publicly confronted and reproached the emperor for his intolerance of the Christians. Because of this, art historian Theodore Rousseau, Jr. states that Diocletian had Sebastian "clubbed to death and thrown into the Cloaca Maxima, the great sewer of Rome, so that the Christians would not revere him as a martyr."²⁷ While the story remains fairly straightforward, the depiction of the Saint has varied. Prior to the Renaissance, the emphasis was on content over form. Besides Christ, Saint Sebastian was "the only legitimate opportunity for a painter living in a Christian society to exercise his or her skill in painting a male nude."²⁸ Different variations of imagery depicting Saint Sebastian exist throughout history. Early portraits show Sebastian fully clothed and holding an arrow as an attribute. By the Renaissance, he is portrayed either alone and wounded by arrows or naked and tied to a post while being attacked by archers. Rousseau claims that the latter imagery, like the one painted by Brooks, is the most

²⁶ Dr. Jean-Pierre Lafouge, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, www.marquette.edu/haggerty/collections/sebas.html

²⁷ Theodore Rousseau, Jr., "The Saint Sebastian by Andrea del Castagno," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 7, no. 5 (January 1949): 125.

²⁸ Lafouge, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*.

frequent depiction of Saint Sebastian. While this common scenario is reproduced by Brooks, she also chooses to depict Sebastian as a woman rather than a man.

In terms of meaning, the D'Annunzio play, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, was written with Claude Debussy for Ida Rubinstein who, according to Chadwick, "plays a heterosexual male saint adored by a homosexual Roman emperor."²⁹ The play received mixed reviews from critics and the public. It was controversial because of the casting of Rubinstein, a Jewish female, in the role of the Christian Saint Sebastian but also because "both D'Annunzio and Debussy were proclaimed nonbelievers."³⁰ The subject matter undoubtedly intrigued Brooks due to her proclivity to cross-dress and her purported romantic relationships with the play's author and with Rubinstein. According to her biographer Secrest and from letters by Brooks, she was in love with D'Annunzio who in turn was enamored of Rubinstein.³¹ Biographer Diana Souhami states that Brooks began an affair with Rubinstein "to take revenge on D'Annunzio for the pain he had caused her."³² In her painting, Brooks implies this personal connection to Rubinstein by rendering the personality of the model more pronounced than in her previous two works. In the *Masked Archer*, the figure appears more empowered as evident in the subject's defiant stance. Additionally, Brooks paints the figure's hair to resemble fire, which symbolizes passion and destruction. Chadwick argues that D'Annunzio conceived "a Saint Sebastian whose masochism is a vehicle for the expression of Christian symbolism, erotic imagery, heroic suffering, and violence."³³ This explanation of the play begins to clarify some of the imagery in the *Masked Archer*.

²⁹ Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 79.

³⁰ Rousseau, "The Saint Sebastian," 124.

³¹ See Secrest, *Between Me and Life*.

³² Souhami, *Wild Girls*, 131.

³³ Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room*, 24.

The woman is bound in a Christ-like manner, eroticized through her nudity, with an anonymous dwarf violently attempting to take her life with his arrows.

In *Masked Archer*, the female nude is bound and persecuted like Saint Sebastian. If she is a crucified figure, what is the crime for which she is being punished? Because the D'Annunzio play had homoerotic undertones, the perceivable crime would be homosexuality. The sensuality of the play was another reason for the Archbishop of Paris to threaten "Roman Catholics with excommunication if they attended a performance."³⁴ Here, Sebastian, played by a woman, is persecuted for rebuffing the advances of the emperor, a man. In correlating homosexuality to Sebastian's crucifixion, Brooks inverts the traditional ideal because, according to psychotherapist Lee Crespi, "as the means of procreation and perpetuation of the species, heterosexuality is not only deemed necessary but is raised to the level of the holy."³⁵ Therefore, to be "other" in the face of the holy is to be bound and persecuted. If Sebastian is the symbol of homosexuality in this painting, the prosecutor would be heterosexuality. While Sebastian (homosexuality) is a slender androgynous figure, the dwarf (heterosexuality) appears as a strange and misshapen male. Although the dwarf hides his identity, the female does not and is not ashamed of her state. The male figure, who does not reveal himself to the viewer, becomes more suspicious and guilty because of his disguise. In comparing homosexuality to Sebastian's persecution, Brooks inverts the less common, homosexuality, with the normative, heterosexuality.

³⁴ Rousseau, "The Saint Sebastian," 124.

³⁵ Lee Crespi, "Some Thoughts on the Role of Mourning in the Development of a Positive Lesbian Identity," in *Disorienting Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Reappraisals of Sexual Identities*, ed. Thomas Domenici and Ronnie C. Lesser (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

She repositions homosexuality in a way that makes the viewer identify and contemplate unjust opinions.

Since the figure is naked and confined, her sexuality is therefore restricted and assaulted in this work. She is attacked by an arrow projected by an abnormal figure in the dwarf. In traditional iconography, Munco argues that the “arrow is associated, not only with birds because of its flight, but with the penis because of its shape and piercing action.”³⁶ The archer symbolizes heterosexuality through shooting his ‘arrows’ at the naked female. If this is the symbol of heterosexual, the masked dwarf gives it an abnormal representation. Though she is about to incur either a wound or death, the nude appears neither scared nor apologetic. She turns away from the symbolic penetration in defiance, remaining true to herself. In rebuffing the attack of these arrows and man, the woman becomes an emblem of homosexuality which neither welcomes nor fears heterosexuality. The two figures are juxtaposed in almost opposite extremes; the woman is nude while the man is almost entirely covered from head to toe. Although the elements around her are more constricting than those in the prior two paintings of nudes, she seems more cognizant and in control.

All three images of the female nude bring into question the idea of the gaze and how Brooks’ identity as a lesbian could render their readings as different. Because the gaze is generally associated with power and positioned as male with the female in the objectified position, placing this within the context of lesbianism is rather dubious. Theorist Chris Straayer argues that the lesbian look “requires exchange. It looks for a

³⁶ Munco, “Suggestion and Symbolism,” 162.

returning look, not just a receiving look. It sets up two-directional activity.”³⁷ While *White Azaleas* and *Red Jacket* portray nudes, the woman that appears the most erotic is the stylized figure in *Masked Archer*. As Brooks and the model Rubinstein had a sexual relationship, the lesbian look is possible in *Masked Archer*, although the figure is depicted less realistically than in the two other paintings. As stated by theorists Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, “while the male is locked into sexual identity, the female can at least pretend that she is other—in fact, sexual mobility would seem to be a distinguishing feature of femininity in its cultural construction.”³⁸ Woman has more flexibility when it comes to identity because of the unequal power distribution of power in society. This also affects the gaze as women did not have the ascendancy or equality to men at the turn of the century. There is a difference between “the look (associated with the eye) and the gaze (associated with the phallus).”³⁹ The look has more duality because the seer can both identify and desire. Furthermore, the lesbian gaze is problematic because homosexuality has traditionally been viewed through repression. While Brooks would utilize her “sexual mobility” as a woman in her *Self Portrait* (1923; fig. 2.5) and other such paintings later in her career, during this period she was less overt in her feminist outlook.

While many critics lament that Brooks’ style was old-fashioned in the age of modernism, she was able to present an artistic standard such as the female nude and challenge the way women were portrayed. With *White Azaleas*, *Red Jacket*, and the

³⁷ Chris Straayer, “The Hypothetical Lesbian Heroine,” in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 344.

³⁸ Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, “The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing,” in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

³⁹ Evans and Gamman, “The Gaze Revisited,” 16.

Masked Archer, Brooks portrays three varying examples of female nudes. In *White Azaleas* and *Red Jacket*, she paints naturalistic anonymous models and uses imagery and color to question the various roles and representations of women. With *Masked Archer*, Brooks has furthered the critique of female nudity and sexuality through identification with the model, Rubinstein. Because of her sexual relationship with the model, Brooks was in a position that was not shared by the majority of woman painters. In spite of this relationship, she is able to portray Rubinstein in a way that is both erotic and intelligent. Brooks's attention to both the model's intellect and sexuality is in contrast to the ways in which male artists have traditionally depicted the nude. In all three paintings, Brooks uses imagery to comment on problems which are still being discussed today, the objectification of women and the representations of alternate sexualities.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERIOR SCENES

Throughout 1910 and 1911, Brooks displayed and painted images of women in interior spaces with a feminist undertone. While male artists had unrestricted access to the city, women artists during this and earlier periods were fairly limited in where they could respectfully go in society. Many female artists were largely confined to interior spaces, which were often the subjects of their paintings. While later in her career she painted more overtly feminist subjects, Brooks always had a progressive outlook on women and their roles in society. During this period, as Julie Anne Springer states, that woman “was largely perceived as an ‘interior’ being: emotional, intuitive, and imaginative.”⁴⁰ When portraying women in interiors, Brooks emphasizes their intellect in addition to conveying their strong emotions. Brooks delicately renders the images with multiple meaning and layers. The two images that I will discuss in this chapter both find the models deep in thought as opposed to being vacant expressionless women. Brooks imbues her female subjects with depth and intellect even within their limited sphere of existence. In her images of women in interior spaces, Brooks subtly critiques the roles of women of that time through color, imagery, and positioning while reworking similar paintings by earlier artists.

In *La Debutante (The Pink Dress, 1910-1911)* [fig. 3.1], Brooks contradicts the traditionally happy occasion of a young woman’s public debut with a dark canvas and somber debutante. While Brooks herself was never a debutante and detested being put on display, her mother sent her to a finishing school in Geneva “to groom her for a

⁴⁰ Julie Anne Springer, “Art and the Feminine Muse: Women in Interiors by John White Alexander,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (Autumn 1985-Winter 1986): 4.

wealthy marriage.”⁴¹ Her negative thoughts on this rite show through the model’s demeanor along with the melancholic coloring of the canvas. While the debutante is dressed for her upcoming party, there is no evidence of the festivities. This painting, like many of her others, has a minimal background with the emphasis placed on the emotion of the subject. Here, a solitary woman emerges from the shadows to stand beside a barely discernable table which holds a ceramic rooster. The darkness overwhelms the work, leaving the rooster and woman the most defined and brightest objects in the room. Moreover, the background of the painting reflects the red tonality of the pink dress and red of the rooster. This wash on the canvas gives the impression of viewing the scene through “rose-colored glasses.” While this phrase means looking at things in a positive light and seeing situations as better than they are, Brooks belies this image through the presence of the woman. The darkness of the canvas and appearance of the debutante contradict the festivities ahead.

Because Brooks was so deliberate in her choice of subject and manner of painting, the positioning of the ceramic bird facing the woman is rather significant. The image of the rooster can be interpreted as heralding a new day since it crows at dawn each morning. The imagery of the debutante and rooster immersed in twilight aids the reading of this symbolism. While this is a new beginning for the debutante who is becoming a woman, Brooks did not feel inclined to participate in this ritual nor does her subject reflect this spirit. In terms of the finishing school she attended and her outlook, Brooks always “knew she was going to escape.”⁴² Although the rooster stares at the woman and heralds a new chapter in her life, this ritual makes the woman appear sickly

⁴¹ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 76.

⁴² Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 76.

as evident in the coloring of her skin. That she is not embracing the festivities is indicated by the darkness and her solitude. The ceramic object is a rooster; a male animal known to for its aggressiveness. Although an inanimate object, its assertiveness in looking cannot be ignored. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the gaze is associated with the phallus. Because of this, the rooster lords over the debutante through its direct and unwavering stare. Even in her solitude the woman cannot escape being displayed or objectified as the ceramic rooster stares directly at her.

In juxtaposing the debutante with the ceramic rooster, Brooks adds another layer to the painting and its meaning. Because the rooster is the most identifiable object in the painting along with the woman, their pairing seems significant. Brooks seems to be making a more critical comparison. The rooster is a decorative accent in the room, a commodity. Similarly, sociologist Dean Knudsen asserts that the debut of the woman “represents the culmination of extensive and *expensive* efforts to attain high status.”⁴³ The debutante has been prepared for this moment through years of costly schooling and training. Therefore, she has also become an expense to be displayed much like the ceramic animal. To echo this, Brooks painted the rooster gazing directly at the woman. Furthermore, both the woman and the rooster appear to be floating in a sea of dark color; they are simultaneously emerging from the darkness and dissolving into this void. Like her commentary on the female nude, Brooks shows how easily a woman can become invisible in society through antiquated rituals such as a debut.

In much the same fashion as in *White Azaleas*, Brooks portrays the flesh of the model in *La Debutante* with a greenish-grey color that gives the illusion of decaying

⁴³ Dean D. Knudsen, “Socialization to Elitism: A Study of Debutantes,” *Sociological Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1968): 301.

flesh. The face of the model gives the illusion of an x-ray with the image of the skull showing through the skin as indicated by the hollowed eyes and triangle area around the nose. In echoing the effects in *Azaleas*, *La Debutante* also reflects the possible influence of the x-ray and its capabilities on Brooks. However, the female in *Azaleas* is in a natural state as indicated by her nudity. While the debutante also displays translucency of the skin, she is formally dressed and beautified with make-up indicated by the unnatural coloring of her face in contrast to the skin of her arms and neck. The cheeks, lips, and eyes of the model appear to be adorned with rouge because of their unnatural hue. According to art historian Susan Sidlauskas, beauty regiments at the time reveal that for years “society beauties had ingested arsenic water to make their skin more translucent, thus allowing the blue capillaries beneath to show through.”⁴⁴ In *La Debutante*, the left arm of the model appears almost translucent; the skeletal form is alluded to through the skin with darker hues outlining the bone. Furthermore, makeup of this period had a lead base which is poisonous to the human body. While the debut is in essence a beginning of womanhood for this young woman, she is expected to beautify herself with materials which may ultimately lead to her demise.

In *La Debutante*, Brooks comments on rituals and expectations of women during this time. Brooks shows the deteriorating effect of placing women in antiquated rituals that rely on birth right and social standing over intellect and merit. Although the model is dressed in a pink frock, she stares blankly from the canvas as if in a trance. While she does not appear excited for this event, the subject is placed on display for the viewer and assumingly for her debut. Because the debut “may be regarded as a *rite de*

⁴⁴ Susan Sidlauskas, “Painting Skin: John Singer Sargent’s ‘Madame X,’” *American Art* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 24.

passage into adult status, providing the context for introducing the young lady to eligible young men,” this festivity attempts to thrust the debutante into the path of marriage and ultimately motherhood.⁴⁵ The act of being objectified and the upcoming celebration seemingly destroys the woman as evident in the deteriorating appearance of her skin. To emphasize this, Brooks has placed what looks like a skull in the front of the woman’s dress directly over her breast. While this could be coincidence, it seems deliberate because of the lack of discernable folds in the dress. Furthermore, the pink rouge on her cheeks accentuates her unhealthy demeanor because of its unnatural brightness, particularly when contrasted with the sickly hue of the skin.

Unlike in *La Debutante*, where the title focused on the subject, Brooks names *Le Piano* (1910; fig. 3.2) for an inanimate object outside the scope of the canvas. In doing this, Brooks continued a trend from the late nineteenth century of artists painting “female subjects with seemingly arbitrary titles.”⁴⁶ While both works portray a woman in an interior space, *The Piano* shows the model in profile with more detailed surroundings. Without the title, the subject matter of the painting would be rather indiscernible. Because of the monochromatic color palette, Brooks’ paintings usually give an impression of melancholy and seriousness. However, the overwhelming feelings of this composition are concentration and interest because of the inclination of the model towards the left of the canvas. The model’s face is shown only in profile; her focus is outside the scope of the canvas. Not only are her eyes trained directly to the left of the canvas, but her entire body is shifted in the chair in the direction of the music. She is literally sitting on the edge of her seat. Also, the model is formally dressed with

⁴⁵ Knudsen, “Socialization to Elitism,” 301.

⁴⁶ Van Hook, “Decorative Images of American Women,” 46.

only her face and neck exposed. The veiling of the hat is overwhelming and gives the impression of a horse's mane. Its line directs the viewer's attention to the pot of flowers on the right-hand side of the painting. While the majority of the canvas is dark, the white flowers immediately catch the eye because they are the brightest part of the work.

In terms of clothing, the subject appears overly dressed for this interior space. Because she wears her veiled hat and tasseled cape, she seems either to have just arrived or to be about to depart. Both the cape and veil have utilitarian functions of protection from the elements, but they also shield the woman's body from being observed or admired. According to the *Survey of Historic Costume: A History of Western Dress*, the clothing reveals to the viewer that it is most likely late afternoon. During this period, "cap es were especially popular for evening wear."⁴⁷ In this instance, the cape engulfs the subject, obscuring her figure. However, the most interesting element of clothing worn by the model is the veiled hat. Art historian Marni Kessler states that the veil is an item of intrigue because "the seductive and mysterious aspects of wearing a veil, the ways in which it can generate a surface of fantasized beauty, know no geographic or temporal boundaries."⁴⁸ The veil in this instance is pulled back and is not concealing the woman's face, lessening greatly its erotic attributes. Because she is indoors, the model does not hide behind the veil in an area that welcomes the female presence. Nevertheless, it is placed on her head in anticipation of her departure.

⁴⁷ Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, ed., *Survey of Historic Costume: A History of Western Dress*, 4th ed. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2006), 369.

⁴⁸ Marni Reva Kessler, *Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet's Paris* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 143.

Because the model is fully clothed and not confronting the viewer, her presence continues a tradition of symbolist depictions of women. The subject is surrounded by various items, such as the potted flowers, which suggests culture and the harnessing of nature. Although the female has generally been associated with nature, cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner argues that, “since it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture should find it ‘natural’ to subordinate, not to say oppress, her.”⁴⁹ The potted flowers are a symbol of what the figure has become—the combination of nature and culture. While the woman listens to the piano, she cannot engage the viewer because of her contemplation of the music. In turn, the viewer meditates on her, the flowers, and the rest of the scene depicted on the canvas. She is obviously immersed in culture, much like the viewer who is studying the painting. In this period, woman “was believed to excel in those arts conducive to emotional outpourings.”⁵⁰ While the subject in this painting is not producing this passionate art, she is intently consuming it. Her intensity showcases her interest in the music. She is contained in the space by the walls and her bulky and restrictive clothing, which mimics the form of the chair. Although woman was identified with nature, she was confined to certain spaces such as interiors during this period.

Brooks repeatedly uses flowers in her paintings as a symbolic motif. She may be drawn to the motif because “flowers, as the seat of a plant’s reproductive activity, contain both male and female reproductive organs.”⁵¹ In her later works, she blends both masculine and feminine in her portraits to depict androgynous figures. In these

⁴⁹ Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1972): 12.

⁵⁰ Springer, “Art and the Feminine Muse,” 4.

⁵¹ Stott, “Floral Femininity,” 65.

earlier paintings, Brooks uses the flowers in juxtaposition with the female figure to challenge conceptions and roles of women in society. While both the flowers and models appear as decorative objects, the flowers thrive on the canvas while the women begin to fade. In comparing *Le Piano* with *White Azaleas*, the colors, settings, and figures seem so similar that the works could be companion pieces. In fact, *Azaleas* could present an older version of the woman from the *Piano* due to the maturing of the flowers in the painting. Though the flowers were fuller and more eroticizing in *Azaleas*, their presence is significantly diminished in this work. Because the woman is using her intellect and artistic sensibilities, she becomes less decorative and therefore less flower-like. In this painting, the flowers are neither as voluminous nor as visually complementary to the female form; they are horizontal while the figure is vertically erect making them less harmonious. Here, the flowers act as less of a comparison to the female form and provide more beauty for the viewer to contemplate, much like the woman who is meditating on the music.

To compare *Le Piano* to a work by a female contemporary, I will look to Lilla Cabot Perry's *Le Paravent Jaune* (*The Yellow Screen*, 1907) [fig. 3.3]. While Perry was a quarter of a century older than Brooks, they shared many similarities in their lives and careers. Both were American women artists working at the turn of the century, born into wealthy families, surrounded by elite artistic circles (Perry was close friends with Monet and many of the Impressionists), and painting and living abroad.⁵² While Brooks was independent and lived openly as a lesbian, Perry was more conventionally married with children. Still, *Le Paravent Jaune* and *Le Piano* have similar compositions. In each

⁵² See Meredith Martindale and Pamela Moffat, *Lilla Cabot Perry: An American Impressionist*, (Washington, DC: The National Museum of Women in Arts, 1990).

painting, the female subject is portrayed sitting askew in a chair, deep in thought, and staring outside the scope of the canvas. The works are each named for an inanimate object, the yellow screen and the piano. Nevertheless, the styles and palettes of the artists provide each painting with entirely different moods. While Brooks paints in dark, earth tones, Perry utilizes pastel colors that brighten the canvas and the mood of the work. Brooks' darker colors give her canvas a more serious impression than the cheerful hues of Perry's composition. Additionally, both Brooks and Perry incorporate flowers into their arrangements. In *Le Paravent Jaune*, as Meredith Martindale asserts, the model "muses over past memories symbolized by a single white gardenia which has fallen to the floor."⁵³ In contrast, Brooks leaves her flowers alive in a pot and has the figure turn her back towards them. In *Le Piano*, Brooks makes the model more interested in music and culture than in the decoration of the room.

In *La Debutante* and *Le Piano*, Brooks focuses on bourgeois women in interior scenes. Although both works are reminiscent of paintings by earlier artists, Brooks was critiquing the status of women in society: seen in terms of decoration and sexuality and not in terms of intellect. While *Le Piano* portrays a woman listening intently to music off-canvas, *La Debutante* comments on the antiquated rituals which perpetuate a valuing of beauty over personality or intelligence. When Brooks depicts unknown women, there is an emotional intensity that is lacking in many of her society portraits. In showing these women in interior spaces, Brooks shows the analogy "between remote interior settings and the inner chambers of the mind."⁵⁴ *La Debutante* portrays anxiety and sadness in contrast to the intent concentration of the subject in *Le Piano*. Although these works

⁵³ Martindale and Moffat, *Lilla Cabot Perry*, 66.

⁵⁴ Springer, "Art and the Feminine Muse," 1.

juxtapose the figures to inanimate objects, the meanings of the paintings are deeper than the contemplation of beauty. Brooks shows her female subjects with depth even within their limited sphere of existence.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BALCONY

Because the balcony was one of the main spheres for woman's spectatorship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it symbolized the limited spaces which respectable women could frequent in this period. While the previous chapter dealt with enclosed interiors, this will focus on semi-exterior spaces, balconies. Although balconies provide access to the outside world, they were just as confining as interior spaces to women of the period. Griselda Pollock's article "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" discusses the spatial restrictions and their relation to female artists and their subject matter during this time. Pollock argues that society was divided into gendered spheres. Unlike their male counterparts, bourgeois women were increasingly segregated from the public realm.⁵⁵ Because of their dissimilar experiences in society, men and women artists of the period had different outlooks on subjects. Respectable women were limited in where they could go while men were not—this affected the output of women artists. Being both a woman and an artist, Brooks was aware of this double standard. She was keenly acquainted with the consequences of attempting to change social perceptions. In her personal life, Brooks staged her own rebellions such as attending Scuola Nazionale, an all-male art school in Italy. In drawing classes, she was left obscene postcards and books daily until she struck her tormentor with the affronting book, therefore silencing the harassment.⁵⁶ In the paintings discussed in this

⁵⁵ See Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

⁵⁶ See Secrest, *Between Me and Life*.

chapter, Brooks comments on these injustices through the settings and demeanors of her subjects.

In *Au Balcon* (*The Balcony*, 1911) [fig. 4.1], Brooks portrays a woman in the limited sphere that she could occupy at this time. Unfortunately, the reproductions I have seen are all in black and white, as the current whereabouts of the painting are unknown, negating any analysis of color. In this painting, a young woman in a feminine polka dot dress appears alone on a balcony. Although her head is high, her eyes are cast downward to the street below. The balcony is separated from the street and city by chest-level bars. In the distance, the city and landscape are painted less distinctly than the model which provides depth to the painting. The building across the wide avenue is typical of the Haussmannization of Paris in the late nineteenth century, dictated by strict height guidelines. In fact, Kessler argues that many of Haussmann's buildings had balconies "in an effort to lessen the possibility of bourgeois contact with the lower-class germs and street dust and the diseases that they harbored."⁵⁷ Furthermore, there is a stillness about the work evocative of Impressionists scenes of Parisian life painted decades earlier. Although the city is beyond the balcony bars, there are no other people on the streets or within the bright rectangles representing windows. The street is completely empty of any signs of life or transportation; the woman is isolated within a seemingly deserted city.

The many compositional elements combine to evoke a sense of isolation and alienation. While the city is traditionally a conglomerate of multitudes of people, it can be an impersonal experience. Art historian Sharon Hirsh asserts that "the Symbolistic

⁵⁷ Kessler, *Sheer Presence*, 17.

city is often silent, bare, and uninhibited.”⁵⁸ In this painting, Brooks utilizes the deserted cityscape to evoke the sense of isolation of the woman. Although the viewer’s perspective is eye level with the woman, we are able to see her outlook on the city below. This balcony overlooking the city “afford(s) distance, lack of confrontation, and even protection (. . . balconies with screens allow those—usually women and children—not allowed in the street to observe ‘public’ life vicariously).”⁵⁹ However, the model looks out onto a deserted street. While she is in the city, the subject is also partitioned from it by the presence of the balcony bars and through the height of the balcony above the street. In this way, she is more than protected from the outside elements. Much like a prison, the bars contain the woman in this small space in addition to segregating her from the rest of the world. Although her head is positioned straight ahead, her eyes are cast down onto the street. The distance of her body from the edge and the tentative way the woman touches the bars shows her apprehension to join the city or leave her “prison.” The feeling of isolation is present because of the apparent desertion of the city. In this painting, the restrictive nature of woman’s sphere is presented as a lonely and segregating experience.

In contrast to women of the period, male artists and flâneurs could walk the streets and frequent places that would bring scandal to a respectable female in the same circumstances. Pollock argues that for a bourgeois woman, to “maintain one’s respectability, closely identified with femininity, meant *not* exposing oneself in public.”⁶⁰ The balcony allowed women the ability to gaze on the city streets and its inhabitants

⁵⁸ Sharon L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38.

⁵⁹ Hirsh, *Symbolism*, 83.

⁶⁰ Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” 254.

and maintain a separation from engaging in the city life. Respectable women were separated from life in a way that their male counterparts were not. The public sphere for a woman was “where one risked losing one’s virtue, dirtying oneself; going out in public and the idea of disgrace were closely allied.”⁶¹ This double standard was of particular interest and frustration to Brooks. When she moved to Rome to study art in 1896, Brooks was annoyed that she “could not walk anywhere without an escort.”⁶² Because of this, Brooks was well aware of the limitations placed on women in society. In *Au Balcon*, Brooks reflects her own experiences through the demeanor of the woman while also making reference to earlier works of art. Although separated from the city, the woman has her head held high. Brooks personally challenged the limitations of women. She took up bicycling at a time when a woman riding around “in full public view was somehow disgusting to the really well-bred.”⁶³ The painting shows the alienating feelings of women when forced into limited spaces in society. Although Brooks could and did challenge these norms, the woman in the painting is suspended in time. The effects of alienation and isolation are clearly evident in the woman’s demeanor and the deserted city below. Although she has a safe venue with which to gaze on activity, the subject is powerless. The streets are barren and the subject is forced above and away from any direct interaction with the city or its inhabitants.

In terms of comparison, *Au Balcon* is similar to several Impressionist paintings which feature the city streets and balconies. In *On the Balcony* (ca. 1871-72; fig. 4.2), Berthe Morisot depicts a woman and, presumably, her child on a balcony overlooking the city. While Morisot’s woman does not appear to hesitate to look over the balcony

⁶¹ Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” 254.

⁶² Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 108.

⁶³ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 90.

bars, the streets below are unpopulated like in *Au Balcon*. Additionally, each of the works includes flowers—Brooks has plants on the floor while Morisot shows blossoms in the upper right corner of the canvas. The inclusion of the flowers reinforces the idea that this is a feminine space. While male artists tend to obscure the fact that they are painting from a balcony, female artists such as Brooks and Morisot often emphasize their perspective. Pollock argues that Morisot shows “not the boundary between public and private but between the spaces of masculinity and of femininity inscribed at the level of what spaces are open to men and woman and what relation a man or woman has to that space and its occupants.”⁶⁴ In both works, the figures are situated so that the viewpoint of the artist is evident. Brooks and Morisot do not erase the fact that they are on the balcony as well. In many Impressionist paintings by male artists, they neither include evidence of the balcony nor include figures to show their perspective. The male artists see beyond the balcony while their feminine counterparts depict their limitation.

As a way to show the differing gender relations in this period, I will look to a painting by Gustave Caillebotte, *Man on a Balcony* (ca. 1880; fig. 4.3). In this instance, Caillebotte shows the figure and balcony in sharp profile. While *On the Balcony* and *Au Balcon* show the artist’s perspective realistically, Caillebotte renders his figure in sharp profile which distorts the artist’s actual viewpoint. Although *Man on a Balcony* and *Au Balcon* are compositionally similar, they have many differences. While both portray a person on a balcony looking onto the streets of the city, Brooks as a woman artist paints a female model whereas Caillebotte is a male and portrays a masculine subject. In Caillebotte’s work, the male leans nonchalantly over the rail looking onto the populated streets below. Brooks paints her female subject apprehensively glancing over the side

⁶⁴ Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” 251.

of the balcony onto the desolate city. Also, the balcony in Caillebotte's work is waist-high and open while Brooks has painted an enclosed balcony. These works illustrate the differing gender relations of the time. Brooks' painting shows the female in an enclosed space which contains her and segregates her from the outside world. This other sphere, the city, has nothing to offer the woman; while the streets are barren of people, the balcony has more life through the subject and the potted plant. Her world does not exist outside of her apartment. In contrast, the man in Caillebotte's painting leans toward the populated city below. He is neither cut off from the city and its people on the balcony nor in his life. He has the freedom to join the city without the limitations that hinder the subject of Brooks' work. Brooks uses a symbolist trope, the empty city street, to counter the kinds of images of women that her male colleagues were making. In *Au Balcon*, Brooks sees the feminine constraints of the period and comments on them through her composition.

While using the balcony as a focal point in *Au Balcon*, Brooks utilizes it in a less prominent way in *Jeune Fille Anglaise—Yeux et Rubans Verts* (*Green Bows*, ca. 1910) [fig. 4.4]. In this painting, Brooks produces a traditional portrait of a young woman, although anonymous, in a seated position with a much smaller balcony open behind her model. The subject is shown in a three-quarter view with a slightly hazy background. While the figure is not named, Brooks references her physical features in the title instead of naming the work for an inanimate object; indeed, she is a young English girl with green eyes and ribbons. The model is wearing a frilly embellished dress and gazes directly at the viewer. Though maintaining eye contact, she has her head slightly tilted which gives her a more docile, less challenging demeanor. Behind the sitter, Brooks

has painted a block of black which gives an unfinished appearance to the work. Though this is probably a door opening onto the balcony, Brooks has made this portal to the outside an indeterminable black void. The background also consists of an open balcony and city view. The limited, hazy atmospheric view behind the woman shows smokestacks of industry in the distance. In comparison to the stark background, the girl appears overly adorned; five ribbons or bows are present on her clothing and in her hair while the dress is embellished with ruffles. As the title suggests, the girl and her bows are the most dominant objects in the painting.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, art historian Joanna Woodall states that “the distinction between portrait sitter and artist’s model became less clear, challenging the normal politics of the portrait transaction.”⁶⁵ This was the case with *Jeune Fille Anglaise* where the sitter is not identified but is nonetheless painted in the guise of a standard portrait. This complicates matters for the viewer because traditionally “the most innocent reading of portraits would be that the sitters are portrayed because they had authority in the first place, in whatever field of society.”⁶⁶ Although it is doubtful the model was as well connected and wealthy as the subjects of the two portraits discussed in the next chapter, Brooks shows more care with this rendition. Because the figure is anonymous, Brooks is able to project emotion onto the subject which is usually not possible within the constraints of society portraiture. The model becomes a blank canvas that Brooks can mold since the subject is not commissioning the work and is merely sitting for the artist. Because of this, *Jeune Fille Anglaise* allows the viewer an insight into Brooks which is lacking in her society portraiture.

⁶⁵ Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 7.

⁶⁶ Woodall, *Portraiture*, 240.

Unlike in her depictions of society figures, anonymous portrait paintings like *Jeune Fille Anglaise* allowed Brooks the opportunity to inject her unique point of view. While the balcony is not as pronounced as in the work by that name, Brooks utilizes this opening into the outside world to further her commentary on women's limitations. In this work, Brooks juxtaposes the feminine clothing of the sitter with the masculine smokestacks in the background in order to comment on gender relations. According to Rita Felski, the identification of modernity with masculinity occurs because "many of the key symbols of the modern in the nineteenth century—the public sphere, the man of the crowd, the stranger, the dandy, the flâneur—were indeed explicitly gendered."⁶⁷ A respectable bourgeois woman could not wander the urban landscape alone; there was no feminine equivalent of a flâneur. The sphere of women at this time was still very limited, and Brooks seems to be commenting on this idea. In representing industry in the distance from the model, she is far removed from progress. Nevertheless, Brooks does not portray the woman as content in this role. Her hands are clasped tightly as she stares somberly at the viewer indicating her anxiety and discontent. As the woman poses for this portrait, modernity and industry advance outside of the room. In painting the portal to the outside as indeterminable, Brooks observes the difficulty women have in entering the male sphere or leaving their own confining spaces. This ambiguity shows that change is possible because it does not make a definitive statement. However, Brooks has placed the balcony bars between the woman and the external world. Like a prison, the girl is blocked from leaving her world and from entering the masculine sphere. Her sad expression reflects the oppression of this situation.

⁶⁷ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16.

Because both *Au Balcon* and *Jeune Fille Anglaise* incorporate the balcony, they comment on the social sphere of women at the time. The balcony was a way for bourgeois women to observe the city yet remain separate from the many temptations and diseases which existed there. Unlike their male contemporaries, respectable women had limited access to public spaces such as restaurants, shops, and the street. While modernity was defined closely by representations of and interactions with the city, bourgeois women were restricted from many parts of the city at the turn of the century. As both a woman and an artist, Brooks was able to depict (and know) these disadvantages facing women. In *Au Balcon*, Brooks reworks earlier paintings by women artists to show not only the realities of the separate feminine sphere, but also the effects of this segregation through the desolate city. With *Jeune Fille Anglaise*, Brooks also focuses on this aspect, although not as obviously. In both instances, Brooks subtly critiques the limitations imposed on women in this period.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PORTRAIT

While she focused mainly on anonymous women during the years of 1910 and 1911, Brooks did paint society figures in this early stage of her career. Portraiture has been seen as a lesser genre in art history precisely because, traditionally, it has been viewed as a straightforward representation of the sitter. Although movements such as cubism challenged this assumption, Brooks chose to paint portraits in a classical way. In works of this genre, Brooks' experiments with techniques and colors would lead her to her eventual style in the society portraits in her later career. Cognizant that she could only be as famous as the subjects she painted, Brooks reviled but also courted people she thought "were garrulous bores."⁶⁸ In choosing this path, Secrest claims that Brooks "was aware that she was embarking on a course that ran counter to her truest self."⁶⁹ Because of her mixed feelings about portraiture, Brooks was able to create interesting and subversive paintings. While she subtly challenged artistic conventions in her other works previously discussed, Brooks uses imagery and style to further her critique in this genre.

In *Princesse Lucien Murat* (ca. 1910; fig. 5.1), Brooks renders a traditional society portrait. According to *Vogue* magazine, Princess Murat was "a distinguished member of the French nobility."⁷⁰ Painting such a figure would have been a coup because "this was the world she courted and chose to reflect."⁷¹ This portrait appears to be a very typical depiction in which the subject is portrayed sympathetically. While

⁶⁸ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 202.

⁶⁹ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 202.

⁷⁰ Princess Lucien Murat, "A French Princess Savors Turkish Delights," *Vogue* (April 1922), 70.

⁷¹ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 196.

she paints the princess in three-quarter view, Brooks diverts from her common technique of providing insightful background by eliminating it completely. Also, the subject looks unwaveringly at the viewer. This gives her an air of self-assurance and confidence, but not in an overbearing way. The fashionable plumed hat and fur hand muff displays the wealth and style of the sitter. The image seems very bland yet shows how Brooks experimented with styles in her early career. Brooks flattens the painting through dark outlines and an unfinished quality which gives the work a more modern feeling. Nevertheless, this work seems to lack the qualities for which Brooks would be revered as a portraitist—namely, the ability to capture the essence of the subject. While it is obvious through the title and the clothing of the sitter that she is wealthy and aristocratic, the personality of the subject does not show through as in Brooks' later more accomplished works.

In contrast, Brooks painted a subtle, purposely unflattering depiction in *Madame Errázuriz*, signed both 1908 and 1910 [fig. 5.2]. Unlike the majority of her paintings of around this year, *Madame Errázuriz* depicts not an anonymous model but a recognizable figure. The Chilean Errázuriz married into a wealthy family which cemented her position in society. While both Brooks and Errázuriz were women designers and foreigners in Paris, Brooks paints her in a way which dismisses any similarities. To begin, Errázuriz has a slightly condescending smile on her face. Also, she tilts her head upwards placing her in a position to look down on the viewer. She is standing and not sitting, another way for her to “lord” over the spectator. Rather unusually for her portraits, Brooks paints a full-length image of the subject. Whether this was because of the subject's specifications or a way to show Errázuriz's vanity,

Brooks depicts even more socially prestigious subjects in three-quarter length. Errázuris is unafraid to engage the viewer directly which gives her the air of arrogance and invites the contempt of the audience. According to sources, Brooks thought Errázuris “was a smug, vain, slightly ridiculous figure, who liked to dress up in absurdly over-ornamented clothes.”⁷² Because of this, Brooks is undermining conventions as portraits are normally meant to be flattering.

With color and schematic choices in this depiction, Brooks further portrays her disdain of the subject. First, Brooks creates a more finished realistic work in contrast to her frequent painterly style. Furthermore, the mood is less melancholy and pensive than usual. While the clothing is still extremely dark, Brooks painted the background in light beige, unlike the majority of her other portraits. Here, Brooks intensifies the contrasting light and dark colors. While the subject of the composition frequently appears paler, Brooks reversed the color scheme in this painting, using the lighter background to illuminate her more negative feelings regarding the subject. Although light visually equals positive generally, Brooks favored darker earth tones in her paintings. Brooks also paints Errázuris as robust and rosy cheeked, also strikingly dissimilar from the majority of portraits she completed or exhibited in this year. All of the stylistic differences mark this portrait as contradictory to her usual depictions; Brooks chose colors and a more finished style which were opposite of her prevalent taste to show her dislike for her subject. Although Brooks portrayed her in a subtle tongue-in-cheek fashion, Errázuris never commented on whether she was aware of Brooks' opinion or slight.

⁷² Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 211.

In this portrait, Brooks eliminates background and focuses solely on the subject and her clothing. While this is comparable to *Murat*, Brooks generally includes items or landscapes which provide clues to the personality of the sitter. The umbrella in hand, the multiple tassels dangling from the coat, and the exotic ostrich feathers protruding from the veiled hat align to depict an affluent woman who impresses through obvious displays of fortune. This tasseled coat is reminiscent of the cape worn by the subject in *Le Piano*. While the model in *Le Piano* wears a more simplistic cloak in gray with black tassels, Errázuris wears a black coat with enlarged sleeves. Errázuris' coat appears more dramatic because the white tassels and border contrast with the black material of the coat. In both *Le Piano* and *Madame Errázuris* the coat overwhelms the subjects. Close examination of her style shows Errázuris' fashion sense to be slightly old-fashioned. As Dilys E. Blum states, during this period, "women's hats were frequently decorated with large, sweeping feathers, often dyed brilliant colors, as well as entire birds, such as the bird of paradise."⁷³ While the hat was keeping with the fashion of the time, elements of her outfit were becoming passé. The style of dresses and skirts were moving away from fullness and "from 1909 to 1911 a narrow straight skirt predominated."⁷⁴ Concurrent with the skirts getting more slender, the "high-boned collar gradually went out of fashion."⁷⁵ In contrast, Errázuris' skirt is full and her collar is high. She is adorning herself with multiple embellishments making her mode of clothing slightly old-fashioned and obsolete.

⁷³ Dilys E. Blum, "Ahead of Fashion: Hats of the 20th Century," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 89, no. 377-8 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 8.

⁷⁴ Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 370.

⁷⁵ Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 370.

By juxtaposing the uncluttered background with the highly adorned Errázuris, Brooks subtly comments on the personality of the subject. In this painting, Brooks emphasizes the elements of the subject that she finds unpleasant. While she might wear expensive clothing, Brooks shows Errázuris as vane and overindulgent. To complicate matters further, journalist Jody Shields describes Errázuris' as "one of the first to create a modern, minimalist esthetic."⁷⁶ Her interior design scheme was simple and her philosophy was "elegance means elimination."⁷⁷ According to this portrait, she was not adhering to her own philosophy with her personal dress. Here, her design aesthetic and individual style are at odds. While Errázuris chose minimalism with regard to her decorating, her clothing style appears cluttered. Because Brooks acquired her own notoriety for interior design with a similar minimal style, the dislike of Errázuris may also be construed as jealousy. However, to dismiss the animosity as envy would be reducing Brooks to petty stereotyping which occurs often enough in a androcentric view of art history. While it is not exactly known why Brooks did not care for Errázuris, she never made her dislike a secret. Richard Wunder, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the National Collection of Fine Arts, wrote to Brooks that her "self portrait looks superb in [the] gallery, and Madame Errázuris appears to be looking at it impishly from the corner of her eye."⁷⁸ Therefore, the subversive portrayal of Errázuris exemplifies the subtle rebellion Brooks had for convention and conformity.

In comparing the portrait by Brooks of Errázuris with one of the multiple portraits of her by John Singer Sargent (ca. 1882-1883; fig. 3.2), it is obvious that Sargent portrayed her with more sympathy than Brooks. While Brooks only painted her once,

⁷⁶ Jody Shields, "The Queen of Clean," *New York Times*, October 11, 1992, www.nytimes.com.

⁷⁷ Shields, "The Queen of Clean."

⁷⁸ Richard Wunder, personal letter to Romaine Brooks, May 10, 1968, Smithsonian Institute Archives.

Sargent made multiple studies of his friend Errázuriz. In fact, “at the turn of the century everyone was painting her portrait: Helleu, Sargent, and Boldini.”⁷⁹ Brooks followed suit with her own version, although the circumstances of the commission are unknown. While Brooks shows Errázuriz as pompous and overly adorned, Sargent portrays a more feminine, refined woman. In Sargent’s painting, she is wearing a simple, elegant basic black dress. Although she is sitting on a splash of color, her only personal embellishment is a fan. Unlike the older, somewhat caricatured version in Brooks’ painting, the younger Errázuriz “practiced a sleight-of-hand, somehow managing to make the most ordinary objects extraordinary.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, she looks extremely approachable and friendly in contrast to her intimidating stance of in Brooks’ painting. In particular, the viewer is in the position of power unlike in Brooks’ painting. While Errázuriz is looking down on the spectator in Brooks’ work, she is being seen from above in the Sargent painting. This gives the impression of vulnerability, which the subject is lacking in Brooks’ portrait. The simple, carefree woman of Sargent’s painting has become an older, heavily adorned subject in Brooks’ painting.

To illustrate the idea of Brooks’ subversion further, Jacques-Emile Blanche painted Errázuriz in 1890 [fig. 5.4] reflecting the same characteristics displayed in the work by Sargent. Both Sargent and Blanche portray Errázuriz as feminine unlike the rather cold rendering by Brooks. Vulnerability is shown through her averted eyes and her appearance of deep contemplation. Again, her clothing is not as embellished as in the Brooks work, and her only accessory is a hand-held fan. Blanche paints Errázuriz in a loose, flowing dress which does not overwhelm the figure but accentuates her

⁷⁹ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 211.

⁸⁰ Shields, “The Queen of Clean.”

softness. Errázuris is shown wearing a tea gown which was “worn without a corset, loosely fitted and softer in line than daytime or evening dresses.”⁸¹ While Brooks and Sargent show Errázuris in fitted formal clothes, Blanche portrays a softer, informal subject. If the work was not named for her, it would be very typical of the late nineteenth century scenes with women in interior spaces, similar to the Brooks paintings I examined in Chapter Three. During this period, these scenes “allude to the depths of feeling of which the cultured soul is capable.”⁸² By placing Errázuris in such a setting, Blanche saw her as an embodiment of emotion, beauty, and culture.

The differing images of Errázuris show the conflicting nature of portraiture as a reflection of the sitter and the artist. Both Sargent and Blanche painted their subject by either their good opinion of her or their response “to the demands formulated by the individual’s wish to endure,” as Richard Brilliant has written of portraiture.⁸³ On the other hand, Brooks did not idealize her subject in quite the same way. Although she did portray her middle-aged subject with hardly any indication of aging, this could be due to the subject’s specifications. Because people inherently construct and project their ideas of themselves, Brilliant states that “the very ambiguity of impersonation complicates the proper evaluation of the portrait artist’s performance in interpreting (or concealing) the impersonating subject.”⁸⁴ In other words, what Errázuris thought of herself and what others thought of her could be (and usually was) conflicting. Also, the image she projected to Sargent or Blanche may have differed when she was around Brooks.

⁸¹ Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 333.

⁸² Springer, “Art and the Feminine Muse,” 2.

⁸³ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 14.

⁸⁴ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 89.

While either could be true, Brooks seems to have seen through the façade of Errázuris as indicated in her portrayal.

When the two Brooks portraits are compared, the image of Errázuris exhibits more subversive qualities which become clear. In the first painting discussed, Princess Murat appears more inviting, as indicated through her slight lean towards the viewer. In another difference between the two, *Murat* appears more painterly and sketchy than the portrait of *Errázuris*. In particular, the clothing around the neck seems unfinished. The painting of *Murat* appears flatter and less three-dimensional than *Errázuris*. Brooks used a more modern approach to the Murat painting instead of the realism she used for Errázuris. The figure of the princess is more heavily outlined than the figure of Errázuris. Because this flatter style of painting occurs more often in Brooks' painting, I believe the more realistic painting of Errázuris aids in her scathing portrayal. Murat does not display the falseness that Brooks projected from *Errázuris*; Murat looks directly at the viewer without arrogance or pretense. Murat's clothing seems every bit as extravagant as Errázuris'. Her plumed hat and fur hand muff showcase the social status of this princess without the arrogance present with Errázuris. Also, Brooks shows a full-length Errázuris while only showing a three-quarter view of Murat. Because Errázuris is shown fully while the princess is content with only a partial representation, Brooks seems to comment on Errázuris' sense of self-importance. In comparing these two portraits, it becomes obvious that Brooks had mastery over multiple styles and used them to highlight her feelings about the sitters.

Although Brooks painted portraits, she found ways within the constraints of the genre to critique societal and artistic conventions. While *Princesse Lucien Murat* is the

least subversive of the works discussed, Brooks uses the portrait of *Errázuris* to make subtle statements about the sitter. According to Secrest, Brooks “looked at society with undeceiving eyes, seeing its hypocrisy, its self-serving rationalizations, and its trivialities.”⁸⁵ Although painting a portrait, Brooks could not disguise her disdain for the subject, Errázuris. Through not flattering the subject, Brooks challenges the traditional idea of portraiture in *Errázuris*. Both *Princesse Lucien Murat* and *Madame Errázuris* show the ability and experimental nature of Brooks during this period of her career. However, these works progress Brooks’ direction towards her more “personal” style of portraiture.

⁸⁵ Secrest, *Between Me and Life*, 202.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

While Romaine Brooks continues to be identified for her portraiture of cross-dressing lesbians, the earlier works showcase a more diverse range of subject and genre. In examining the works produced by Brooks or exhibited in the years 1910 and 1911, when her output was at its most varied, I divided them into four different categories. In her depictions of the female nude, Brooks utilized color and stylistic choices to update earlier art historical works from a subtle feminist viewpoint. With her interior scenes and balcony depictions, Brooks examines and critiques the limited spheres available to women of this period. While she would explore gender identity in her later portraiture, Brooks challenges the artistic conventions in her portrait of Madame *Errázuris* by undermining the traditional flattery apparent in this genre. While these works prove that while Brooks painted in a traditional fashion, she also subtly challenged the role of women in art and society. In looking at the sphere of women and women artists at the time, Brooks confronts these constraints in her personal life and her art.

In contemplating these earlier works, I hope to have established Brooks' proto-feminist outlook and the necessity of looking at her entire oeuvre. Through examining these paintings, the beginning aspects of her later, more overtly feminist output become clearer. Although born into a family with wealth, Brooks chose to relinquish her financial stability for freedom to pursue her art and life. While this was a rare act at the turn of the century, it is still largely unimaginable today. In her personal life and career, Brooks took chances that epitomized her as a maverick and early feminist. While her later

artworks are still viewed and discussed, I feel that her earlier works deserve to be analyzed because they provide a more subtle and equally interesting comparison.

In conclusion, I hope that Brooks' oeuvre will continue to be examined more broadly and holistically. While her androgynous portraits remain the major focus of her career, Brooks has other areas in her body of work which deserve further consideration. Although I have touched on a brief period of her artistic production, I feel that her early works, along with her later drawings, need more analysis and research to provide a more complete perception of the artist and her range.

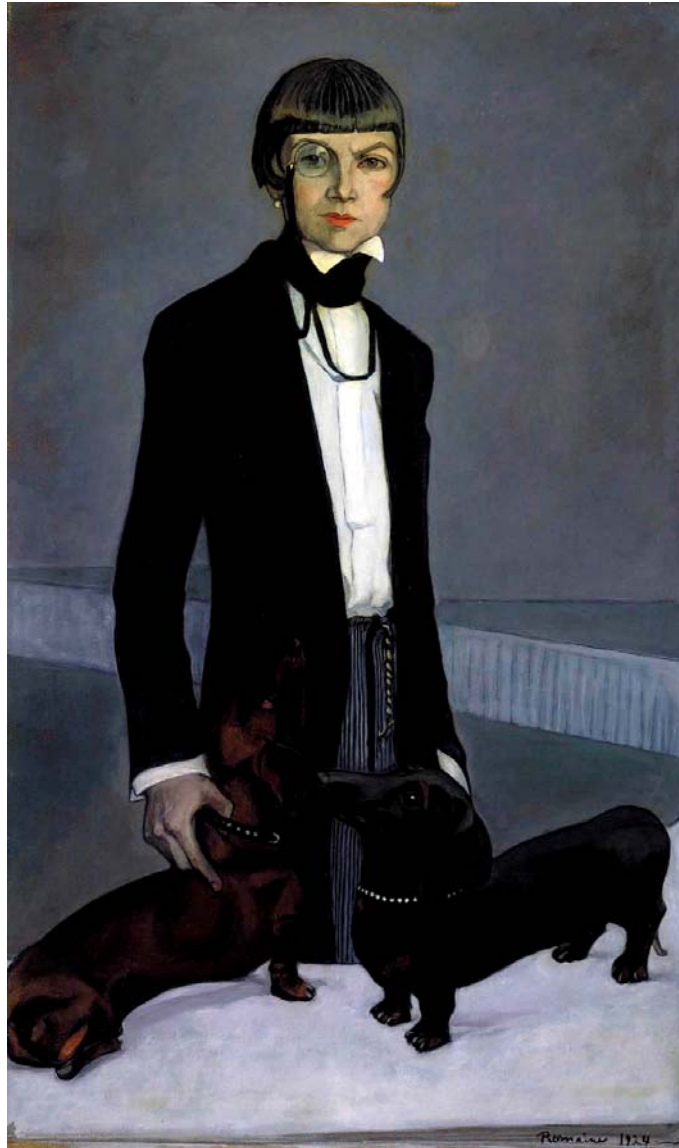


Figure 1.1. Romaine Brooks. *Una, Lady Troubridge*, 1924. Oil on canvas.

Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 67.



Figure 2.1. Romaine Brooks. *Azalées Blanches* (*White Azaleas*), 1910. Oil on canvas.

Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 49.



Figure 2.2. James Abbott McNeill Whistler. *Nude Model Reclining*, 1900.

Pastel on brown paper. www.tate.org.

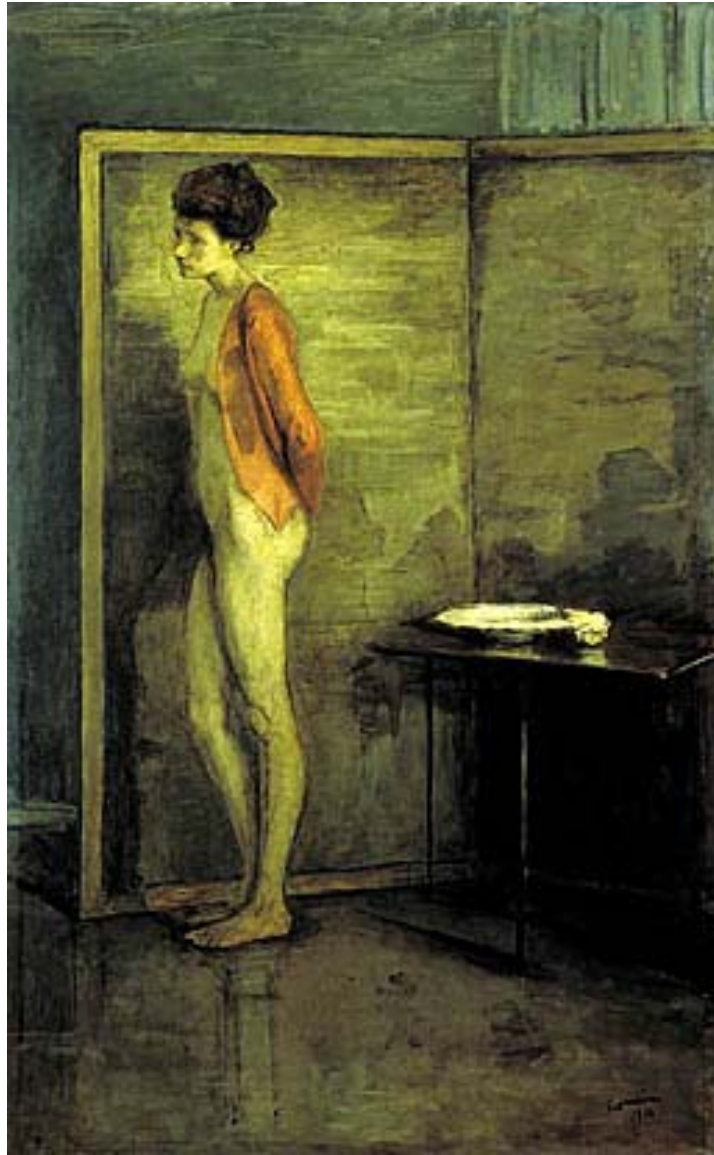


Figure 2.3. Romaine Brooks. *La Jaquette Rouge* (*The Red Jacket*), 1910.

Oil on canvas. Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 48.



Figure 2.4. Romaine Brooks. *The Masked Archer*, 1910-1911. Oil on canvas.

Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 79.



Figure 2.5. Romaine Brooks. *Self Portrait*, 1923. Oil on canvas.

Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 69.



Figure 3.1. Romaine Brooks. *La Debutante*, 1910-1911. Oil on canvas.
Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 46.

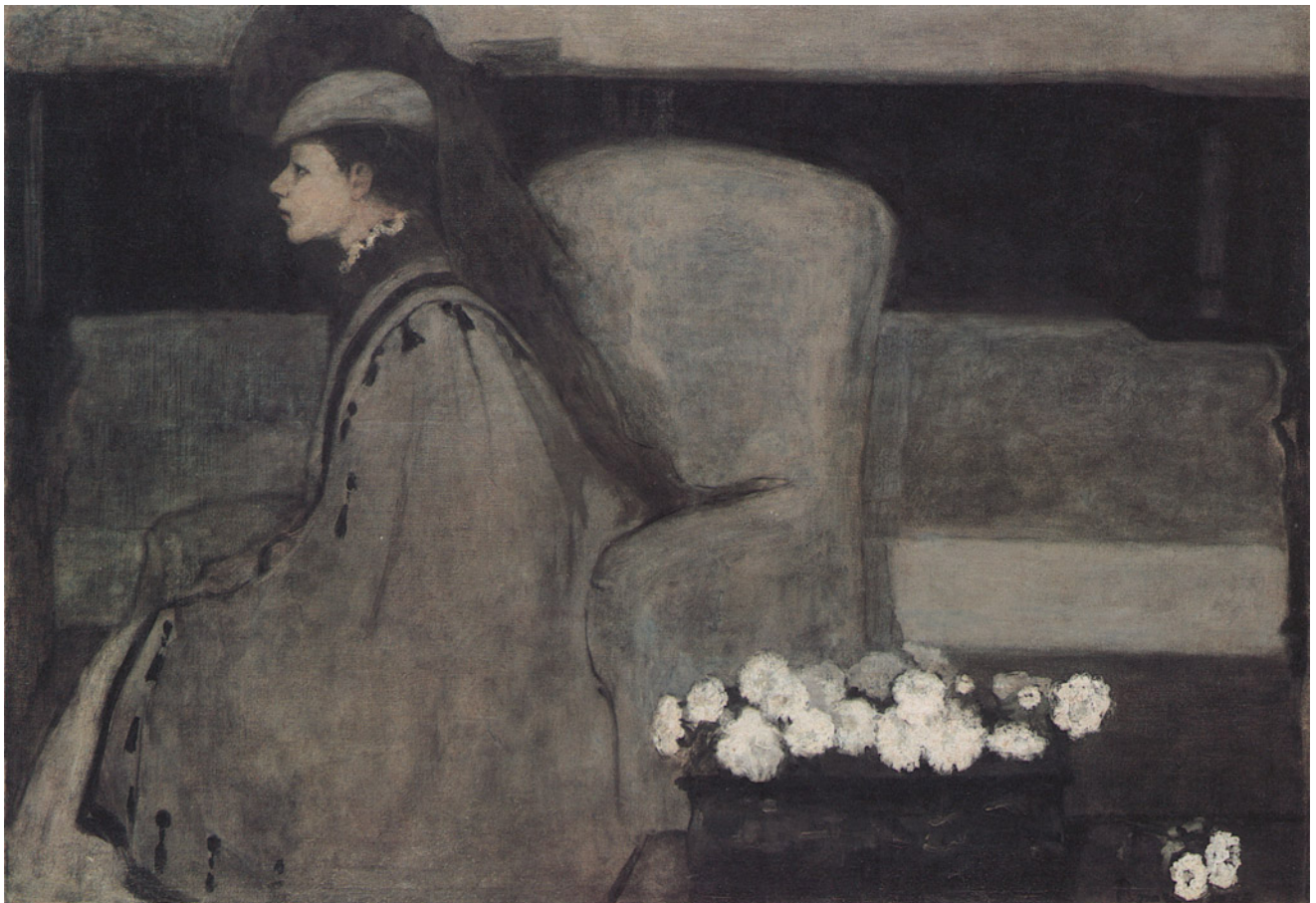


Figure 3.2. Romaine Brooks. *Le Piano (The Piano)*, 1910. Oil on canvas.
Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 50.

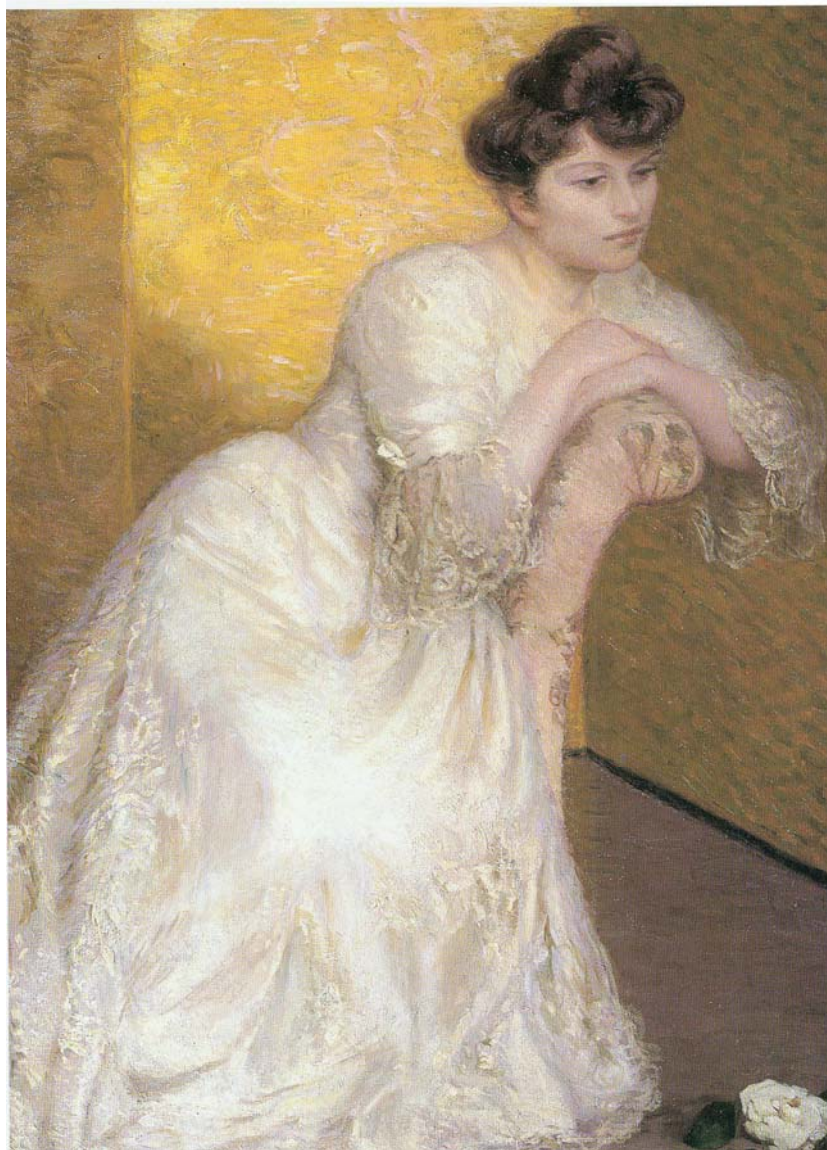


Figure 3.3. Lilla Cabot Perry. *Le Paravent Jaune (The Yellow Screen)*, ca. 1907.
Oil on canvas. Martindale, Lilla Cabot Perry, 76.



Figure 4.1. Romaine Brooks. *Au Balcon (The Balcony)*, 1911. Oil on canvas.
Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 19.



Figure 4.2. Berthe Morisot. *On the Balcony*, ca. 1871-72. Oil on canvas.
www.artstor.org.



Figure 4.3. Gustave Caillebotte. *Man on a Balcony*, ca. 1880. Oil on canvas.

Distel, Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist, 143.

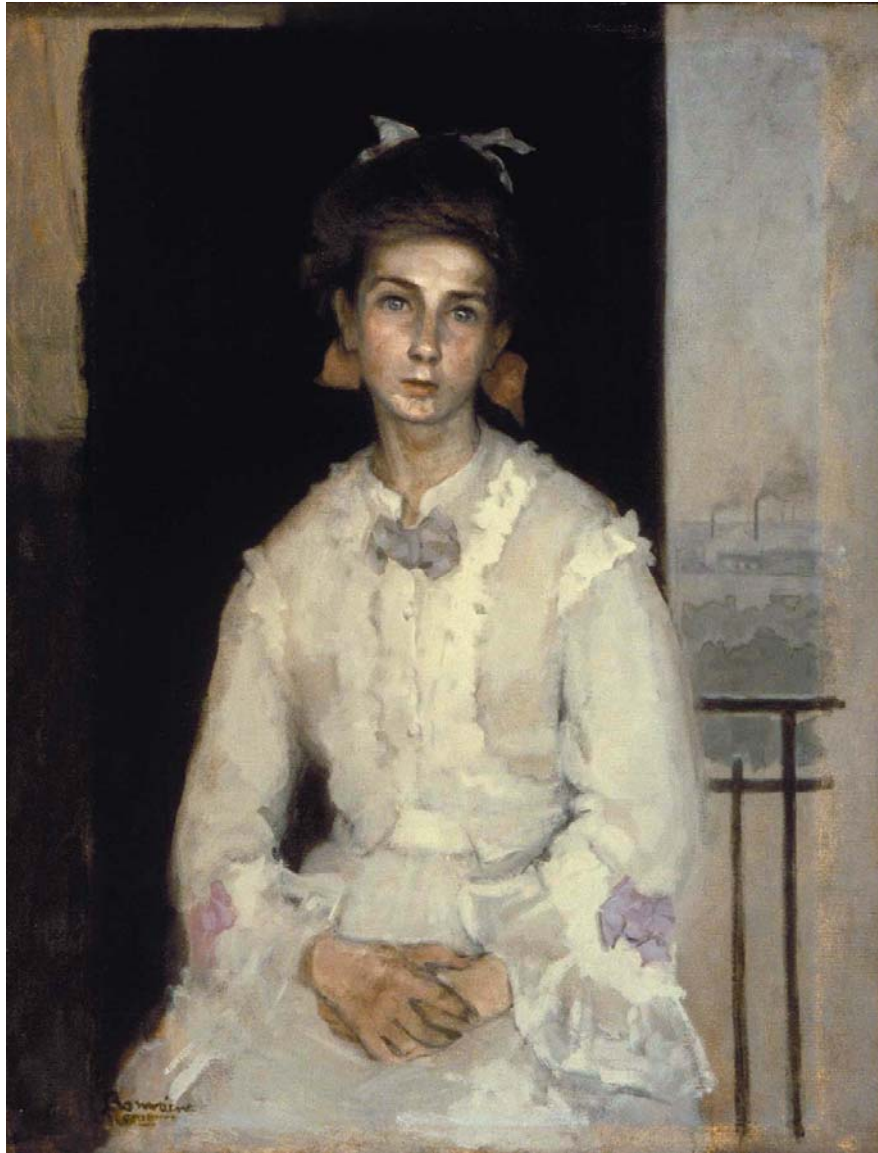


Figure 4.4. Romaine Brooks. *Jeune Fille Anglais—Yeux et Rubans Verts (Green Bows)*, ca. 1910. Oil on canvas. Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 51.



Figure 5.1. Romaine Brooks. *Princess Lucien Murat*, ca. 1910. Oil on canvas.
Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 20.

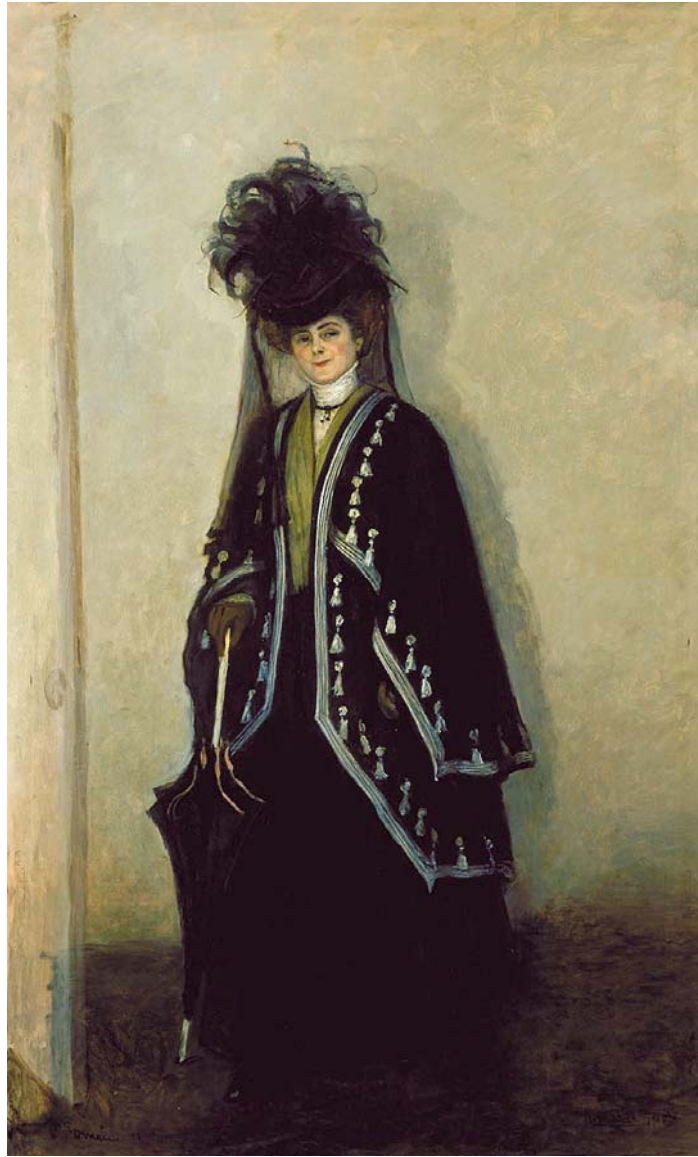


Figure 5.2. Romaine Brooks. *Madame Errázuriz*, signed 1908 and 1910.

Oil on canvas. Chadwick, Amazons in the Drawing Room, 46.

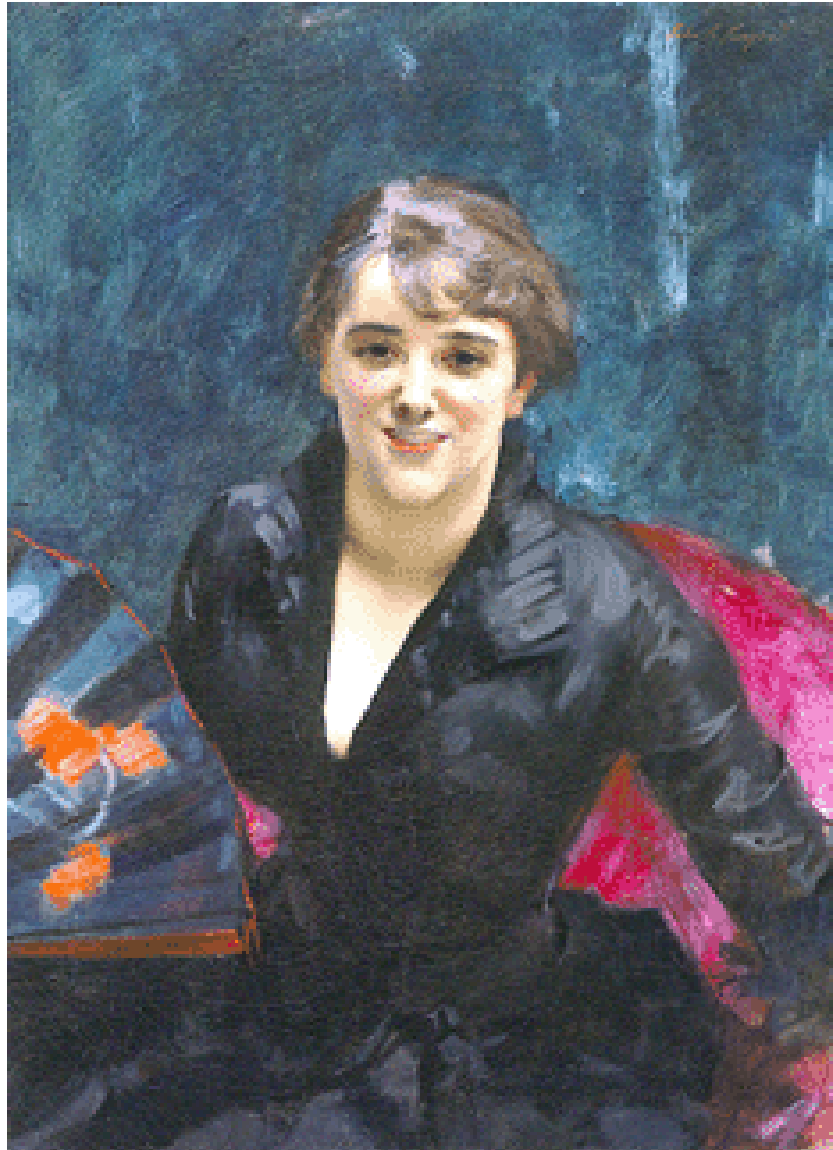


Figure 5.3. John Singer Sargent. *Madame Errazuriz*, ca. 1882-1883. Oil on canvas.

www.jssgallery.org/Paintings/Madame_Errazuriz.



Figure 5.4. Jacques-Emile Blanche. *Portrait of Senora Eugenia Huici de Errazuriz*, 1890. Oil on canvas. http://jssgallery.org/Other_Artists/Jacques-Emile_Blanche/Eugenia_Huici_De_Errazuriz.html.

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