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# 'The Proust of Painting': Jacques-Emile Blanche, the Neurasthenic Portrait and the Nervous Elite of Paris 1900

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**‘THE PROUST OF PAINTING’: JACQUES-ÉMILE  
BLANCHE, THE NEURASTHENIC PORTRAIT AND THE  
NERVOUS ELITE OF PARIS 1900**

**by**

**SIOBHAN SEXTON**

**A thesis submitted to Plymouth University in partial fulfilment  
for the degree of**

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**Centre for Humanities, Music and Performing Arts Research  
(HuMPA)**

**June 2015**

## Abstract

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Title: ‘The Proust of Painting’: Jacques-Emile Blanche, the Neurasthenic Portrait and the Nervous Elite of Paris 1900

Author: Siobhan Elizabeth Sexton

Jacques-Émile Blanche (1861-1942) is rarely included in histories of late nineteenth-century French art, despite his prolific career as an artist who produced over 2,000 paintings. A portraitist, Blanche’s upbringing as the son of an eminent psychiatrist provided him with a wealth of sitters connected to his father’s fashionable clinic and, I argue, a distinctive approach to their representation. These relatively unstudied portraits of famous Parisian intellectuals and socialites deserve our attention as works of ‘psychological impressionism’. Combining penetrating observation with painterly execution, Blanche’s methods emphasised the ‘nervous’ disposition of his sitters.

Blanche’s practice as a portraitist is one of the reasons for his neglect. His contemporaries were evasive when it came to writing about the genre, uncertain of how to evaluate it – a critical apprehension that has persisted to this day. Art historians are implicated in what may be thought of as a hesitation around the status and significance of portraiture in late-nineteenth-century French art. The thesis seeks in part to redress this through its examination of Blanche’s portraits as intuitive works of art that not only reflected but also, more actively, produced particular forms of knowledge about the ‘nervous’ condition of Parisian high society. With a focus on Blanche’s depictions of Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and the Comtesse de Castiglione (1837-1899), the thesis considers Blanche’s ‘neurasthenic portraits’ in relation to discourses on modern psychiatry, modernity, and modern art, drawing attention to how they enrich our understanding of the social, cultural and artistic contexts in which Blanche lived and worked.

By situating Blanche’s artistic practice within his father’s clinical practice, and by embracing a methodology that draws upon both the histories of art and psychiatry, I argue that the language of Blanche’s portraiture was environmentally connected to the language of nervous disorder. As such this thesis will provide an original contribution to the scholarship on Blanche and offer significant insights into the entanglement of art, culture and nerves in nineteenth-century Paris.

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## Author's Declaration

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At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

This study was financed with the aid of a three-year studentship from the Centre for Humanities, Music and Performing Arts Research (HuMPA) within the School of Humanities and Performing Arts, bursaries generously given from the donor of the Art and World Travel fund, and the author.

Regular Art History seminars and appropriate conferences were attended and external institutions were visited for consultation purposes. Presentations of work in progress were given to the Art History Research Group at the University of Plymouth.

No papers have been published during the period of registration for this degree.

Word count of main body of thesis:

Signed .....

Date .....

### ‘The Proust of Painting’

Jacques-Émile Blanche (1861-1942) is often viewed as an artist who embraced the traditions of the Academy and was thus unreceptive to the socially-engaged, avant-garde works of Courbet, Manet and other Impressionists that have so occupied historians of modern art (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Few have expressed admiration for him as a painter; his contribution to portraiture – his main area of activity – is rarely recognised in histories of impressionism and post-impressionism despite being a “central preoccupation” of many artists we would single out as the major figures of these movements, such as Edgar Degas (1834-1917), Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) and John Singer Sargent (1856-1925).<sup>2</sup> Art historian Heather McPherson has argued that this

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis the term “avant-garde” refers to artists, writers and musicians whose ideas, styles, methods and work were original in comparison to the period in which they lived. It does not mean “modern”, however the two terms do coexist beside one another. As Stephen Eisenman argues, “For Courbet and for later ambitious French and European artists, avant-garde and modern are two sides of a coin that don’t add up to a whole; the one connotes community, the other individuality; the one implies engagement, the other an ivory tower; the one invites bohemianism, the other flimflammy. In fact, however, the avant-garde and modern possess the same specific gravity since the technical procedures that make possible the first are the very ones that inevitably conjure up the second.” See Eisenman, S.F., *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> McPherson, H., *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 3. “Impressionism” in this thesis is used to refer to a small group of artists who made common cause, who were associated together by their contemporaries and who were interested in the effects of colour and light. Charles Moffett describes their loose brushwork and bright palette as “sufficiently similar to suggest the presence of a new school in 1874, which a contemporary critic sarcastically labelled Impressionism, but the renegade exhibitions also served the needs of artists such as Degas who thought of themselves as Realists.” Manet did not share in the independent exhibitions organised by the others, but he was consistently treated by the press as a member of the group. Degas and Monet were poles apart in many ways, and yet both jettisoned most traditional subjects in favour of a strong commitment to contemporary life. It could be argued that Caillebotte’s harsh architectural lines and his glaring light, compared to Monet’s or Morisot’s more vaporous tones, mark him out so strongly from the other that he should not be called an impressionist. Yet, we should not narrow down the definition of Impressionism to say, broken brushwork, and then use such a lens to cast non-conforming artists into the shade. For more see Charles Moffett (ed.), *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, exh cat, San Francisco: The Fine Art Museums of San Francisco and Washington: National Gallery of



neglect is due in part to the fact that portraiture as an artistic genre remains “understudied, aesthetically problematic, and critically suspect”<sup>3</sup>, particularly in the modern period, when genres were being redefined. Contemporary critics of Blanche thought twice about discussing portraiture at any real length, with Maxime du Camp declaring in *Le Salon* of 1857 that it resisted description and “eluded criticism.”<sup>4</sup> Art historians have been as hesitant to critically engage with the modern portrait as it developed in France, and this has made Blanche’s position all the more precarious.<sup>5</sup> Thought to embody outmoded attitudes in an age characterised by rapid artistic change, Blanche has remained relatively unstudied by art historians working in the field of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French studies.

Tamar Garb, an art historian who, like Heather McPherson, has addressed the problem of the status of portraiture in the scholarship, argues that,

Portraits have invariably lent themselves to narrativisation. Built on imagined encounters with named sitters, they teasingly invite speculation about the identity and status of the people they portray and prompt successive viewers to invent and reconstruct the historical subjects with which they are faced.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, part of my attraction to Blanche’s portraits lay in my then-partial knowledge of his upbringing in his family’s *maison de santé*, a clinic housed, unusually, in a private home, which welcomed patients as guests. Both Blanche’s father and grandfather were doctors of distinction in the field of psychiatry and neurology who treated and hosted

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Art, 1986, p. 13; Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, p. xiv; McQuillan, M., *Impressionist Portraits*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> “It is difficult to discuss or even describe a *portrait* because it touches private life too closely and must, to a certain degree, elude criticism.” Maxime du Camp, *Le Salon de 1857*, Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1857, pp. 146-147, cited and translated in McPherson, H., 2001, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814-1914*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 19.

some of the most illustrious men and women of the nineteenth century, including Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), Édouard Manet (1832-1883), the Goncourt brothers (1822-1896; 1830-1870), Vincent Van Gogh, and Anna de Noailles (1876-1933). The maison du Docteur Blanche had the rarefied atmosphere that was identified with the intellectual, quintessentially ‘nervous’ community who valued portraiture, amongst other forms of artistic production, as a way to not only document their physical appearance at the time, but to also explore their identity through an image charged with psychology and subject to moral evaluation. Growing up in this distinctive environment, the young Blanche became well acquainted with his father’s extensive social network of patients, friends, and colleagues. Highly socialised through his family’s emphasis on conversation, care and companionship as part of a patient’s treatment, Blanche was able to move across the different strata of Parisian middle and upper class society with ease and this was to prove decisive in the development of his career as a portraitist.

In France, the rise of the newly enriched and empowered middle classes in Paris in the nineteenth century was accompanied by a new taste for secular subjects that reflected everyday life; such interests elicited an artistic response. In terms of the history of modern French art, the painting of landscapes and urban scenes is mostly identified with this era, but portraits were another important signifier of middle-class shifts in taste. Far from going into decline, portraiture flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, reflecting new interests in human personality, as well as the increasing desire for self-knowledge we see acknowledged in the culture of the maison du Docteur Blanche, amongst other progressive clinics. Upon becoming a portrait painter in the early 1880s, Blanche quickly acquired a great reputation in his circle. His many portraits

(over 2000) are evidence of the range of his connections and the broad recognition of his talent.<sup>7</sup> He painted portraits of the most famous names of intellectual and Salon life in Paris at the turn of the century, including Marcel Proust (1871-1922), Comtesse de Castiglione (1837-1899), André Gide (1869-1951), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Maurice Barrés (1862-1923), Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) and Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Yet all too often his depictions of these figures have been regarded as nothing more than historical documentation – images that offer little beyond a physical likeness of the sitter.

Heather McPherson argues this kind of reaction to Blanche's portraits was not uncommon during the nineteenth century, and that one of the fundamental difficulties in analysing Salon portraiture was the problem of "referentiality."<sup>8</sup> She writes,

Portraits tended to be judged subjectively, primarily on the basis of the identity and social status of the sitter. Once the portrait had been identified (named), there appeared to be little else essential to say about it as a work of art.<sup>9</sup>

As Théophile Thoré, a critic of the Salon of 1861 observed, "The truth is that none of these portraits exists as a *work of art*."<sup>10</sup> Portraiture exhibited at the Salon became little more than an identity parade, with the substantive critical issues surrounding portraiture being ignored by critics during the mid-century. McPherson also notes that once the person had been identified, there was seemingly little else to say about the portrait.<sup>11</sup>

This lack of critical attention is exacerbated by the fact that, with the passage of time,

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<sup>7</sup> Jane Roberts alone has attributed over 1500 of these works. See Neutres, J., *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche: Un salon à la belle époque*, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, October 11 2012 – January 27, Skira, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Thoré, T., *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861 à 1868*, 2 vols. Paris: Jules Renouard, 1870, I:6, cited in McPherson, H., 2001, p. 8. The distinction between a portrait and a painting was also made by Degas; see Loyrette, "Portraits and Figures," pp. 193-194.

<sup>11</sup> McPherson, 2001, p. 8.

Blanche's sitters have faded as cultural figures. Art historians do not seem overly interested in identifying sitters as people either, so there is little hope for further, interpretive engagement with portraits. Blanche's reputation plummeted after his death, and this makes it all the more difficult to assess his role in the burgeoning of modern portraiture during the Third Republic. However, over the last decade Blanche has begun to emerge, albeit slowly, as a prominent personality once again. He has been the focus of a comprehensive biography, exhibitions in Rouen and Paris, and a publication translated into English dedicated to his long life and career as an artist and writer.

In the most recent exhibition of Blanche's work at the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves-Saint Laurent in 2013 in Paris, the curators described the artist as "The Proust of Painting", arguing that in the same spirit as the literary works of Marcel Proust, Blanche's portraits documented "the birth of the intellectual" and the heady lifestyle of Parisian high society during the *fin-de-siècle* (Figure 2).<sup>12</sup> Blanche and Proust attended the same Salons, socialised with the same people, and frequented the same places. Both men knew each other well, and a number of Blanche's sitters are rumoured to have also been the inspiration for the characters in Proust's novels. Robert de Montesquiou (1855-1921), a homosexual who was identified with Parisian nervous culture during the *fin-de-siècle*, is an example of someone whom both Blanche and Proust shared a profound personal and creative interest in. Blanche painted Montesquiou's portrait in 1889, and Proust used him as the inspiration for Baron de Charlus in Proust's seven-volume novel *In Search of Lost Time* (Figure 3).<sup>13</sup> Their shared interest in neurasthenia, neurasthenic

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<sup>12</sup> Neutres, J., *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche Un salon à la belle époque*, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, October 11 2012 – January 27 2013, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> A licentious gay man, the Baron is first introduced in the second novel, *Within a Budding Grove*, 1919. Chris Eagle argues that Baron de Charlus is the best example of Proust's dual neuro/psycho-genic

friends, and the broader nervous culture that brought this condition into vogue at the turn of the nineteenth century, is no doubt due in part to the fact that both Blanche and Proust grew up with fathers who were neurologists and treated patients suffering with neurasthenia. A condition of nervous exhaustion or “nerve weakness” for the middle and upper classes, neurasthenia was characterised by a complex of symptoms and caused in those where “excessive stimulation atrophied the nerves to a point of extreme irritability and physical lassitude.”<sup>14</sup> Yet for Blanche and Proust it was not just the physical likenesses, gestures or personalities of their sitters and characters that both men wanted to capture in their respective fields, but also, as Proust described it (albeit not in medicalised terms) “their very souls.”<sup>15</sup>

Both men also enthusiastically partook in the new forms of leisure and pleasure that had become so indelibly associated with late-nineteenth-century Paris, with modernity. Blanche and Proust led busy society lifestyles and often socialised late into the evening at fashionable salons, dinners and soirées, eating large meals and getting small amounts of sleep. French physicians considered that the wear and tear of life in the city promoted neurasthenia as a general condition of modernity at the turn of the century, and as such, socialising and other lifestyle choices such as those undertaken by Blanche and Proust were understood by physicians to only enhance neurasthenia and its

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approach to language breakdown. Over the course of the novels, Charlus undergoes a sort of linguistic downfall, from his initial position as the greatest talker of the social world Marcel inhabits to a frail aphasic who can “only pronounce certain words with difficulty and incorrectly.” See Eagle, C.

*Dysfluencies: On Speech Disorders in Modern Literature*, USA: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> For more on neurasthenia see Gijswijt-Hofstra, M. and Porter, R. (eds) *Cultures of Neurasthenia: from Beard to the First World War*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine Series, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001; Silverman, D. L., *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France: Politics, Psychology and Style*, California: University California Press, 1992, p. 80-82; and Forth, C., *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*, Baltimore: JHU Press, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Chazin-Bennahum, J., *René Blum and The Ballet Russes: In Search of a Lost Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 19.

symptoms.<sup>16</sup> As Blanche's friend François Mauriac observed, "Blanche lived in the world of Proust, that he spoke of often and with great penetration."<sup>17</sup> It is this description of Blanche as "The Proust of Painting" that effectively brings together the interests of this thesis: neurasthenia, modern portraiture and Blanche's concern and attempts to capture the psychological complexities of his sitters on canvas.

The genre that Blanche selected and cultivated – portraiture – is, like the artist, somewhat difficult to assess. Even during the nineteenth century, and despite Salon critics singling out outstanding individual portraits for praise, much of the writing about portraiture reveals a profound uneasiness about how to evaluate individual portraits as works of art in terms of critical principles or aesthetic criteria. Writing in 1855 the Goncourt brothers complained of the decadence of the portrait,

But the portrait no longer possesses the moral physiognomy that the Italian school pursued; it is no longer the beautiful carnal mask of the Flemish; it no longer counts upon the pleiad of eighteenth-century specialists, the Rigauds, the Largillières, the Toqués.<sup>18</sup>

Much to the dismay of the Goncourt brothers, they recognised during the mid-century that the portrait was changing, and artists, and sitters alike, were adopting an approach to portraiture that considered, and depicted, the newfound hypersensitivity to modern life

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<sup>16</sup> Doctor Fernand Levillain published an inexpensive, small-format book entitled *La Neurasthénie* in 1891, with an introduction by Jean-Martin Charcot. In his study Levillain emphasised that the modern metropolis, demanding continuous nervous exertion, could lead all of its inhabitants into a state of *surmenagement*, "overtaxing neurosis." For more see Levillain, F., *La Neurasthénie: la maladie de Beard*, Paris: A. Maloine, Libraire-Éditeur, 1891; and Proust and Ballet, cited in Hayman, R., *Proust: A Biography*, Harper Collins, 1990, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Mauriac, F., *Le Revue hebdomadaire*, 1921 cited and translated in Hodson, L., (ed) *Marcel Proust: The Critical Heritage*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> "Mais le portrait n'est plus la physionomie morale qu'avait cherchée l'école italienne, il n'est plus le beau masque charnel des Flamands, il ne s'appuie même pas sur la pléiade des spécialistes du XVIIIe siècle, les Rigaud, les Largillière, les Toqué." Goncourt, E., "La peinture à l'Exposition Universelle de 1855," *Etudes d'art*, Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1893, p. 176.

experienced by intellectuals in a city undergoing extensive renovations.<sup>19</sup> Artistic decadence was considered “symptomatic of national degeneration and decline” and was caused by “nervous disorders” according to Max Nordau in his widely debated and controversial book, *Degeneration* of 1895.<sup>20</sup> However, Emile Zola (1840-1902) thought that artists were not embracing modern life enough and complained that portraits remained “too dependent on past models and were often devoid of life as waxworks”, arguing they should, by their “very nature embody modernity.”<sup>21</sup> For Zola, the situation was exacerbated by the proliferation of portraits, both commissioned and uncommissioned, that too often recycled standardised formula imposed not only by the Academy but also by the status and gender of the sitter. As Tamar Garb notes, “The late nineteenth-century female sitter had to maintain a fine balance between the specific and the generic if the laws of propriety and the exigencies of portraiture were to be met. Pure resemblance was not enough.”<sup>22</sup> Artists were also frequently ambivalent about portraiture, doubting its validity as an aesthetic enterprise. Compromised by the inherently collaborative demands of the genre and perturbed by its association with commerce, many artists approached portraits with caution. Salon critics tended to analyse portraits primarily by identifying the sitter and acknowledging their social status, sometimes only going as far as describing their clothing. Although a handful of critics did

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<sup>19</sup> The Haussmannisation of Paris began in 1853, see Kirkland, S., *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City*, London: Picador, 2014; Stephan, P., *Paul Verlaine and the Decadence, 1882-90*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975, pp.10-13;

<sup>20</sup> For Nordau the physically exhausted and overstimulated artist was merely the forerunner of all the citizens of urban centres in France. The city, condenser of anxiety, concentrator of speed and sensory bombardment, depleted energy and eroded nerve fibre to the point of neurasthenia. See Nordau, M., *Degeneration*, 1895 reprint, New York: Howard Fertig, 1968, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Zola, E., “Salon de 1875,” in *Le bon combat de Courbet aux impressionistes*, ed. Jean-Paul Bouillon, Paris: Hermann, 1974, pp. 169-170, cited and translated in McPherson, H., 2001, p.7.

<sup>22</sup> Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 60-61.

address more substantive critical issues regarding portraiture, Heather McPherson claims that these were few and far between with Baudelaire and Jacques-Émile Blanche being the exceptions.<sup>23</sup> Baudelaire noted in his Salon review of 1846,

There are two ways of understanding portraiture – either as history or as fiction. The first consists of reproducing faithfully, rigorously, minutely, the contour and modelling of the sitter. [...] The second method, the one characteristic of the colourists, consists in making a picture out of a portrait, a poem with its accessories full of space and reverie. This form of the art is more difficult, because it is more ambitious.”<sup>24</sup>

For Baudelaire in 1846, portraits either attempted to represent an observed “reality” where through additive detail, the portrait operated reductively by simplifying and conceptualising the sitter, or it would fall on the side of “fiction” and embody what could be characterised as an “anti-photographic” concept of portraiture.<sup>25</sup> According to Baudelaire these two notions of what a portrait could choose to represent consciously, or unconsciously, reiterated in visual terms the dichotomies of mind and body, artist and model.<sup>26</sup> Baudelaire also insisted that, just as a novel may be more “truthful” than history, so a painterly, imaginative portrait may more clearly explain its model than a meticulous drawing.<sup>27</sup>

The status and concept of the portrait shifted throughout the centuries as well as the decades of the nineteenth century, with portraiture as an artistic genre evolving from antiquity as “often highly conceptualised and subsumed by funerary or magical

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<sup>23</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Baudelaire, C., “Salon of 1846,” in *Art in Paris, 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed* by Charles Baudelaire, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne, Oxford: Phaidon, 1965, pp. 84.

<sup>25</sup> Schor, N., *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 54; McPherson, 2001, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 28. In addition, despite Baudelaire’s fears, the photographic portrait did not lead to the demise of portrait painting or its material enslavement, as he and other critics initially feared; rather it incited artists to explore painterly, “antiphotographic” directions.

<sup>27</sup> Baudelaire, C., “Salon of 1846,” in *Art in Paris, 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed* by Charles Baudelaire, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne, Oxford: Phaidon, 1965, pp. 84.



functions”, to the increasing concern in the late nineteenth century that the portrait should be concerned with “expression and the psychology of the sitter.”<sup>28</sup> This change in the representative function of portraiture during the late nineteenth century also coincided with pioneering developments in the field of neurology, in particular the identification and categorisation of new ‘nervous’ conditions, such as neurasthenia, and this is not surprising: both fields were concerned with the question of subjectivity. In addition to developments in the field of neurology, the invention of photography also changed the status and credibility of the painted portrait;<sup>29</sup> as such it is the modern portrait’s “self-reflexive questioning of the premises of representation and its stylistic determinacy” that makes it worth examining closer.<sup>30</sup> Whether the portrait merely captured a superficial likeness or a deeper ‘truth’, whether it conveys social conventions, coded messages, or what is often described as the inner recesses of the soul, a portrait subjects its sitter to analysis, scrutiny, dissection and reconstruction.<sup>31</sup>

This thesis focuses solely on Blanche’s portraits painted from the 1880s through to the beginning of the First World War in 1914 and the reasons for this are twofold. The first is that Blanche turned away from the practice of portraiture as his main creative output during the 1920s and concentrated his efforts on writing until returning to portraiture much later in life. The second is that the First World War changed the way that neurasthenia was conceived, diagnosed and treated. During the First World War, neurasthenia was re-categorised and re-medicalised as a disorder related to what was termed ‘shell shock’. The sign of a nervous system weakened by the terrors and stresses

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<sup>28</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, pp. 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ormond, R., ‘Foreword’, *The Society Portrait: Painting, Prestige and the Pursuit of Elegance*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2007, p. 11.

of modern warfare, neurasthenia was no longer associated with the life of the privileged intellectual, and accordingly it was no longer referenced in society portraiture.<sup>32</sup> As such this thesis will explore Blanche's portraiture in terms of: discourses on the impact of modernity on the nervous system; the middle and upper class experience of modern life; and subsequent, classed and gendered constructions of 'neurasthenic' identity.

It is perhaps a necessary step in the rediscovery of an artist who has been left on the margins of art history to isolate him as an individual. Such recuperative work has been started by Georges-Paul Collet, who published his biography *Jacques-Émile Blanche. Le Peinture-Écrivain* in 2006, and by Jane Roberts, who produced the first book on Blanche in English in 2012. Both publications focus on Blanche's long life and vast body of work; neither book considers his work contextually and this means that neither author can ultimately lay claim to thinking about Blanche's contribution to painting outside of the reductive categories of traditionalism and modernism.<sup>33</sup> My aim in this

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<sup>32</sup> See Gijswijt-Hofstra, M. and Porter, R. (eds) *Cultures of Neurasthenia: from Beard to the First World War*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine Series, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> According to Clement Greenberg, Modernism used "art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting – the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment – were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly. Manet's paintings became the first Modernist ones by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painted. The Impressionists, in Manet's wake, abjured underpainting and glazing, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colours used were made of real paint that came from pots or tubes. Cézanne sacrificed verisimilitude, or correctness, in order to fit drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas. It was the stressing, however, of the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art was criticised and defined itself under Modernism ... Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else." Greenberg, C., 'Modernist Painting' *Art and Literature*, no. 4, Spring, 1965, pp. 193-201, quoted in Fried, M., *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 13-14. For all its clarity and power, Greenberg's account of modernism is open to serious objection, and T.J. Clark, along with other social historians of art understand the emergence of modernist painting in Paris in the 1860s and 1870s as responding to a distinctive experience of *modernity*. Baudelaire's poems, prose poems, and art criticism are read as testifying to the nature of that experience, which has been variously glossed by subsequent commentators: sometimes the emphasis falls on the increasingly dehumanised and dehumanising aspects of life under commodity capitalism, sometimes on the rise of a "society of spectacle" with its newly

thesis is to take a different approach. By focusing on a single genre within Blanche's oeuvre over a much shorter period of time, and by thinking about its relationship to a very particular social, cultural and medical context, I hope to show Blanche as a far more complex and nuanced painter than many – including his two biographers – appear to believe. By using largely unpublished primary source material from archives in both France and the UK, as well as visual analysis, this thesis aims to place Blanche firmly into the history of the modern French portrait as an artist who painted with an in-depth knowledge of neurology and a unique ability to both concentrate on and pictorially suggest the psychology of his sitters. By considering the development of Blanche's career as being tied to the distinctive environment of the private clinic he grew up in and remained associated with, I intend to complicate the visual analysis of his portraits. When thinking about Blanche's upbringing and what impact, if any, it had on his decision to pursue a career as a portrait painter of intellectual Parisian society, research questions include, but are not limited to: how central was neurasthenia to cultural life in France; what was the cultural significance of the private clinic in Paris; what was Blanche's connection to the Parisian neurological community and the city's fashionable neurasthenic circles; how did Blanche manage to portray the nervous ailments of his neurasthenic sitters; what do Blanche's portraits offer above and beyond a physical likeness; what role did Blanche's portraits play in the construction of neurasthenic identity?

The thesis will trace the lines of influence from Blanche's parents and family

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developed modes of entertainments, leisure activity, fashion, and display; in both cases, however, an experiencing subject is imagined as standing at a certain virtual distance from his surroundings, and a sense from himself (hence the pertinence of the Marxist notion of "alienation"). See Clark, T.J., *The Painting of Modern Life*, 1985, pp. 12-13.

home, La maison du Docteur Blanche, the neurasthenic patients he knew and grew up around, and the wide range of artists he trained with. At the same time, it will consider Blanche's development as a portrait painter, and the contribution he made to modern French portraiture by pushing boundaries with painterly techniques which attempted, above all, to emphasise the psychological sharpness of his representation of sitters. In his 1924 essay on Blanche, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer explained Blanche's desire to capture the psychological element of his sitters, as well as his experimentation with painterly technique and style using the term "psychological impressionism", an expression he defined based upon Blanche's "acute and penetrating observations", as well as "extreme professional security and rapid execution."<sup>34</sup> However, in this thesis, "psychological impressionism" is also used to bring together and encapsulate both the new ideas that were being developed in the field of neurology during the late nineteenth-century, as well as the painting technique that moved away from an academic finish.<sup>35</sup> This technique enabled Blanche to adopt a sketchy execution essential to the final appearance of immediacy, as painting was, for him, a rapid jotting down of visual senses. The use of impressionism techniques allowed for his brushwork to define form, space, direction and shape, all of which were intentionally eloquent.<sup>36</sup> It was not Blanche's intention or concern to produce art that fooled the eye, but rather to stress to the viewer the individual nature of the artist's perception, and to create a portrait that was an extension of the

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<sup>34</sup> Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintures, pastels et lithographs*, Paris: Hotel de Jean Charpentier, 1924.

<sup>35</sup> In this thesis, the term "academic" refers broadly to the nineteenth century art academies of Europe that became extremely conservative, resisting change and innovation. They came to be opposed to the avant-garde and to modern art generally. The term academic has thus come to mean conservative forms of art that ignore the innovations of modernism. See McWilliam, N., 'Limited Revisions: Academic Art History Confronts Academic Art', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1999, p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> Callen, A., *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique and the Making of Modernity*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 65.

sitter's psychological and physical world.

In this study I am setting out to explore the relations between Blanche's portraiture and the neurasthenic culture from which, I will argue, it emerged. In order to do this an interdisciplinary approach is required, it is fundamental here in my efforts to explain, re-define and re-position Blanche's portraiture. As Alan Rauch in his effort to define interdisciplinarity declared,

Cultural productions, whether scientific, technological, literary, or artistic, all emerge from environments that resist the scientifically useful but highly artificial notion of mutually exclusive categories.<sup>37</sup>

Methodologically, my thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines my work as an art historian with my interest in the history of medicine and of neurology specifically. In turn, my hope is that this thesis will make a contribution to a field that has recently been termed the 'medical humanities', which is comprised of a variety of disciplines that explore the social, historical and cultural dimensions of scientific knowledge and clinical practice. Scholars working in the field of medical humanities investigate and give meaning to experiences, narratives and representations of health and illness that are often ignored by biomedical sciences alone.<sup>38</sup> As the social scientist Felicity Callard recently argued in a booklet produced by the Wellcome Collection, it is exceptionally difficult to talk about human cultural lives and experiences without considering the historically-specific biological and medical concepts that 'textured' them.<sup>39</sup> By placing medical knowledge, practice and experiences in context, such

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<sup>37</sup> Alan Rauch, 'Defining Interdisciplinarity', *PMLA*, vol. 111, no. 2, March 1996, pp. 271-282.

<sup>38</sup> 'Medical Humanities' [Online] <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/funding/medical-humanities/index.htm> [Accessed May 2015]

<sup>39</sup> Callard, F., 'Medical /Humanities', in John Holden, John Kieffer, John Newbiggin and Shelagh Wright (eds), *Where does it hurt?* London: Wellcome Trust, 2014, p. 16-17, 17.

scholarship can enrich our understanding of, for example, health, medicine and nervous disease in nineteenth-century France, but it can also add to our understanding of the visual arts and of portraiture in particular.

Using this as my foundation, I will engage in an in-depth analysis of the impact of Blanche's family profession, and the clinical environment he grew up in, on the development of his portraiture.<sup>40</sup> This will provide me with another lens through which to look at his work, which is markedly different to the approaches used by Collet and Roberts. I believe it is only when we consider Blanche's portraiture as being inextricably linked to the concept of neurasthenia that we can begin to appreciate the contribution he made as a portrait painter to the representation of a very particular, fashion-conscious, urban elite – a social group that considered itself to be uniquely diseased, quintessentially nervous. Callard embraces the medical humanities as a field of study that provides us with the means of unravelling 'the entanglements of subjectivity, experience and pathology'.<sup>41</sup> The task of the scholar, she proposes, is to 'track the flight of entanglement'.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Blanche's career as a portraitist, when, where and how did subjectivity, experience and pathology become so intertwined? It is my contention that, in any study of Blanche, it is highly artificial to consider the development of his portraiture apart from the developments in neurology that defined the context in which he lived and worked. The language of portraiture, I will argue, was intrinsically connected to the language of nervous disorder. This is the territory I have set out to explore.

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<sup>40</sup> The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates claimed that "wherever the art of Medicine is loved, there is also a love of Humanity", suggesting both that medicine is an "art" and there is a crucial association between medicine and the "human" dimensions of the humanities. Jack, B. 'The rise of the medical humanities', *Times Higher Education*, January 22 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Callard, F., 2014, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Callard, F., 2014, p. 17.

The chapters of this thesis are conceived as a chronological series in order to explain and emphasise the developments and changes not only in the history of neurology and nerves, but also in modern French culture and portrait painting. Through using a chronological approach, the thesis is also able to work its way through the historical timeline of key events in both the fields of medicine and art, and to provide a window through which to consider the relationship between neurasthenia, Blanche and modern French portraiture. Chapter 1 'Portraits of a Lifetime: Writings on Jacques-Émile Blanche, French Modern Portraiture and Neurasthenia' offers a summary and analysis of the current state of scholarship on Blanche and the connections between nineteenth-century neurology and the visual arts in Europe, and Paris in particular. As this is only the second study on Blanche to be written in twenty-five years in English, Blanche is considered through his limited appearances in English publications and exhibition catalogues, as well as key French texts. Chapter 2 'Neurasthenia and the History of Psychiatry' begins with a brief history of the founding of French psychiatry through Phillipe Pinel before moving on to provide a comprehensive account of neurasthenia as a newly identified condition of the nineteenth century. Chapter 3 'La Maison du docteur Blanche' provides a history of the two generations of Blanche doctors and their progressive private clinics, la Folie-Sandrin and la Maison du docteur Blanche, over the course of almost a century. The chapter goes on to explore how the young Blanche grew up within his father's fashionable clinic, establishing relationships that were formative with the patients, and explores his early development as an artist. Chapter 4 'Jacques-Emile Blanche: People, Places and Portraits' approaches Blanche biographically, exploring his subsequent maturity as a portrait painter, his teachers and influences. It

goes on to examine how Blanche established himself as a portraitist through the Parisian salons and how he built up artistic networks in Paris and Dieppe. Chapter 5 ‘Jacques-Émile Blanche and Modern French Portraiture, 1859-1914’ provides a survey of the modern French portrait while positioning Blanche among his contemporaries in order to provide an understanding of Blanche’s portraits, his interest in people, and painterly technique, while also demonstrating his fashionability and exploring why he was the portraitist of choice for the ‘nervous’, cultivated Parisian elite. The final chapters both present case studies of neurasthenics whose portraits were painted by Blanche. Chapter 6 ‘Case Study: Marcel Proust’ examines Blanche’s portrait of Proust painted in 1892 through an exploration of Proust’s neurasthenia, Blanche’s painterly technique and the critical reception of his work as that of a “psychological impressionist.”<sup>43</sup> Chapter 7 ‘Case Study: La Comtesse de Castiglione’ explores the relationship the comtesse had with Dr Blanche, her treatment programme and the two neurasthenic portraits painted by Blanche of her in the wake of his father’s death in 1893.

Blanche was a cosmopolitan personality who played a pivotal role in the Parisian art world in the 1890s and early 1900s, yet at the same time he was a complex figure who has been virtually forgotten in art historical scholarship of this period. It is therefore significant that Blanche is the central figure in this study concerned with the shifting representative function of the portrait, and of the identity of the neurasthenic in late nineteenth-century France. As I will go on to show, Blanche and his portraits were far more than just a stylish register of interesting individuals of the *fin-de-siècle*. Crucially, he saw his work as a reflection of his civilised values – ideals and principles that were

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<sup>43</sup> Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintures, pastels et lithographies*, Paris: Hotel de Jean Charpentier, 1924.



informed, to my mind, by his experience as the son of one of the city's leading psychiatrists. My hope is that this thesis will place Blanche back at the centre of the nineteenth-century Parisian art world, a world he occupied so confidently during his lifetime.

## Chapter 1

### Portraits of a Lifetime: Writings on Jacques-Émile Blanche, Modern French Portraiture and Neurasthenia

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Fifty years from now, the public will view the portraits I have painted of so many writers, all my friends; and of the painter of all those portraits, there will be no trace in any contemporary book. I am perhaps the only artist of my age about whom there is no monograph and who is even ignored by the Larousse dictionary.<sup>44</sup>

In 1921, at the age of 60, Jacques-Émile Blanche reflected on the extent to which writers and critics had overlooked his long and productive career as an artist. In contrast to other prolific painters of *fin-de-siècle* Paris, Blanche did not see his work committed to public memory during his own lifetime. Moreover, in published writing following his death in 1942, Blanche appears in just a handful of publications. Although there is an increasing awareness of his contributions to portrait painting and to the wider pictorial representation of modern French identity during the nineteenth century, at the time of writing there is only one monograph dedicated to Blanche that is available in English and no *catalogue raisonné*. Such scholarly neglect is down in part to the fact that although there are items pertaining to Blanche in several archive collections (listed in the bibliography of this thesis), there is no single, extensive archive dedicated to the artist. But a further, more interesting reason for the lack of secondary literature is that Blanche's status as a society portraitist at work in a time and place that is identified, above all, with the avant-garde means that scholars have struggled to position him within the rich art

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<sup>44</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de peinture II, Dates*, with a response to the preface by Marcel Proust in *De David à Degas*, Paris: Émile-Paul, 1921, p. 78. The *Larousse dictionary*, otherwise known as the *Great universal dictionary*, by Pierre Larousse remains the most extensive biographical, bibliographical and analytical repertory on all topics related to the humanities. It is the only general reference work which gives, for all important figures, so many details of many kinds; it is also the only general reference work to offer such a detailed and careful study of literary, musical and artistic works.

historical discourse that has developed around Paris at the turn of the century. Despite Blanche's many, meaningful connections to some of the leading 'progressive' artists of the day, his work has received far less critical attention because, at first glance, it does not seem to fit the paradigm of French modernism.

My aim in this chapter is threefold. Firstly, I will gather and appraise the existing published writing on Blanche, which comprises: dictionaries and biographies, survey books and monographs; exhibitions and exhibition catalogue essays; reviews of those exhibitions; journal articles. A review of this literature reveals certain patterns: authors tend to rely on the same key source texts, and deploy them within a limited frame of reference. I aim to expand this frame of reference by thinking about Blanche's portraiture in relation to that of his contemporaries. To this end, after evaluating the limited scholarship on Blanche, I will go on to consider the more expansive body of scholarship on modern French portraiture – literature in which Blanche barely features. How have art historians interpreted the genre, how can the models they have proposed be applied to Blanche's practice, and what happens to Blanche's work when it is positioned within such a critical framework? In the chapters that follow, I will argue that neurasthenia and the wider culture of nerves played a vital role in the development of Blanche's career as a portraitist and in formulations of modern identity more broadly. With this in mind, after evaluating the scholarship on the modern French portrait, I will go on to consider the literature on the history of psychiatry, the history of neurology and neurasthenia in particular. How have scholars used turn-of-the-century discourses on nerves, social exhaustion and modernity to pose new questions about the formation of modern identity? And how have these questions opened up new ways for art historians to think about the

evolution of the modern French portrait, a history that would, to my mind, more than benefit from the inclusion of the work of Jacques-Émile Blanche.

### **Jacques-Émile Blanche**

When I began researching and writing this thesis there was very little published writing available on Blanche in English: four secondary source texts and a single obituary, which appeared in *The Times*.<sup>45</sup> The first text was an article by Gabriel Weisberg, “J.É. Blanche and the Stylish Portrait, 1880-1905”, published in 1985; the second was an article of 1988 by Denys Sutton entitled “Jacques-Émile Blanche: Painter, Critic and Memorialist”; the third was an essay of 2001 written by Heather McPherson entitled “Jacques-Émile Blanche: The *Écriture* of a Portraitist”; and finally, the fourth text was an exhibition catalogue essay by Jane Roberts, “Jacques-Émile Blanche: A young man at home in Dieppe” of 2005.<sup>46</sup> With the addition of Roberts’ 2012 monograph on Blanche, also to be discussed, these texts remain the only published works written in English on the artist to date.

The only biography written on Blanche is by Georges-Paul Collet, *Jacques-Émile Blanche. Le peintre-écrivain*, published in 2006. Working through Blanche’s life chronologically, Collet’s aim is to describe the multifaceted work of an artist who was also a writer, diarist and critic of his time, attentive to all artistic and literary innovations,

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<sup>45</sup> Nicolson, H. “Obituary of J.-É. Blanche” *The Times*, 27 November 1942. See bibliography for list of French texts written on Blanche following his death in 1942.

<sup>46</sup> Weisberg, G. “J.É. Blanche and the Stylish Portrait, 1880-1905” *Arts Magazine*, LIX/10, Summer 1985, pp. 97-101; Sutton, D., “Jacques Emile Blanche: Painter, Critic and Memorialist” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January-February 1988 pp. 159-172; McPherson, H. “Jacques-Émile Blanche: The *Écriture* of a Portraitist” in *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 145-169; Roberts, J., “Jacques-Émile Blanche. A young man at home in Dieppe” Exhibition Catalogue *Edgar Degas: Six Friends at Dieppe*, Providence, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 17 September 2005 – 15 January 2006, pp. 31-48.

including that of the avant-garde.<sup>47</sup> Drawing upon the unpublished diaries of Blanche as well as his correspondence files, Collet's richly illustrated book provides many valuable insights into the life and mind of the artist. Collet notes the importance of the education Blanche received in his youth and emphasises that the introductions arranged by his famous psychiatrist father were instrumental to Blanche choosing his vocation as a portraitist. Collet is particularly interested in Blanche's connections with England and Normandy, exploring his countless relationships through his copious correspondence with such individuals as Virginia Woolf, Henry James, DH Lawrence, Thomas Hardy, George Moore and James Joyce.

Jane Roberts, an independent scholar and art dealer specialising in nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings and drawings, spent many years researching Blanche and her book *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, 2012, is the first, and only, monograph that exists in English on Blanche to date. Using a biographical and chronological approach that is typical of celebratory accounts of artistic practice, Roberts provides a carefully documented history of Blanche's entire career, asking the reader to appreciate its vast scope and, at the same time, its focus on portraiture; supporting material is provided, in the main, from the books published by Blanche himself. The book includes a number of appendices – a chronology of Blanche's life, an exhibition history, a bibliography, a list of Blanche's published written work, and a list of his signatures – all of which are useful starting points for research. Although Roberts does make some reference to other sources on Blanche published during and after his lifetime, her referencing in general is fairly loose and this makes the text a rather unstable foundation for thinking about Blanche's life, work and legacy. Moreover, Roberts is reluctant to consider Blanche's choice of

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<sup>47</sup> Collet, G-P. 'Un artiste d'avant-garde', in *Jacques-Émile Blanche. Le peintre-écrivain*, pp. 39-55.

subjects and painting technique in any real depth; her visual analysis of the artworks seems superficial in parts. For example, her description of Blanche's 1906 portrait of Percy Grainger (Figure 1.1) is as follows,

The composer and performer Percy Grainger (1882-1961) met Blanche in Offranville in 1902. *“I was slightly wary of the young prodigy [...]. At first, I was stunned by the beauty of this steely-eyed young archangel with the most admirable profile, a crooked mouth as red as a cactus, golden hair, a large body that was harmonious yet seemingly disjointed, a workman's hands.”* Percy Grainger had a glittering career as a pianist and composer, firstly in England, then in the United States, where he settled in 1914.

As well as mentioning Grainger's occupation twice in the short paragraph and failing to reference the quotation (presumably from Blanche), Roberts also shies away from engaging with the portrait in any depth, with her own contribution to the description consisting only of biographical information, and this is typical of her approach. Yet a portrait such as Grainger's deserves to draw attention to the formal arrangement, the painterly technique and the way in which Blanche has depicted Grainger's hands.

Utilising a three-quarter-length portrait, Blanche depicts Grainger seated against a muted brown background and wearing a three-piece suit of a similar colour. The white of his collar contrasts sharply with the darker, duller tones of the portrait, and Grainger's pale face is where Blanche has concentrated the most attention. By using smaller, more concentrated brush strokes on the face, Blanche was able to create a particular level of detail through which the viewer can examine, and recognise, the face of his sitter. With his head tilted slightly and turned away from his body, Grainger's right side is left somewhat in the shadow, however his piercing blue eyes stare directly out of the canvas. An obsessive, eccentric personality with a striking appearance, Grainger extensively documented everything he did, and he appears here to be keeping a watchful eye on

Blanche as he paints his portrait.<sup>48</sup> Using a different technique than that of Grainger's face, Blanche completed the body and hands with rapid, sweeping brush strokes and used a strong, dark outline to flatten Grainger against the background. Blanche paints Grainger's hands and fingers as an entwined blur in his lap. Quick, long and distorted brush strokes create the impression of disfigured and disjointed hands, as well as a sense of movement; Blanche has enabled the viewer to imagine Grainger constantly moving his fingers. This highly particular depiction of Grainger's hands could be a reference to his profession as a pianist, or his anxious, overly sensitive personality, or both.<sup>49</sup>

Roberts' lack of visual analysis is compensated in part by the numerous, high-quality reproductions of Blanche's work that appear in the publication. Many of Blanche's artworks remain in private collections or are held in the stores of permanent collections, and are therefore often difficult to gain access to.<sup>50</sup> In providing the reader with such reproductions of artworks from all phases of Blanche's career, Roberts not only demonstrates her broad familiarity with his painting, gained through her work as an art dealer, but more importantly she allows, and acknowledges the need for, a wider audience to experience Blanche's works. By including such a number of the portraits in

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<sup>48</sup> For more on Percy Grainger see Simon, R., *Percy Grainger: The Pictorial Biography*, GIA Publications, 1983; and Pear, D., *Facing Percy Grainger*, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Grainger felt a strong need to endure physical suffering and regarded playing the piano as a way to engage in long, arduous labour. Therefore, rather than pamper his hands like other pianists, Grainger was firmly convinced that he needed to suffer in order to avoid muscular fatigue. He did the same with his testing his memory so he would be able to enter at any random point in a concerto. Rezits, J., "Grainger the Pianist", in Lewis Forman (ed) *The Percy Grainger Companion*, London: Thames Publishing, 1981, p. 178. For more on Percy Grainger's anxious personality see: Gillies, M. and Pear, D., 'Percy Grainger: Grieg's Interpreter and Propagator' Keynote Address, International Grieg Society Conference, Bergen, 30 May 2007 [online] <http://www.griegsociety.org/filer/1094.pdf> [accessed June 2014].

<sup>50</sup> Some of Blanche's artworks can be found in: Musée Jacques-Emile Blache, Offranville; Château musée, Dieppe; Musée du Dijon; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon; Musée des Beaux-Arts de la ville de Paris; Musée du Arts Moderne, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Musée Rodin, Paris; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Mulhouse; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen; Musée national du château, Versailles; Musée du Bruxelles; Museum of Fine Arts, Strasbourg; Tate Gallery, London; National Portrait Gallery, London; The Cleveland Museum of Art; The Chicago Institute of Art; North Carolina Museum of Art; Providence Museum of Art, Rhode Island; Stanford University Art Gallery.

oil and pastel that Blanche created – images that record his many intimate relationships with high-profile figures of the day – Roberts invites us to study Blanche’s work and shows her concern with writing a narrative of origin, rather than thinking about Blanche’s work in its specific historical and ideological context. This was taken up by reviewers of the book who agreed that the publication would act as an encouragement for scholars to engage in lengthier art historical study of Blanche’s work. Roberts’ text was published in 2012 but Jean-David Jumeau-Laford, writing in the same year, goes so far to suggest that the catalogue of the Rouen exhibition of 1997 remains the best scholarly tool for art historians, in particular the essays by Bruno Foucart and Philippe Dagen, as well as Collet’s biography of 2006.<sup>51</sup>

Roberts believes Blanche deserves an important place in the history of art and states in her introduction that her book sets out to show how he should be “reinstated among the great painters of the Belle Époque and pre-war period, on the same level as Boldini or Helleu.”<sup>52</sup> In attempting to position Blanche among other fashionable society portrait painters working in Paris during the late nineteenth century, Roberts repeats an established pattern in the reception history. Rather than reinforcing and bringing to the fore Blanche’s artistic connections, his desire to work with artists such as Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas and Auguste Renoir, and his development of painterly technique, Roberts instead categorises Blanche as a somewhat conservative artist, wedded to the stylish flamboyance of nineteenth-century society painting. Though more than aware of

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<sup>51</sup> Jumeau-Laford, J-D. ‘Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche, A Salon at the Belle Époque’ *The Art Tribute*, 11 November 2012; Dagen, P., *Le Silence des peintres*, Paris: Fayard, 1996; Dagen, P. “Blanche entre guerre et dadaïsme”, exhibition catalogue *Jacques-Émile Blanche, peintre*, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 15 October 1997 – 15 February 1998, Édition de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1997, pp. 19-26; Foucart, B. “Blanche, critique d’art. Corot et Manet contre Picasso et Matisse”, exhibition catalogue *Jacques-Émile Blanche, peintre*, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 15 October 1997 – 15 February 1998, Édition de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1997, pp. 15-18.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, J. *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, France, Paris: Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2012, p. 9.



what we would identify as progressive styles and methods, Blanche – for Roberts – was reluctant to embrace them. She writes,

Over the years Blanche would little by little absorb and digest all these many influences, to find a style that never wavered from a very realist vision, albeit tinged with Post-Impressionism, from the 1880s to his last paintings of 1938. He was never tempted by the avant-garde movements he witnessed throughout his life, and his painting remained steadfastly anchored in the nineteenth century that he so loved.<sup>53</sup>

Jane Abdy in her 1996 entry on Blanche for *The Grove dictionary of art* (which Roberts cites) is less generous than Roberts, arguing that,

Blanche, highly gifted, was an extraordinarily uneven painter, for his art bears the imprint of the last picture he looked at, now a Gainsborough, now a Daniel Garden, now a Lavery, now a Manet.<sup>54</sup>

Able yet ‘flighty’, Blanche’s apparent inability to commit to any particular style, whether “realist”, as Roberts defines it, or modernist, as she contrasts him to, is problematic for Abdy: Blanche is a painter who, it seems, lacks conviction and direction, flitting from one painted reference to another. This is not Roberts’ view but in polarising his work with that of his avant-garde friends and contemporaries – such as Manet and Degas – and emphasising how rooted his work was in the conservative (to our eyes) yet wildly fashionable art of the nineteenth century, ultimately Roberts does Blanche a disservice. However, it is not my intention to reinstate Blanche into the major history of modernism, rather this thesis examines Blanche’s work contextually.

In the same year of Roberts’ publication, the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent presented an exhibition titled *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche*, which displayed Blanche’s portraits of Blanche in an environment intended to recall that of a

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<sup>53</sup> Roberts, J. 2012, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Jane Abdy, ‘Jacques-Emile Blanche’ *The Grove dictionary of art*, London: Macmillan, 1996.

*fin-de-siècle* Salon (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). This was the first extensive ensemble of Blanche's work in Paris since 1943, and in France since the exhibition at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen in 1997. The elegant exhibition strived to recreate the atmosphere of the homes that once housed the works on show, with warm lighting, music, and the diffusing of a heady scent of amber, rosewood and Moroccan jasmine throughout the space.<sup>55</sup> The curator's staging of the paintings within an intimate context also created a very tight hanging with works displayed at regular intervals by pilasters with gilt ornaments; chandeliers, padded armchairs, folding screens and silk curtains were also used to convey the luxury and intimacy of the Salon (Figure 1.4). The graphic arts room was also decorated with wallpaper produced after a décor by Blanche for the 1912 Biennale in Venice.<sup>56</sup> Some might judge the setting as contrived, but was this not the case in the very places these works were made to hang? With such a small amount of information on Blanche available to the public, the setting of this exhibition certainly helped visitors to add context to Blanche's works, enabling them to imagine the sumptuous environments Blanche's works were produced and displayed in. As a result bringing his portraits, and the interiors they were destined for, to life.

The catalogue that accompanied the exhibition varies in quality, with just two texts, one written by the curator, Jérôme Neutres, and the other by Jane Roberts, both of which cover the same biographical ground. In the short preface to the accompanying catalogue, Pierre Bergé, director of the Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, observes that Blanche's work "blossoms when once takes the trouble to look" and proposes that his

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<sup>55</sup> 'Press Release: Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche' [online] [http://www.fondation-pb-ysl.net/medias/fichiers/DP\\_JE\\_Blanche\\_EN\\_Bdef.pdf](http://www.fondation-pb-ysl.net/medias/fichiers/DP_JE_Blanche_EN_Bdef.pdf) [accessed November 2012].

<sup>56</sup> Bergé, P., 'Préface', *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche*, Paris: Fondation Pierre-Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent/Skira Flammarion, 2012, p. 11.

portraits were more than just a catalogue of his favourite models from the Belle Époque.<sup>57</sup> In contrast to Roberts, Bergé argues it is a facile idea to categorise Blanche as an artist creating “so-called high society painting”, pointing out that it is used as a label for those who know “nothing about it and wish instead to eliminate certain artists no matter the cost among Helleu, La Gandara, Boldini, etc.”<sup>58</sup> This point is not expanded upon, and Bergé’s dismissal of such artists as Boldini is undoubtedly problematic as it ultimately upholds the very categories he is attempting to critique.

Gabriel Weisberg’s 1985 article ‘Jacques-Émile Blanche and the Stylish Portrait, 1880-1905’ was the first English text to focus solely on Blanche’s portraiture. It raised interesting questions around the misreading of Blanche’s portraits as “traditionalist”, noting that this had forestalled any serious assessment of Blanche’s role in the burgeoning of portraiture that took place during the Third Republic.<sup>59</sup> Weisberg’s article, though short, also attempts to provide an accurate overview of Blanche’s artistic leanings, placing him alongside artists such as Manet and Degas, despite his formal training with well-established society portraitist Henri Gervex. Weisberg notes Blanche’s need to become more aware of his sitters’ personalities, and to capture them in the portrait. In his discussion of Blanche’s portraits of his mother and father, the sketchbook studies of Rafael de Ochoa, and the double portrait of the artist with Rafael de Ochoa and Aubrey Beardsley, Weisberg argues Blanche was “a painter capable of abstracting from reality in order to create an image according to his own tastes and inclinations.”<sup>60</sup> Although

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<sup>57</sup> Bergé, P., ‘Préface’, *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche*, Paris: Fondation Pierre-Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent/Skira Flammarion, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Bergé, P., 2012, pp. 9, 14-20.

<sup>59</sup> Weisberg, G. “J.É. Blanche and the Stylish Portrait, 1880-1905” *Arts Magazine*, LIX/10, Summer, 1985, pp. 97-101.

<sup>60</sup> Weisberg, G., 1985, p. 100.

Weisberg does not engage in a sustained way with Blanche's portraits or his painterly technique, he lays the foundations for thinking about the challenges faced by Blanche in working in a period of rapid artistic change, and for analysing the distinctiveness of his portraiture that was based on the psychological penetration of his sitters.<sup>61</sup> As Weisberg states,

It is clear that Blanche, while still preoccupied with formal aesthetic changes and abbreviations in composition, gave his sitters a psychological presence. It is as if he had come of age as a portraitist, no longer hesitant to reveal the personalities of the people he painted.<sup>62</sup>

Heather McPherson picked up where Weisberg left off in her 2001 chapter 'Jacques-Émile Blanche: The *Écriture* of a Portraitist' in which she examines Blanche as a central artistic figure of his day, who has since been neglected and placed on the "scrap heap of modern art."<sup>63</sup> She states that Blanche, like Boldini and Sargent, has been dismissed as a society portraitist and therefore he occupies a position straddling the official art world of the Salon and the emerging avant-garde; an artist not fully accepted by either camp. As such, McPherson argues Blanche should be taken seriously as an artist who tried to "modernize the portrait while maintaining its traditional social mandate and humanistic content" and believes his career "underscores the instability of modernity and the complexity of the turn-of-the-century art."<sup>64</sup> According to McPherson, Blanche forged a distinctive painterly *écriture* in his portraits of the artistic and literary intelligentsia of the epoch that involved modernist methods of simplification and surface effects, which

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<sup>61</sup> Weisberg, G., 1985, pp. 98-99.

<sup>62</sup> Weisberg, G., 1985, p. 99.

<sup>63</sup> McPherson, H., *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 167.

<sup>64</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 146.

fused direct observation and physiognomic and psychological analysis with a modernist aesthetic and reasserted the traditional iconic and sociohistorical function of the portrait.<sup>65</sup>

This reductivist *écriture* (that McPherson argues is especially evident in his preparatory studies) transcribes the essential characteristics and expression of the sitter, and from this McPherson notes that Blanche can be considered a “continuator of the modernist techniques developed by Manet and the impressionists.”<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, McPherson’s examples of Blanche’s portraiture – Aubrey Beardsley and Tamara Karsavina – do not lend themselves well to demonstrating Blanche as a modernist and other examples of his work from the 1890s could have provided McPherson with a better foundation upon which to demonstrate Blanche’s emphasis on the flatness and homogeneity of the painted surface, as well as his focus on the psychology of the sitter.

McPherson’s chapter on Blanche appears in a book that examines the evolution of portraiture in the late nineteenth century after the advent of photography – an invention widely regarded as instigating a crisis in representation.<sup>67</sup> Considering Blanche’s practice in relation to portraitists and sitters Gustave Courbet, the Comtesse de Castiglione (painted by Blanche), Sarah Bernhardt, Paul Cézanne, and Edouard Vuillard, McPherson focuses on the painted portrait as a contested site of representation and the diverse strategies that artists deployed to revitalise a genre threatened with obsolescence. McPherson’s main concern is to “examine the ways in which painting and photography compete, conflict and negotiate with one another in the field of portraiture from the

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<sup>65</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 163.

<sup>66</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 163.

<sup>67</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 6.

1840s.”<sup>68</sup> She argues that photography not only led to the painted portrait’s identity crisis but also became an urgent incentive for the genre to define itself differently from photography. Modern painted portraiture became increasingly concerned, she proposes, with a “self-reflexive questioning of the premises of representation and its stylistic indeterminacy.”<sup>69</sup> Painters responded to this question by emphasising a sitter’s fleeting, subjective mood over and above their objective, physical likeness. Brushwork, as McPherson notes in her chapter on Blanche’s ‘écriture’, played a leading role in this representational shift from a sitter’s outward appearance to their inner, complex and conflicted state of mind. She argues,

Being modern has to do with how one deals with the contrasted structure of the surface of the physical aspect of painting and its interior or psychological domain. Blanche’s metaphysical and painterly quest and resulting doubt are emblematic of such a modern condition.<sup>70</sup>

McPherson argues throughout her book that portraiture offers one of the most compelling reflections of the changes and upheavals that defined the late nineteenth century. Methodologically, she places portraiture within the broader cultural matrix of history, biography, artistic and literary crosscurrents, and shifts in the production and consumption of images. Deftly situating portraiture at the epicentre of nineteenth-century visual culture, McPherson expands the frame of reference within which we can consider Blanche’s work, proposing that we view it as specifically *modern* portraiture.

## **Modern French Portraiture**

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<sup>68</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 4

<sup>70</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p.169.

Portraiture was central to the practice of modernist painting. Freed by the invention of photography from retrograde notions of physical likeness, painted portraits, as McPherson argues, offered powerful new interpretations of the modern individual caught in a rapidly changing society. Portraits also raised particularly pointed questions, for their commissioners, practitioners, and viewers, about individual and collective identity, the artist's engagement with the social and the political, as well as the relationship between what we might term an individual's physical and psychical realities. Attention to the persistence of portraiture in the modern era is a relatively new phenomenon. It has been the subject of a number of recent exhibitions, including *Faces of Impressionism: Portraits from the Musée d'Orsay* (Paris, 2014); *Facing the Modern: The Portrait in Vienna 1900* (National Gallery, London, 2013); *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2013); *Manet: Portraying Life* (Royal Academy, London, 2013); and *Madness and Modernity: Mental Illness and the Visual Arts in Vienna 1900* (Wellcome Collection, London, 2009). It has also been discussed in Catherine M. Soussloff's *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (2006), which focuses on Viennese modernism, and Tamar Garb's book, *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814-1914* of 2007, to which I will now turn.

Garb offers both a focused and expansive account of portraiture and modernism: focused, because her acute and intense visual analysis is essentially based on six portraits of women, and expansive, because her subject is modernism itself, and its role in the gendering of visual representation. Garb's narrative takes the form of six chronologically ordered chapters, analysing artists ranging from Ingres to Matisse, and focusing on a single painting from each. The essays are anchored by a prologue that proposes the

analogy between cosmetics and oil paint as a means of understanding why female portraiture was such an important site for artistic experimentation:

The link between personal adornment and painterly effect was regarded as a worthy subject for art and Woman was, by now, its widely accepted avatar. Increasingly, when the made-up face of femininity was recorded, it was to emphasise and celebrate its fabricated effects, the product of cosmetic consumption on the one hand and the manifest manipulations of the painter's hand on the other.<sup>71</sup>

In her prologue Garb clearly states that her study is not a survey or a social history.

However, each female portrait discussed becomes in effect a mirror of France's shifting social attitudes, and artists' attempts to register them through new pictorial techniques.

Garb gestures in several places in the book to the particularity of the historical and artistic situation in nineteenth-century France but for the sake of her argument, she focuses upon the association between femininity and commercial culture. The book's larger discussion concerns how the increased emphasis on materiality, tactility, self-referential painting techniques and the tangible experience of painting paralleled the decline in the importance of physical likeness. Combining historical facts with close visual analysis, Garb also emphasises the importance of surface effect to understanding not only pictures of women, but femininity itself.<sup>72</sup>

Garb's book is useful for thinking about the shifting functions of painted portraiture as she draws attention to the profound changes in the definition and function

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<sup>71</sup> Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Balducci, T., 'Reviewed works: *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814-1914* by Tamar Garb; *The Body in Time: Figures of Femininity in Late Nineteenth-Century France* by Tamar Garb', *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1. (Spring/Summer) pp. 65-68; Phippard, P., 'The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814-1914 (Book Review)', *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 2008, p. 262-3; Talbot, E., 'Review of "The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814-1914" by Tamar Garb', *Caa.reviews*, May 2008.



of portraiture during the nineteenth century, with artists (particularly those working in the wake of photography) constantly challenging the genre's conventions. Methodologically, Garb's book also helps us to appreciate the complexities in the intersection of social, psychological and symbolic factors involved in the production of any painted portrait during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this has been particularly helpful for thinking about Blanche's work. In addition, Garb's chapter on Mary Cassatt's unfinished depiction of her elderly mother offers a discussion of the subject's withdrawal in a melancholic mode of portraiture: Mrs Cassatt's empty stare and mourning attire diminishes the force of her individual personality. By drawing our attention to such other forms of portraiture, Garb encourages us to think about portrait conventions expansively. She also highlights the problematic and often harshly criticised modes of representation that arose at the end of the nineteenth century; as Garb states,

The potential split between the artist's touch and the material world made apparent at the level of skin had induced anxiety throughout much of the century. [...] Paint, too roughly applied, threatened to sully the complexion of the sitter while it testified to the infelicity of the paint application.<sup>73</sup>

Turning from the connections between femininity and representation to masculinity and representation, Bridget Alsdorf also engages with gender and portraiture in her compelling study, *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting* of 2012. Highlighting the tensions that existed between an individual's personal ambitions and a collective's need for uniformity and solidarity – tensions that ran particularly high as the Parisian avant-garde was establishing itself – Alsdorf argues that Fantin's group portraits reveal “the precarious

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<sup>73</sup> Garb, T., 2007, p. 10.

position of both individual and group in nineteenth-century life.”<sup>74</sup> Centred around five large group portraits painted by Fantin between 1864-85, Alsdorf insists on analysing these works as paintings rather than simply documentary portraits, as they are often viewed. This enables her to highlight the uneasy combination of intimacy and distance, bohemian rebellion and bourgeois respectability that each painting conveys.<sup>75</sup> As Alsdorf states,

Indeed, a chief reason why nineteenth-century group portraits demand our attention is that they materialise a set of concerns about modern life rooted in the uniquely provisional, fragile nature of their subject. It is for this reason, I believe, that they become a powerful vehicle of expression for modern artists who were trying to find a form for their changing social world and the place of the individual within it.<sup>76</sup>

Building upon Alan Bonnet’s 2007 book, which analysed the group portraits of artists and artist associations in the nineteenth century, Alsdorf calls for a renewed engagement with group portraits by Fantin and his contemporaries.<sup>77</sup> From the 1860s onwards, she asserts, group portraiture was reinvented as a way to express the anxiety that was created through often incompatible desires to be a part of a group, on the one hand, and to withdraw to the seclusion of the studio, on the other. Alsdorf’s research repeatedly demonstrates that the collective unity of the group was often more imaginary than real; group associations were necessary, but they were also always fraught with tension. Fantin’s contribution was to make such fractures and rifts visible, calling attention to a group’s fragility, while at the same time emphasising their individual need

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<sup>74</sup> Alsdorf, B., *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting*, New Jersey and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Alsdorf, B., 2012, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Alsdorf, B., 2012, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Bonnet, A., *Artistes en groupe: La représentation de la communauté des artistes dans la peinture du XIX siècle*, Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

for cohesion, support and public recognition. Fantin is the focus of the book but part of its strength lies in Alsdorf's comparisons to the work of his contemporaries, including Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Frédéric Bazille and Auguste Renoir. In drawing comparisons to Fantin's contemporaries, Alsdorf is able to extend and enrich her treatment of Fantin's work and artistic network, placing his contributions in the context of the avant-garde. Focusing her attention on detailed analyses of the genesis and formal structure of Fantin's group portraits, she reveals how these somewhat stiff and unyielding paintings offer up multiple layers of meaning.

Alsdorf does not mention Blanche in her monograph but it is impossible to not think of him in relation to Fantin's community and the tensions in the representation of their collective identity considering he knew and worked with them all. Alsdorf's nuanced analyses and supple style allows for her to draw the reader into Fantin's creative processes and the personal difficulties he encountered when trying to reconcile the different layers of individual and group identity. This is an important consideration when discussing Blanche's work too, especially in terms of how visual analysis can be used to extract meaning from form, and also to identify less obvious yet significant elements in sketches and finished works. Alsdorf's monograph has helped me to elucidate the ways in which Blanche's portraits also raise broader issues concerning artistic status in nineteenth-century France.

Alsdorf's work was preceded by the co-edited collection of essays *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789-1914* of 2011. Noting the relative lack of research into the complexities of French masculine identities, the editors draw attention to the persistent critical tendency to perpetuate the traditionally gendered notion

of the separate spheres, comprising the supposedly masculine public domain and the apparently feminine private realm – a notion that Alsdorf and the authors gathered in this collection problematise. In their introduction the editors state their intention to challenge the conception of the public and private as separate and essentialised spheres. Following recent discussions of how nineteenth-century women were becoming increasingly active in the public sphere (for example, McMillian’s *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender Society and Politics* of 2002 and Balducci’s *Women, Femininity and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789-1914* of 2014), the contributors to this volume seek to demonstrate French men’s very active involvement in private spheres.<sup>78</sup>

Laurie Dahlberg, in her essay ‘At Home with the Camera: Modelling Masculinity in Early French Photography’, argues that photography was a strongly contested site of representation during the middle of the nineteenth century and the photographic medium not only challenged established social patterns and ideals, but also troubled conventional ideas of masculinity by its emphasis on vanity and narcissism and its “offering up [of] the male as the passive object for the camera’s gaze.”<sup>79</sup> Quoting public outbursts from the Goncourt brothers, Charles Baudelaire and Victor Fournel, Dahlberg proposes that photography democratised portraiture in ways that made early critics wholly uncomfortable as concepts previously reserved for intellectual debate – concerning ‘identity’, for example, and ‘likeness’ – began to be discussed and consumed by the public in an entirely new way.<sup>80</sup> Photography could operate in a way that portraiture

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<sup>78</sup> Balducci, T. Belnap Jensen, H. and Warner, P., 2011, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Laurie Dahlberg, ‘At Home with the Camera: Modelling Masculinity in Early French Photography’ in *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789-1914*, 2011, p. 65.

<sup>80</sup> Dahlberg, L., 2011, p. 65. The camera’s effect on painting is also covered in McPherson; John Gage, “Photographic Likeness” in Joanna Woodall, ed. *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997; Shearer West, “Portraiture and Modernism” in *Portraiture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

could not and faster exposure times combined with a boom in commercial establishments across Paris during the 1860s meant that photographic reproducibility resulted in the photographic portrait having

an infinitely expandable reach in public (particularly in the avidly collected and traded *carte-de-visite* format), while its small scale allowed it to be held in the hand or carried on the body. [...] Photographic portraits lent themselves to intimate contemplation.<sup>81</sup>

Dahlberg notes that the portrait-specialisations that took shape within the new medium were gendered in that they “confirmed handily to existing masculine types: the adventurer, the scientist, the entrepreneur, the artist, the industrialist.”<sup>82</sup> Studio photographers began competing with one another in an attempt to flatter the social ambitions of such male customers. The burgeoning of photography, added to its new accessibility, meant that “the public began judging art by its likeness to photography.”<sup>83</sup> Dahlberg argues the practice of photography was as much about class as it was about gender with the photograph becoming a “publically inscribed badge of bourgeois honour.”<sup>84</sup> Part of this badge of honour lay in being able to endure the photographic process, which had a deserved reputation for being physically uncomfortable. Dahlberg also draws attention to some of the anxieties that went with sitting for photographic portraits, such as the symbolic loss of autonomy through the photograph’s casual reproduction and distribution. In addition, she notes there was a widespread, superstitious

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<sup>81</sup> Dahlberg, L., 2011, p. 67.

<sup>82</sup> Dahlberg, L., 2011, p. 67.

<sup>83</sup> Dahlberg, L., 2011, pp. 65-66.

<sup>84</sup> Dahlberg, L., 2011, p. 67.

fear of having the likeness taken at all, based on the notion that the camera would strip away some invisible essence of the subject.<sup>85</sup>

Dahlberg's work has been useful for this research project in terms of thinking broadly about gender, class, interiority and the relationship between portraiture and photography during the nineteenth century. In particular, it has proved valuable in considering how Blanche and other modern portraitists working in Paris at a high point in the public's fascination with the photograph, needed to offer their sitters something other than a representation of 'likeness' – something more. Dahlberg has also been beneficial for considering if, and how, artists used photography and if they were instrumental in the realisation of their portraits. However, Natasha Ruiz-Gómez in her 2010 essay 'Auguste Rodin, Photography, and the Construction of Masculinity', offers a deeper understanding of artists using photography as she examines a lesser-known element of Rodin's œuvre in a study of his photographs that "occupy a space somewhere between a traditional portrait and a self-portrait."<sup>86</sup>

In order to address issues of "myth, identity and agency" in Rodin's life, Ruiz-Gómez explores the execution of photographic portraits that downplayed his reputation for excessive sensuality in favour of introspective, intellectual activities and images of bourgeois propriety.<sup>87</sup> As she states,

The photographs of Rodin in his homes and studios show masculinity as a variable concept and contest the monolithic view of the sculptor's aggressively exaggerated sexuality that continues to plague studies of his life and work. For Rodin, it seems that the bourgeois interior was not

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<sup>85</sup> Dahlberg, L., 2011, p. 68.

<sup>86</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 'Auguste Rodin, Photography, and the Construction of Masculinity', *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1780–1914*, eds. Temma Balducci, Heather Belnap Jensen and Pamela Warner, Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 197-212.

<sup>87</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2010, p. 198.

a “box in the theatre of the world”...but as a stage on which he enacted different identities.<sup>88</sup>

A careful examination of his portraits reveals that Rodin fashioned a fragmented and necessarily “incomplete persona that is far more ambiguous than has been presumed.”<sup>89</sup>

As such, Rodin’s use of photography in order to construct a range of masculinities reveals “culturally prescribed gender roles are both performative and contingent.”<sup>90</sup>

Ruiz-Gómez also highlights that for Rodin, the interior was not only a private space of reflection, creation, and domesticity, but also the domain of public relations and celebrity – an intriguing combination of the ‘separate spheres’. This article is useful for this research project in thinking about how Blanche’s contemporaries used, understood and negotiated a place in their practice for the photographic medium. However it is also valuable in thinking about how Blanche used his studio/salon space as a public/private space for painting, being creative and socialising.

Susan Sidlauskas in her book, *Body, Place and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, examines through pertinent examples the development of the-figure(s)-in-interiors in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painting through concepts of interiority and embodiment, the viewer and the viewed.<sup>91</sup> Sidlauskas discusses paintings by Degas, Sargent, Vuillard, and Sickert with a fine eye for pictorial detail, psychological and social suggestion. She explains “the painted interior did not function, ultimately, as a sign of safety, but instead became a deeply contested terrain where the very nature and

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<sup>88</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2010, p. 198.

<sup>89</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2010, p. 199.

<sup>90</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2010, p. 206.

<sup>91</sup> Sidlauskas, S., *Body, Place and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

limits of identity were debated rather than resolved.”<sup>92</sup> Sidlauskas claims, “interiority characterized a distinctly nineteenth-century sense of self. A perception of self that is *contained* psychically, bodily, architecturally, and socially characterizes interiority.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, the nineteenth century understood identity as something that could and should have limits, and the meanings of the paintings are, for Sidlauskas, enacted in the viewers’ psychological and somatic identifications with the figures portrayed. “During the nineteenth century,” Sidlauskas explains, “the practice of animating one’s immediate surroundings began as material inspiration and came to constitute a mode of configuring identity.”<sup>94</sup> As such, the works discussed produce a series of subject positions in visual representations that parallel the rise, consolidation, and decline of modern bourgeois identity.

When considering *Blanche*, Sidlauskas’ text is useful for reflecting upon the notion that the paintings she discusses are “inseparable from the achievements of modernism”, whereby “each artist struggled with such intensity that the depth and texture of the quest remain palpable.”<sup>95</sup> Also, when thinking about her notion of “retreating to the interior”, it is useful to see that, for Sidlauskas, it is an explicitly modern journey. However, in describing the retreat as a masculine experience she serves to exclude female artistic agency, refusing the association of the domestic environment with femininity.<sup>96</sup> She writes,

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<sup>92</sup> Sidlauskas, S., 2000, p. x.

<sup>93</sup> Sidlauskas, S., 2000, pp. 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> Sidlauskas, S., 2000, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> Sidlauskas, S., 2000, p. xi.

<sup>96</sup> Mansfield, E., ‘Review: Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*’ [online] <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring02/86-spring02/spring02review/185-victorian-babylon-people-streets-and-images-in-nineteenth-century-london-by-lynda-nead-and-body-place-and-self-in-nineteenth-century-painting-by-susan-sidlauskas> [accessed June 2015]



The usual polarities between the masculine and feminine realms of the nineteenth century, as they are employed to interpret images, must be tempered somewhat. [...] I would add that *men's* interior lives must be considered as well.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, when thinking about how Sidlauskas' text is useful for this research project and Blanche, it is interesting to reflect upon how Sidlauskas' notion of the *fin-de-siècle* "psychologised interior" constitutes a mature expression of a longer cultural interest in the interior as a "metaphysical vessel for the self" and one that also coincided with the development of modern bourgeois identity.<sup>98</sup>

In its pursuit of artistic interiority, Sidlauskas' text acknowledges the influence of Debora Silverman's book *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, on modern culture's late nineteenth-century "retreat to the interior." Silverman's important text of 1989 focuses its argument on the affiliations between modern design, the domestic interior and the relationship of both to the new medical psychology of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) and Hippolyte Bernheim (1840-1919). Highlighting how interiors were designed to stimulate a visitor not just visually but also psychically, Silverman explores how interiors contributed to a distinctly late-nineteenth-century "cult of the self", reflecting the refined tastes of their inhabitants and appealing to the sensitivities of those who visited them. Quoting Georges Valbert writing for the *Revue des deux mondes*, Silverman explains that by 1889 a decade of clinical exploration of new dimensions of the self had already gained public attention.<sup>99</sup> Valbert had noted that a cult of the self had emerged to compensate for

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<sup>97</sup> Sidlauskas, S., 2000, p. 26.

<sup>98</sup> Sidlauskas, S., 2000, p. x.

<sup>99</sup> Silverman, D. L., *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, California: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 76-77.

the challenges to individuality wrought by machine production and colossal technology.

Silverman writes,

The continual search for the new and varied sensations, however, denied to the ego both contentment and stable boundaries. If self-reflexiveness countered regimentation and social levelling, it also transformed modern man into an “agitated” and weary “neuropath.”<sup>100</sup>

Silverman is interested in particular in how “nervous vibrations and unconscious projections” were conveyed by interiors and understood by their creators. She argues that the atmosphere of the interior became increasingly personal and highly subjective, as the movement of forms on the wall surface or the utilization of certain colours elicited highly particular responses or sensations from the occupants of the room. Silverman points to the fact that in the late nineteenth century the interior was no longer a stable environment; new ideas on interior design and states of mind paralleled advances made by leading medical doctors at the time. She writes,

The meaning of the 1890s craft modern style was inextricably linked to a new French medical psychology that identified the interior of the human organism as a sensitive nervous mechanism. The language of art criticism, the ideas expressed by the artists themselves, and the statements of some promoters of art nouveau form a consistent pattern: an appeal to concepts absorbed from the late nineteenth-century French neuropsychiatry. [...] Neuropsychiatric medicine was not simply a new source for, or an influence upon, art nouveau. Rather the interaction between art and neuropsychiatry in the 1890s was complex and reciprocal, with influence flowing in both directions.<sup>101</sup>

Silverman’s book ties ideas from the new medical psychology to artistic representation through the interiors of Jean-Martin Charcot and his wife who produced furniture, decorative objects, and sculpture, as well as the work of Emile Gallé. She

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<sup>100</sup> Silverman, D. L., *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, California: University of California Press, 1989, p. 76.

<sup>101</sup> Silverman, D.L., 1989, p. 9.

suggests how modernity, privacy, and interiority were deeply linked to nervousness, suggestibility and the unconscious in France. Silverman also argues that this period was about the birth of ‘psychological man’, and that it was French art nouveau (not modernism) that provided a “visual language for this modern psychological discovery.”

She states,

If the late nineteenth century produced the possibilities for a dynamic and collective existence, the space and setting of mass man, it also gave birth to the triumph of psychological man, whose liberty and isolation were heightened by the monumental configuration emerging from the metropolis.<sup>102</sup>

It is this thinking that enables me to consider Blanche as an artist living during a time that was culturally defined by its interest in the representation of psychological sensitivity.

Silverman’s book also assists me in understanding the institutional and cultural influences in France that inspired the creation of artworks or the adoption of a particular style.

### **Men and Women on the Verge: History of Psychiatry and the Culture of Nerves**

One of the major aims of this thesis is to place Blanche’s portraiture in the wider context of the late nineteenth-century culture of nerves. How did his interest in portraiture reflect his experience as the son of one of Paris’ leading neurologists? How did new ideas on individuality emerging from the field of modern psychology impact his understanding and imaging of the modern individual? In order to understand this context for Blanche’s portraits, this thesis required an extensive exploration of the publications related to the history of psychiatry and neurology in France and, more specifically, the history of neurasthenia and its methods of treatment – sources to be discussed in the next chapter. In

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<sup>102</sup> Silverman, D.L., 1989, p. 10.

this review of the literature I have consulted in my research on Blanche, I would like to highlight those texts that have provided particularly useful and interesting methodological and contextual ways of thinking about Blanche's life and work, the impact of the clinical environment on the development of his career as a painter, his connection to a very particular "neurasthenic" sector of Parisian society, and his profound investment in the genre of portraiture.

The critical engagement with the history of modern psychiatry began in the 1960s and 1970s with Thomas Szasz, R.D. Laing and Michel Foucault's pioneering works that set forth the view that 'madness' was largely defined by the ways in which different societies fixed the limits between "normal" and "deviant" behaviour.<sup>103</sup> In Foucault's reading, the scientific definition of madness and the means employed to treat it were the products of evolving forms of social discipline. Thus the medical understanding of mental illness developed in parallel to the growing ambition, on the part of modern states, to shape the lives of their citizens in every detail. As a result of such examinations by Foucault and others, such as Edward Shorter, Roy Porter, Jan Goldstein, Andrew Skull and Mark Micale, the historiography of psychiatry and neurology has decisively influenced thinking and writing in many neighbouring fields of study, such as the history of medicine and science, the history of the body, and more recently, the history of art and culture.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Szasz, T., *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961; Laing, R.D., *The Divided Self: An Existential Study of Sanity and Madness*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960; Foucault, M., *History of Madness*, London: Routledge, 1961; Foucault, M., *The Birth of the Clinic*, New York: Vintage, 1963; Foucault, M., *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, London: Psychology Press, 1964; Foucault, M., *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France*, London: Picador, 1973.

<sup>104</sup> Shorter, E., *A History of Psychiatry: from the era of the asylum to the age of Prozac*, New York: Wiley, 1987; Mark Micale and Roy Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*; Jan E Goldstein, *Console*

Natasha Ruiz-Gomez's article 'The "Scientific Artworks" of Doctor Paul Richer' examines the busts and sculptures representing 'principal types of nervous pathology' created by the head of the hospital's Museum of Pathological Anatomy, as well as the Salpêtrière's resident artist, Doctor Paul Richer, for the Musée Charcot at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière in Paris during the 1890s.<sup>105</sup> Viewed as patient portraits, these provided an alternative media to that of the photograph and the cast by "permitting the doctor's intervention in not only controlling and animating the sitter, but also emphasising the patient's symptoms."<sup>106</sup> This detailed examination of Richer's works is useful for this thesis in helping to understand the complex relationships that existed between science and art, as well as the problematics of the categories that were traditionally used to describe, analyse and understand medical imagery at the turn of the century.

In another 2013 article 'A Hysterical Reading of Rodin's *Gates of Hell*', Ruiz-Gómez argues,

The hysterical lexicon permeated the French popular and scientific press during the 1880s – the decade when Rodin began working on the portal and when he had intimate connections to Charcot's family and social circle. By exploring the aesthetic and thematic correspondences between the catalogue of hysterical postures and the *Gates of Hell*, this article brings to light Rodin's engagement with, and appropriation of, the aesthetic language of a medical disorder. In so doing, it aims to reaffirm, and redefine, the modernity of his work.<sup>107</sup>

Ruiz-Gómez suggests that Rodin looked to break away from tropes of academic sculpture and therefore turned to modern medicine, in particular to Jean-Martin Charcot's work,

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*and Classify; Psychiatric Cultures Compared: Psychiatry and Mental Care in the 20<sup>th</sup> cent*; Skull, A., *The most solitary of afflictions: madness and society in Britain, 1700-1900*, New Haven: Yale, 1993.

<sup>105</sup> Natasha Ruiz-Gómez, 'The "Scientific Artworks" of Doctor Paul Richer', *Medical Humanities*, Vol. 39, No. 1, June 2013, pp. 4-10.

<sup>106</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2013, p. 5. The busts were of patients suffering from labio-glosso-laryngeal paralysis and myopathy, as well as sculptures depicting Parkinson's disease and juvenile hypothyroidism.

<sup>107</sup> Natasha Ruiz-Gómez, 'A Hysterical Reading of Rodin's *Gates of Hell*', *Art History*, Vol. 36, No. 5, November 2013, pp. 994-1017 (pp. 995-6).

which linked psychology and physical states in a way that demonstrated to Rodin how to make the public see what the patient feels. As Ruiz-Gómez reveals through her research, Rodin knew Charcot well, and though Rodin would have had exceptional exposure and access to the medical discourse on the subject of hysteria because of his strong personal ties to the Charcot family, he would also “have been aware of the popular sensational fixation on hysteria as any Parisian at the time.”<sup>108</sup> As she states,

The obscuration of the connection between hysteria and Rodin’s sculpture seems to have begun during the artist’s own lifetime, which outlasted Charcot’s by twenty years. Yet it now seems evident that Rodin discerned in Charcot’s patients and the visual signs of hysteria the ideal expression of the modern human condition and of eternal damnation. By adapting the visual language of a medical phenomenon, the artist created a potent sculptural idiom that we recognize today as idiosyncratic of Rodin – and distinctly modern.<sup>109</sup>

In a neurological reading of Rodin’s *Gates of Hell*, Ruiz-Gómez shows how Rodin’s contemporaries also recognized the link between his sculpture and Charcot’s neurology demonstrating how art and science did co-exist to mutual benefit during the modern era. Although these texts by Ruiz-Gómez deal with hysteria, a condition quite distinct from neurasthenia, they have been useful methodologically, in helping me to understand how artists turned to medical sources in order to represent the human body, and human experience more broadly in distinctly new ways during the nineteenth century. One fundamental difference between hysteria and neurasthenia is that the former is principally a matter of objective physical signs, the latter of subjective symptoms. The manifestations of hysteria, such as blindness, deafness, mutism, anaesthesia, loss of power, vomiting, raised temperature, and so on, can be tested and monitored by others;

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<sup>108</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2013, p. 999.

<sup>109</sup> Ruiz-Gómez, N., 2013, p. 1014.

those of neurasthenia all relate to altered feelings. In contrast, the immediate causes of neurasthenia were considered to be overwork, and especially worry. Neurasthenia could affect either somatic sensations or psychic feelings. The symptoms of somatic neurasthenia were often due to increased irritability of nerve centres causing pains, not along definite nerve distributions, but in wide and somewhat infinite areas. Physicians noted that after listening to hundreds of neurasthenic patients it “would seem as if their viscera had become as sensitive as their skins; they can apparently feel their brains working, their hearts beating, and their alimentary canals doing the work of digestion.”<sup>110</sup>

Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter in their edited 2001 book *Cultures of Neurasthenia: from Beard to the First World War* offer a collection of essays that were developed from a workshop held in Amsterdam in 2000 entitled ‘Neurasthenia and Society.’ By producing such a collaborative and wide-ranging collection that interweaves themes and disciplines into a richly textured and layered approach, Gijswijt-Hofstra and Porter take a progressive approach to the history of psychiatry, neurology and medicine. In the compilation it is possible to trace the development of the concept of neurasthenia

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<sup>110</sup> See Ernest Reynolds, 1923, p. 1195. Hysteria: a mental condition without pathological anatomic change in which diseased manifestations are imagined and assumed; and the basis of the condition is a morbid craving for sympathy or notoriety, or both. Neurasthenia: a disease of the nervous system without known pathological change in which there is a persistent weakness and irritability of nerve centres due to chronic overuse of neurons and manifested by purely subjective symptoms – that is, altered by feelings. Other symptoms appeared to be due to a lowered irritability of nerves centres, as shown by a lack of power of attention or by great bodily fatigue. Headaches were also exceedingly common in neurasthenics and were constant when they occurred. In order to have a system for diagnosing neurasthenia, physicians classified according to its prominent symptoms – cerebral, spinal, cerebro-spinal, dyspeptic, cardiac, and genital. For more on the differences between hysteria and neurasthenia see, Scofield, A.T., “The Psychology of Neurasthenia and Hysteria,” *The British Medical Journal*, 19 September, vol. 2, 1908, pp. 829-831; Mitchell, S.W., *Fat and Blood: An essay on the treatment of certain forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*, Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1911; Reyonolds, E. S., “A British Medical Association Lecture on Hysteria and Neurasthenia,” *British Medical Journal*, 22 December, vol. 2, 1923, pp. 1193; Goetz, C.G. et al., *Charcot: Constructing Neurology*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 173-174; Finn, M. R., “Neurasthenia, hysteria, androgyny: the Goncourts and Marcel Proust,” *French Studies*, July, Vol. 51, 1997, p. 293; Didi-Huberman, G., *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2004.

as an over-working of nerves (as it was termed by the American physician George Beard), which left the patient tired, nervous and strung out. The authors highlight some precursors of nervous illness – especially the relationship between diet and ‘agitation’ – and map how the disease was dispersed amongst psychiatrists before it disappeared from medical terminology. The true significance of this collection, however, lies in the authors’ discussion of: neurasthenic patients (where they can be identified); the treatments employed by different doctors; the wider dissemination of medical ideas about nervousness through popular health advice and advertisements; the difference approaches of practitioners according to their country of living; the institutions where neurasthenia was treated; the debates between doctors over categories. Throughout, attention is paid to how neurasthenia connected with wider contextual issues relating to gender, class, the state and national culture.

In so far as my research project is concerned, *Cultures of Neurasthenia* provided an excellent basis upon which to compare and understand the different cultures of neurasthenia in Britain, Germany, Netherlands, USA and France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>111</sup> Rich and comparative in its approach, the volume served as an excellent introduction to neurasthenia. Although only two chapters are specifically related to France, the text provided a wealth of varied and interesting case studies that effectively located the debates about neurasthenia within the context of *fin-de-siècle* medicine.

A further, interesting source *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2004-2005, brought together period paintings, texts and

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<sup>111</sup> Other useful texts on neurasthenia include: Gosling, F.G., *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American medical community, 1870-1910*, 1987; Lutz, T., *1903: American nervousness and the economy of cultural change*, 1989.



prints to explore neurasthenia as a gendered cultural phenomenon and a fashionable index of class identity.<sup>112</sup> The exhibition contained a dozen or so paintings (mostly on loan from the Smithsonian American Art Museum) by some of America's best-known late-nineteenth-century artists, including Thomas Eakins, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Eastman Johnson, and Thomas Wilmer Dewing. Each painting represents an apparently healthy young woman according to a set of similar conventions; contemplative downcast gaze, downward-tilted head, and a slouching posture, all of which are intended to convey the sitters' mental, emotional and physical exhaustion. The exhibition included texts and prints from medical treatises and medicine advertisements dating from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. These items addressed specific aspects of neurasthenia and the lives of women living in America at the end of the nineteenth century.

The exhibition gallery itself was decorated like a late-Victorian domestic interior.<sup>113</sup> The walls had been papered with patterned yellow wallpaper and the floor was covered with plush carpeting.<sup>114</sup> Flower arrangements were set out on tables and nineteenth century sofas and chairs were placed around the room. This setting, both visually and historically, unified the diverse paintings, prints and texts on display, presenting neurasthenia within the material environment of the middle-and-upper-classes, precisely those who were believed to have been most susceptible to the illness. Although the gallery was certainly not a historically accurate re-creation of an 1880s salon, it

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<sup>112</sup> Zachary, R. *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, Exhibition Catalogue, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2003.

<sup>113</sup> Zachary, R. *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, Exhibition Catalogue, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> The wallpaper specifically evoked Charlotte Gilman Perkins's 1892 autobiographic story "The Yellow Wallpaper", *The New England Magazine*, January 1892. In the work Perkins describes how the patterned yellow wallpaper in the room where she was confined as part of a rest cure – a remedy typically prescribed to women suffering from neurasthenia – served to induce hallucinations and further hastened her mental decline.

vividly staged the social and cultural context of neurasthenia, with visitors being invited to rest on the furniture and experience for themselves how the cult of domesticity may have contributed to the rise of neurasthenia.

The exhibition implied that different forms of knowledge and cultural production are often united by an interest in the body, a contested site intimately implicated in the struggle for social privilege and power. Reviews of the exhibition indicated that the museum-goers generally regarded the paintings on view as “frank illustrations of neurasthenic females, rather than as works of art produced by artists who were motivated by a myriad aesthetic concerns.”<sup>115</sup> However, I believe, in part, the visitor’s one-sided reading of the paintings was part of the exhibition itself due to the re-creation of the salon interior, which asked the visitors to see the works through a specific historical filter. The broader concerns of the artists were addressed and included in the exhibition catalogue essays.<sup>116</sup> The catalogue included four essays that explored: the history of illness and the current treatment of the symptoms that were once associated with it; the Gibson Girl and late nineteenth-century definitions of femininity; the representation of neurasthenia in the portraiture of Thomas Eakins; and how neurasthenia changed constructions of American female identity. This exhibition and accompanying catalogue assisted in furthering my understanding of neurasthenia and portraiture. It demonstrated how productive it can be to situate neurasthenia within a particular social context, and how effectively portraits were used to convey female portrait sitters’ mental, emotional and physical exhaustion.

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<sup>115</sup> Muller, K.R., Review: Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America, *CAA*, May 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Zachary, R. *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, Exhibition Catalogue, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2003.

In contrast, Christopher Forth discusses the relationship between neurasthenia and conceptions of manhood in *fin-de-siècle* France.<sup>117</sup> He questions whether the diagnosis of neurasthenia was indeed a safe way for men to be nervous without being associated with hysterical women, asking whether it compromised their sense of manhood. Moving between official medical discourses on neurasthenia and wider cultural understandings of what being a neurasthenic meant in France at the time, Forth demonstrates that this became increasingly problematic from the 1890s onwards. He approaches the relationship between neurasthenia and masculinity by looking into the attitudes towards work and the problem of fatigue.<sup>118</sup> Forth also positions the increasingly negative attitudes towards male neurasthenia within the specific circumstances of France under the Third Republic. In the final section of his article ‘Recapturing Manhood’ Forth argues that the beginning of the twentieth century brought an important shift, in that neurasthenic men were now considered to be responsible for their own nervous problems. As reflected in adverts, popular health manuals and novels, men were expected to gain self-mastery, to become mentally as well as physically strong by engaging in sports.<sup>119</sup> Forth argues that the shifting status of the male neurasthenic in France was as much a social and political phenomenon as it was a medical issue. Therefore, by providing a broad overview of neurasthenia in France, his text is useful for understanding and engaging with masculine and feminine representations of neurasthenia, as well as distinctions in medical diagnoses across social classes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>117</sup> C. E. Forth, ‘Neurasthenia and Manhood in Fin-de-Siècle France’, *Clio Medica*, vol. 63, 2001, pp. 329-362.

<sup>118</sup> See also Wessely, S., and Lutz, T. *Neurasthenia and fatigue symptoms*, 1995.

<sup>119</sup> Also useful Sneddon, J.R., *Self-treatment for neurasthenia by nature cure methods*, London: Health for All Pub. Co, 1951.

Although his text considers solely German discourses on nervousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Andreas Killen's *Berlin Electropolis, Shock, Nerves and German Modernity*, 2006, cannot be ignored in this research project. Killen explores how neurasthenia was defined and redefined through the interactions between doctors and patients, as well as discussing how social class determined diagnosis and treatment.<sup>120</sup> He focuses on three key groups – railway personnel, soldiers, and telephone operators – in order to document the spread of neurasthenia beyond the middle classes into the working classes and the service sector. He draws on an extensive amount of sources, including medical publications, hospital and state archives, and electricity industry periodicals, but unfortunately omits illustrations. Through examining the impact of modernity on the diagnosis of neurasthenia, albeit in a different country to that examined in this thesis, Killen provides a comprehensive account that documents the breakthroughs in technologies of transportation, communication, and leisure which, when combined, ultimately changed the shape and tempo of everyday life in Berlin. In exploring cultural attitudes toward electricity, the evolution of psychiatric thought and practice, and the status of women workers in Germany's rapidly industrialising economy, Killen ultimately argues the backlash against the welfare state that occurred during the late Weimar Republic brought about the final uncoupling of modernity and nervous illness.<sup>121</sup>

Gemma Blackshaw and Sabine Wieber also explore the relationship between art, culture and mental health outside of the French context in their co-edited collection of essays *Journeys into Madness: Mapping Mental Illness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*

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<sup>120</sup> Killen, A., *Berlin Electropolis, Shock, Nerves and German Modernity*, California, University of California Press, 2006 p. 107.

<sup>121</sup> Killen, A., 2006, p. 256.

of 2012. Though the focus is on the Austrian capital of Vienna, the authors' exploration of madness as a travelling between boundaries – neurosis/psychosis most explicitly, but also city/sanatorium, insider/outsider, and subjective/scientific – means that this text has been both illuminating and appropriate for this research topic. In particular, Blackshaw's essay 'Peter Altenberg: Authoring Madness in Vienna circa 1900' is beneficial as she analyses caricatures of the Austrian writer Peter Altenberg to explore the personal and cultural construction of his identity as a mad genius during his time as a patient at the Steinhof sanatorium.<sup>122</sup> As Blackshaw notes,

Altenberg's simultaneous engagement with... diametrically opposed notions of madness shows not only the multiple positions just one subject could take up on the map of mental illness at any one time, but also the varied and contested geography of this same terrain.<sup>123</sup>

This engagement with an avant-garde writer in order to understand the "authorship" of his own "mad" personality is valuable for this thesis in helping to understand how individuals might have found agency in their illness. As Blackshaw highlights, Altenberg provides us with a complex perspective on madness in Vienna at the turn of the century as:

a lived reality and an authorial persona; a debilitating personal illness and a regenerative creative resource; a place of exile and a means of cultural belonging; an "authentic" experience and an "inauthentic" representation; a condition to be remedied and a commodity to be protected; an assertion of power of power on the mad subject and an assertion of power by the mad subject.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Gemma Blackshaw, 'Peter Altenberg: Authoring Madness in Vienna circa 1900' in Blackshaw, G. and Wieber, S., (eds) *Journeys into Madness: Mapping Mental Illness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*, Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2012.

<sup>123</sup> Blackshaw, G., 2012, p. 125.

<sup>124</sup> Blackshaw, G., 2012, p. 125.

Her approach has been particularly useful for my case-studies on Marcel Proust and the Comtesse as a way to explore and consider the personal and cultural construction of identities, to investigate if and how Proust and Castiglione found agency in their illness, and also to reflect upon the ‘authorship’ of their personalities.

Laure Murat’s *La maison du Docteur Blanche*, 2001, has been contextually (as opposed to methodologically) useful for this research project as she explores the history of psychiatry and the relationship between creativity and madness from the discovery of unpublished, and extremely difficult to access, archives containing the only surviving copies of the patient records for the Blanche *maison de santé*. As this thesis explores in greater depth in chapter three, the Blanche doctors were modern, courageous, and energetic, opening their family home up as a *maison de santé* where Blanche grew up. Its ethos was in direct contrast with that of the public asylum. Murat’s analysis, informed by her extensive archival research, demonstrates how difficult it can be to disentangle the intricate connections that link the individual, whether that be doctor or patient, with creativity and then to situate it within an art historical and medical context. Therefore, as well as contributing vastly to the knowledge of treatment and conditions of patients with psychiatric disorders throughout French history, Murat also provided this research with the missing archival material which was necessary in order to provide a very specific context for the young Blanche, who grew up within this *maison de santé*.

## Chapter 2

### Neurasthenia: *la maladie du siècle*

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Neurasthenia was the *maladie du siècle*. Neurosis lies in wait for us and weighs more heavily all the time [...] Never has a monster made more victims, either because ancestral defects accumulate, or because the stimulants of our civilization, deadly for the majority, precipitate us into idle and frightened debilitation.<sup>125</sup>

Declarations of this sort by Dr Grellety, a physician writing in the 1880s, show how the diagnosis of neurasthenia and the language of nervous pathology was a common feature of French social, cultural and political commentary between 1870 and 1914.<sup>126</sup> A pathological construct meaning nerve weakness or debility of the nervous system, neurasthenia was considered a condition of modernity, caused by the fast pace of modern life.<sup>127</sup> It manifested in physical and mental lassitude, listlessness, lack of energy and enthusiasm, and a general sense of weariness. French physicians widely believed that the shocks of the fast-paced urban environment had a greater impact on the nervous system of the middle-upper classes, and these stimuli contributed to a deterioration of their mental and nervous functioning.<sup>128</sup>

The physician acknowledged throughout the history of medicine for developing a diagnostic profile for neurasthenia is the American neurologist and electrotherapist, George Miller Beard, who published ‘Neurasthenia or Nervous Exhaustion’ in 1869 in

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<sup>125</sup> Dr. Grellety quoted in Uzanne, O., *Le Miroir du monde*, London: John C Nimmo, 1889, p.57 translated in Gordon, R.B. *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 102. Dr Paul Dubois calls neurasthenia “la maladie à la mode” in Dubois, P. *Les Psychonevroses et leur traitement*, 1904, cited in Bizub, E., *Proust et le moi divise : la recherche, creuset de la psychologie expérimentale, 1874-1914*, Paris: Librairie Droz, 2005.

<sup>126</sup> See Grellety, ‘Apologie du médecin de campagne’, *Le Concours médical*, no.13, June, 1891, pp. 266-267.

<sup>127</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *Neurasthenia*, trans. Campbell Smith, P., London: Kimpton, 1911, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Weber, E., *France, Fin-de-Siècle*, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1986, p. 21.

the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*. Beard believed he was, at this point, presenting this nervous condition to the medical community for the first time. He stated,

The morbid condition or state expressed by this term has long been recognised, and to a certain degree understood, but the special name neurasthenia is now, I believe, for the first time presented to the profession.<sup>129</sup>

Beard was right to acknowledge that this condition had been long recognised and understood, as twelve years before his publication Dr Bouchut, Professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, had invented the term *névrosisme* to describe the condition of people who had nothing physically wrong with them, whose abdomen and uteruses functioned normally, but who were mentally tormented.<sup>130</sup> In his well-known work of 1857, *De l'état nerveux aigu et chronique, ou nervosisme, appelé neuropathie*, Bouchut identified the symptoms of neurasthenia in order to distinguish it from hypochondriasis and hysteria, and to assert it as a distinct malady. Following Bouchut's publication, news of *névrosisme* spread rapidly across Europe, where conditions of nerve weakness had long been known to physicians by a variety of names, including 'nerveux',<sup>131</sup> 'nervous exhaustion',<sup>132</sup> 'irritable weakness',<sup>133</sup> and 'brain fag'.<sup>134</sup> It was from this point, and predominantly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, that clinical

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<sup>129</sup> Beard, G. M., 'Neurasthenia or Nervous Exhaustion', *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, ns 3 1869, p. 217.

<sup>130</sup> In 1854 Claude Bernard coined the term '*milieu intérieur*', a process associated with maintaining the body's stable internal environment. Bernard famously claimed, "La fixité du milieu intérieur est la condition d'une vie libre et indépendante // The constancy of the internal environment is the condition for a free and independent life." Bernard, C. *Lectures on the phenomena common to animals and plants*, trans. Hoff H.E., Springfield: Charles C Thomas, 1974.

<sup>131</sup> Bourveret, L., *La neurathénie: épuisement nerveux*, Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1891.

<sup>132</sup> Savill, T. D., *Clinical lectures on Neurasthenia*, London and New York, 1902.

<sup>133</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *Neurasthenia*, trans. Campbell Smith, P., London: Kimpton, 1911, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Campbell, H., *The Anatomy of Nervousness and Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)*, London, 1890, p. 17.



neurology began to shape itself as a medical specialism.<sup>135</sup> It defined, described and discussed illnesses that affected the central and peripheral nervous system, in contrast with psychiatry that concentrated on the study, diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders.<sup>136</sup> As such, according to these definitions, neurasthenia was considered to be a neurological disorder, rather than a psychiatric illness during the late nineteenth century as it was a condition affecting the nervous system. As such, for the purpose of clarity and consistency throughout the thesis, I will refer to neurasthenia as a neurological condition and the physicians who treated it as neurologists. However, it must be emphasised here that the clear distinction we understand in medicine today between psychiatry and neurology did not occur across the entire medical community in France until the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>137</sup> Therefore at the time neurasthenia was defined,

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<sup>135</sup> Thomas Willis first coined the term ‘neurology’ during the second part of the seventeenth century, however the field and development of neurology is a rather young field of clinical medicine in contrast with the ancient roots of psychiatry. In France, neurology specialists were called ‘*neurologistes*’ only in 1896, and ‘*neurologues*’ in 1907, while the term ‘*psychiatre*’ (psychiatrist) was accepted by the *Académie de médecine* in 1802, but became widespread during the late nineteenth century, progressively replacing the term ‘*aliéniste*’. See Bogousslavsky, J., Moulin, T., ‘Birth of modern psychiatry and the death of alienism: the legacy of Jean-Martin Charcot’, In: Bogousslavsky, J., (ed), *Following Charcot: a forgotten history of neurology and psychiatry*, Basel: Karger, 2011, pp. 1-8; Rey, A., Morvan, D., *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française*, Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2005, cited in Poirier, J., et al. Figures and Institutions of the neurological sciences in Paris from 1800-1950. Part IV: Psychiatry and Psychology, *Revue neurologique*, 2012.

<sup>136</sup> For a further discussion of the central and peripheral nervous system see Goetz C. G., *Charcot the Clinician: The Tuesday Lessons*. New York: Raven Press, 1987.

<sup>137</sup> It should be noted here that it is difficult to review historical changes and developments in medicine with terms that were not necessarily in use at the time. Indeed, certain terms were specifically developed alongside their corresponding concepts and practices in the related field. This is particularly true for neurology and psychiatry, which emerged from the global concept of mental diseases and nervous system disorders. Moreover, historical developments were not identical from country to country. In France, which is classically considered as the cradle of clinical neurology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a thorough review of historical landmarks strongly suggests that, in contrast to common views, the influence of neurology on psychiatry was much stronger than the reverse, while neurology mainly emerged from the coming together of *clinique médicale* (the precursor of internal medicine) and pathological anatomy during the second half of the nineteenth century. See Micale, M.S. and Porter, R., *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 232-247; Goldstein, J. E., *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 2002; Gelfand, T., ‘Neurologist or psychiatrist? The public and private domains of Jean-Martin Charcot’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Science*, Summer 36, 3, 2000, pp. 215-29.

studied, diagnosed and treated, the fields of psychiatry and neurology were still predominantly entwined with each other, and French psychiatrists continued to treat conditions considered today to be neurological, especially in patients they saw in their private practice.<sup>138</sup> There is an exception: Charcot. From a disciplinary and professional perspective, Charcot had virtually nothing to do with the speciality of mental medicine that had emerged at the beginning of the century with Pinel, Esquirol and their students. Rather, Charcot's service at the Salpêtrière was separate and distinct from that of the alienists, and he did not receive hysterical or epileptic patients deemed mentally deranged.<sup>139</sup> Among his hundreds of publications, Charcot wrote nothing on severe forms of mental illness or its treatment, nor did he publish in journals of mental medicine or belong to their societies such as the Paris *Société medico-psychologique*.<sup>140</sup> Charcot developed the Salpêtrière into a centre for neurological diseases, with himself as the chair of *clinique des maladies du système nerveux* in 1882 making a clear distinction at that time between what he considered to be the fields of psychiatry and neurology. In an attempt to bring about order and make it easier for future physicians to conduct studies on these subjects, Charcot and his colleagues examined each of the patients and classified them according to their specific neurological disorder. However, if the question of

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<sup>138</sup> See La Berge, A.E. et al. (eds) *French Medical Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, *Clio Medica* 25: Rodopi, 1994; Bogousslavsky, J., Moulin, T., 'Birth of modern psychiatry and the death of alienism: the legacy of Jean-Martin Charcot', In: Bogousslavsky, J., (ed), *Following Charcot: a forgotten history of neurology and psychiatry*, Basel: Karger, 2011, pp. 1-8; Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *Neurasthenia*, trans. Campbell Smith, P., London: Kimpton, 1911, p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> Bogousslavsky, J., (ed), *Following Charcot: a forgotten history of neurology and psychiatry*, Basel: Karger, 2011, pp. 1-8; Goetz, C.G., et al., *Charcot: constructing neurology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Goldstein, J. E., *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 2002.

<sup>140</sup> He wrote just one article on sexual 'inversion' under the rubric 'psychiatry, and it was likely written in large measure by his co-author, Valentin Magnan, a leading alienist. See Goldstein, J. E., *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 2002; Goetz, C.G., et al., *Charcot: constructing neurology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.205.

whether Charcot had any disciplinary affiliation with French psychiatry in the second half of the nineteenth century can be answered with a straightforward negative, the problem of situating his work on hysteria and the careers of his students becomes extremely complex.<sup>141</sup>

This chapter will begin by heading back to what is acknowledged as the birth of psychiatry as seen in the work of Philippe Pinel (1745-1826) and his student Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840). Both men are widely, and arguably, recognised as being the first physicians to introduce approaches of humane treatment for patients suffering from mental disorders.<sup>142</sup> In order to gain a full understanding of the development of the humane psychiatric institutions and treatments later championed by the Blanche doctors, it is necessary for the chapter to begin here. Following on from this, the chapter will then briefly touch on the classing of neurasthenia and the case notes of Jean-Martin Charcot before exploring how modernity was considered to cause neurasthenia in the middle-upper classes. The next sections explain how neurasthenia was diagnosed and treated during the nineteenth century, and how the interaction of medicine with modernity and tourism helped to make neurasthenia fashionable to both men and women.

### **The Birth of Psychiatry**

Hanging in the entrance hall of l'Academie de médecine in Paris, a large painting represents the birth of psychiatry (Figure 2.1). Given as a commission from L'Academie to Charles-Louis Müller during the years of the French Second Republic (1848-1852),

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<sup>141</sup> Gelfand, T., 'Neurologist or psychiatrist? The public and private domains of Jean-Martin Charcot', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Science*, Summer 36, 3, 2000, pp. 215-29.

<sup>142</sup> Bordin, G. and D'Ambrosio, L., *Medicine in Art*, Getty Publications, 2010, p. 128.

*Pinel fait enlever les fers aux aliénés de Bicêtre* (1849) depicts a noble and touching scene taking place in the courtyard of the Bicêtre asylum, with the rooftops and skyline of Paris clearly visible in the background. In the centre of the composition stands Pinel, dressed in a long, black coat and trousers that contrast with the white of his waistcoat, cravat and shirt. He is being followed by elegant, young physicians and associates who gently push aside the mad men who approach the group. With his top hat in his right hand, Pinel extends his arm to give the order for an employee to file the chains off the wrists of an old, pale, emaciated man who is sitting half naked on a pile of straw.<sup>143</sup> To the far right of the painting, a man dressed in rags points to his once bound wrists, while another man stands up holds his shackles high in the air. Among the crowd there are men who appear to be visually tormented, disabled, and cognitively impaired, while others are assisted with walking, their muscles wasted after long periods of confinement. Müller depicts Esquirol, future clinician and favourite pupil of Pinel, in the colours of the French Republic. Wearing a blue frock coat, white waistcoat and breeches and holding a red notebook in one hand and quill in the other, Esquirol stands to Pinel's right, intently observing and recording the actions of his master.

This painting represents the ground-breaking developments in psychiatry that began in France during the late eighteenth century with Pinel; it is not, however, historically accurate as a number of other 'alienists' (the term itself deriving from Pinel's concept of 'mental alienation') across the rest of France, Britain, Germany and Italy were also coming to the same conclusions about the causes, most efficacious treatments and

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<sup>143</sup> Harris, J.C., 'Art and Images in Psychiatry', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 67, no. 4, 2010, p. 442.

curative institutions for insanity at this time.<sup>144</sup> However, Pinel was the first physician to both theorise, and put his theory into practice, and as a result it was his work that gained an immediate authority.<sup>145</sup>

By the late 1700s, France had some 177 general hospitals. However, patients suffering with mental illness were predominately confined in workhouses (*dépôts de mendicité*) and hospices (*hospitaux, hôtels dieux*) scattered around the country.<sup>146</sup> In 1793 Pinel, then director of Bicêtre, a public hospital for men on the outskirts of Paris, made one of the great breakthroughs in the treatment of the insane: ‘moral treatment’ (*le traitement morale*), which consisted of a routine of regular activity, work, a clean and quiet environment and humane treatment of patients by attendants. In 1795 Pinel transferred to the Salpêtrière, where he remained serving as physician-in-chief for thirty years. Based on his experiences at the Belhomme, Bicêtre and Salpêtrière, Pinel concluded that the public hospice was a place where psychological therapy could be carried out.<sup>147</sup> He said,

The hope is well-justified of returning to society individuals who seem to be hopeless. Our most assiduous and unflagging attention is required

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<sup>144</sup> For more information about Pinel, Esquirol and the liberation of the insane see: Weiner, D.B., “‘Le geste de Pinel’”: The History of a Psychiatric Myth’, in Micale, M.S. and Porter, R., *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 232-247; Goldstein, J. E., *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 2002; Riese, W., *The Legacy of Philippe Pinel: An Inquiry Into Thought on Mental Alienation*, New York: Springer Pub. Co., 1969; Swain, G., *Le Sujet de la Folie: Naissance de la Psychiatrie (The Subject of Madness: The birth of Psychiatry)*, Toulouse, France: Privat, 1977.

<sup>145</sup> On Pinel’s work see René Semelaigne, *Philippe Pinel et son oeuvre au point de vue de la médecine mentale*, Paris: Imps. Réunies, 1888; reprint Arno Press, 1976, pp. 1-53, p. 20; Pinel and the Belhomme clinic: Goldstein, J., *Console and Classify*, 1987, pp. 67-72, 122-123. On the Belhomme clinic: Réne Benard, « Une maison de santé psychiatrique sous la révolution: La maison Belhomme, » *Semaine des hôpitaux de Paris*, 32, Dec. 20, 1956, pp. 3991-4000.

<sup>146</sup> See Goubert, J.-P. and Rey, R., (eds.) *Atlas de la révolution française, vol 7: Médecine et santé*, Paris: Editions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1993, pp. 38, 43, 48.

<sup>147</sup> A similar movement of reform was also started in England by William Tuke, a member of the Society of Friends, and chief founder of the “Retreat” (1796), or asylum in the city of York, for the nonviolent treatment, care and cure of insane members of that sect, (Foucault, M., *Madness and Civilisation*, London: Vintage, 1989, p. 249), but Pinel had apparently never heard of him. Shorter, E., *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac*, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1998, p. 21.

toward that numerous group of psychiatric patients who are convalescing or are lucid between episodes, a group that must be placed in the separate ward of the hospice [...] and subject to a kind of psychological treatment [*institution morale*] for the purpose of developing and strengthening their faculties of reason.<sup>148</sup>

While this was not the first statement to talk of the therapeutic potential of medical institutions, in conventional histories of the subject, modern psychiatry begins with Pinel.<sup>149</sup> His belief that institutions could have a therapeutic function led to the notion that institutions themselves could be part of the curative process; confinement could make the individual better. With this, the status of the ‘patient’ – an individual in receipt of medical treatment – was acknowledged.<sup>150</sup> Individuals were registered to receive medical treatment within particular institutions, treated by specialist doctors, and asked to describe their feelings, aches and pains to the doctor as an initial part of the diagnosis and treatment plan. Pinel’s text of 1801 was vague about how life in an asylum could be organised in order to make it therapeutic, although he was very sympathetic to patients, calming them with warm baths, and filling idle hours with work and other activities.<sup>151</sup>

The notion of curability was an idea that was typical of the Enlightenment, and part of a

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<sup>148</sup> Pinel, P., *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale ou la manie*, Paris: Caille et Ravier, 1801, translated by D. D. Davis, *Treatise on Insanity*, London, 1806, p. 51. For more on Pinel and modern psychiatry see Shorter, E., 1998, p 12; McCorristine, S., *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost seeing in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 53. On moral management see Porter, R., *Madmen: A Social History of Madhouses, Mad-Doctors and Lunatics*, Stroud: Tempus Pub Ltd, 2006, p. 257-312; Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, London: Vintage, 1989.

<sup>149</sup> Agreed by other scholars too, such as Shorter, E., *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac*, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1998; Doerner, K., *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie: A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981; Richards, R. J., ‘Rhapsodies on a Cat-Piano, or Johann Christian Reil and the Foundation of Romantic Psychiatry’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 3, Spring, 1998.

<sup>150</sup> Oxford Dictionary definition of ‘patient’: ‘A person receiving or registered to receive medical treatment.’

<sup>151</sup> Pinel, P., *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale ou la manie*, Paris: Caille et Ravier, 1801, translated by D. D. Davis, *Treatise on Insanity*, London, 1806, p. 62.

larger agenda of self-improvement through social, political and medical engineering.<sup>152</sup> From this, the new discipline of psychiatry began to quickly develop, with a number of physicians training exclusively in the field. Despite this, the word ‘psychiatrist’ did not appear until 1802.<sup>153</sup>

In 1811 Esquirol joined Pinel at the Salpêtrière, replacing Jean-Baptiste Pussin (1746–1811) as administrator of the psychiatric division.<sup>154</sup> The two physicians made a great partnership, as aside from being close friends they had extensive experience of working in private clinics. With this in mind, it is interesting to note the most progressive notion of Pinel’s asylum, as put into operation by Esquirol, was that of a therapeutic community: patients and physicians living as community members in a hospital setting. Esquirol believed in the salutary effects of a patient’s ‘isolation’ from the outside world, including from family and friends.<sup>155</sup> However, this did not mean Esquirol did not realise the curative value patients gained from spending time in a family environment, and in Esquirol’s private clinic located across from the Salpêtrière (which later moved to the

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<sup>152</sup> This Enlightenment-style scientific thinking spanned continents: journals circulated widely, important books were soon translated, and individual physicians undertook trips abroad to learn what was happening elsewhere. Edward Shorter believes that it was this kind of scientific thinking, largely independent of social setting, which launched psychiatry. See Shorter, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>153</sup> ‘*Psychiatre*’ (formed directly from the Greek roots meaning ‘physician of the psyche’) was first listed in a French dictionary in 1802 as a term reserved solely for scholarly discourse. See Goldstein, J.E., *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 6; Robert, P., *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, 1842.

<sup>154</sup> Goldstein offers a reliable guide to these events in *Console and Classify*, p. 124. Esquirol began making a name for himself in 1802 with his doctoral thesis: Esquirol, J.E., *Passions*, in *Mental Maladies: a treatise on insanity*, translated by E.K. Hunt, 1845, p. 21.

<sup>155</sup> Esquirol, J. E., ‘De la lypémanie ou mélancolie’ 1820, in Esquirol, J.E., *Des maladies mentales*, 3 vols, Paris: Baillière, 1838, vol.1, p.470.

suburb of Ivry), the patients would eat together at the same table with the Esquirol family.<sup>156</sup>

In 1876, at the beginning of the Third Republic, Tony Robert-Fleury (1837-1912) painted a canvas entitled *Philippe Pinel releasing lunatics from their chains at the Salpêtrière asylum in Paris in 1795* (Figure 2.2). The work proposed a variant of the great moment painted by Müller and appears to pay tribute to Pinel some fifty years after his death. Robert-Fleury depicts an aged Pinel supervising the removal of chains from an inmate at the Salpêtrière. In the centre of the composition stands a limp, passive woman inmate who holds out her left arm, while a man, possibly Pussin, is removing the chains from around her waist, while another woman, possibly Pussin's wife, Maguerite Jubline (1754 - ?), watches on with concern.<sup>157</sup> The smoothness of the unchained woman's body and the limpness of her stance epitomise her innocuousness and passivity, further highlighted by her remote gaze towards an invisible point. She presents the image of a harmless patient through her unthreatening nature and her willing submission to Pinel, which only emphasises the absurdity of the chains she is being removed from and the drama unfolding around her. She is the victim, freed from her chains by the new humanity of Pinel. The image of the asylum as one of freedom is enhanced by the openness and light of the courtyard. Her former disarray, due to the barbaric type of care that was customary during the Old Regime, still prevails in her unkempt dressing. Her white dress is dishevelled and torn around the bottom to reveal white stockings that have

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<sup>156</sup> Mentioned in Pinel, P., *Treaty medico-philosophical insanity or mania*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1809, p. 236. On this private hospital, see Weiner, D.B., 'Esquirol's patient Register: The First Private Psychiatric Hospital in Paris, 1802-1808', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 63, 1989, pp. 110-120.

<sup>157</sup> For biographical information on Pussin see Schuster, J.P., Hoertel, N. and Limosin, F., 'The man behind Philippe Pinel: Jean-Baptiste Pussin (1746-1811) – psychiatry in pictures', *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 198, 2011, pp. 241.



rolled down around her ankles. The right shoulder of her dress is falling down to reveal her bust and pale skin underneath. The right hand side of the painting exemplifies the turmoil of the Salpêtrière. Chains are attached to vertical iron bars and under the roof a group of women appear anxious and distraught as they sit waiting for their release. One woman is standing up, hunched forward and appears to be shouting at Pinel while tearing at her clothing. Next to her, an older woman sits on the floor with her arms outstretched attempting to help another inmate who has collapsed on the floor convulsing, or possibly in a hysterical fit, however her chains prevent her from reaching the woman who writhes on the ground. The patients seem naturally disposed, when treated humanely, to help one another.<sup>158</sup> The left half of the painting is peaceful in comparison, with well-dressed men, women and children calmly looking on; a woman holds an infant or a doll, and a man grasps a book, perhaps a hospital registry, under his arm. In the background two women, unrestricted in their movements, descend the stairs. Rather than the heroic gesture shown in Charles-Louis Muller's painting of Pinel, in this painting, Pinel stands quietly to the left centre, cane in hand. A young woman kneels to his right and kisses his hand in gratitude. Guards, matrons and other officials surround him watching on and witnessing this great event in medical history. The contrast between the dishevelled women on the right of the composition and the buttoned-up respectability of Pinel and the other figures on the left, quite clearly divides the painting into the 'sane' and 'insane'. This divide brings to the fore the work of many French physicians during the late nineteenth century, in particular the potential reintegration of the insane, what insanity and normality was, and the boundary between the two. The precision with which Robert-Fleury has depicted

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<sup>158</sup> Kromm, J., *The Art of Frenzy: Public Madness in the Visual Culture of Europe 1500-1850*, London: Continuum, 2002, pp. 260-261.

the inmate's faces is a nod to Pinel's classification of mental disorders: melancholia, mania (insanity), dementia and idiotism.<sup>159</sup> The careful documentation means not only could the figures in the painting be portraits, but they also reflect the new ideas and increased interest in the categorising of different kinds of mental illness, beginning with the ground breaking work of Pinel.

This painting by Robert-Fleury adorns the entrance to the Charcot Library at the Salpêtrière today, however it once hung in the Salpêtrière lecture hall where Jean-Martin Charcot gave his famous Tuesday lectures.<sup>160</sup> The young Sigmund Freud remarked upon its presence there when he attended Charcot's lectures during the winter of 1885-1886, writing,

In the hall in which he gave his lectures there hung a picture which showed 'citizen' Pinel having the chains taken off the poor madmen at the Salpêtrière. The Salpêtrière, which had witnessed so many horrors during the Revolution, had also been the scene of this most humane of all revolutions.<sup>161</sup>

As a backdrop to the teaching platform, this enormous painting of Pinel breaking the chains honoured an historical moment in the long history of the Salpêtrière hospital, and these painted figures of a masterful physician among his desperate and anguished patients were juxtaposed with the teaching activities about to begin on the stage in front of them. However, a further function of the painting may also be surmised. Charcot's interest in documenting the universality of the visualisation of hysteria may well account for the

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<sup>159</sup> Pinel, P., *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale ou la manie*, Paris: Caille et Ravier, 1801, translated by D. D. Davis, *Treatise on Insanity*, London, 1806, p. 62.

<sup>160</sup> Micale, M.S., and Porter, R., *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 241.

<sup>161</sup> Freud, S., 'Charcot', in Strachey, J., ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3, London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974, pp. 17-18.

passive central figure, as well as the figure next to her in the *arc de cercle* position.<sup>162</sup>

Both illustrate stages in the hysteric episode. In 1887, André Brouillet paraphrased this painting with *Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière* (1887) (Figure 2.3), depicting Charcot in the place of Pinel and his colleague Joseph Babinski in the position of Pussin. The patient, Blanche Wittmann, is seen in the final stages of either a hysterical episode or hypnotic trance, however the position of the figure is strikingly similar to the young woman in the Robert-Fleury scene. The analogy to Pinel implies Charcot's position as the new liberator of the insane, in this case from the chains of hysteria. But, more importantly, this painting also indicates that hysteria, which the woman in the painting with the arched back seems to prefigure, along with other nervous diseases including neurasthenia, were now very much back *en vogue*.

### **Neurasthenia and Jean-Martin Charcot**

On the opening sheet of Charcot's personal file on neurasthenia, in front of journal articles, case reports and newspaper clippings in French and English, Charcot extended his sympathies to clinicians who were required to deal with patients suffering from this condition. In what could be the opening to one of his lectures, he writes,

There is a category of patients that I would be willing to interview in front of you, but I do not like to do it often because they are insufferable. Nonetheless, they represent the majority of neurologic cases that I see in my private practice. They are the neurasthenics.<sup>163</sup>

Charcot acknowledges here the importance of social class to the description of neurasthenia by noting that the majority of his neurasthenic patients are seen in his

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<sup>162</sup> Beizer, J.L., *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-century France*, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.240.

<sup>163</sup> Charcot manuscript, neurasthenia file, Bibliothèque Charcot, Paris, France.

private practice, but he also asserted its existence among artisans and proletarians too.<sup>164</sup> As his note demonstrates, and as other doctors such as A. F. Schofield, G. Ballet and A. Proust stated, “neurasthenia was by no means a disease of degenerates.”<sup>165</sup> Rather, according to J. M. Clarke, “It was a disease of the brain-worker [...], the more highly civilised races suffer more from the disease than those lower in the scale.”<sup>166</sup> This ‘distinguished malady’, as romantically defined by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim,<sup>167</sup> was thought to surface almost exclusively in the educated, middle and upper classes, affecting “those intellectuals and professionals who took up most intensively the challenge of modern life.”<sup>168</sup> Many nineteenth-century physicians accepted this generalisation that neurasthenia was principally a disease of the “comfortable classes”; leading a “society life” was considered to be one of its primary causes.<sup>169</sup> Yet as the decades went on and medicine progressed, physicians began to look for the symptoms of neurasthenia in patients from all social classes, not just those they saw in their private practices. As a result case notes reveal that neurasthenic patients were in fact drawn from all occupations and classes, however, even though symptoms were detected in patients of lower classes, physicians continued to conceive neurasthenia as

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<sup>164</sup> Gelfand, T., ‘Neurologist or psychiatrist? The public and private domains of Jean-Martin Charcot’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Science*, Summer 36, 3, 2000, pp. 215-29.

<sup>165</sup> Schofield, A. F., ‘Neurasthenia and Neuromimesis’ in *Nerves in Disorder: A Plea for Rational Treatment*, London and New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903, p. 52; Ballet, G., and Proust, A., *L’hygiène du neurasthénique*, Paris: Masson, 1897.

<sup>166</sup> Clarke, J.M., ‘Symptoms of Neurasthenia – Disorders Referable to the Brain – Insomnia’, in *Hysteria and Neurasthenia*, London and New York: John Lane, 1905, p. 175.

<sup>167</sup> Emile Durkheim quoted in Kleinman, A., *Social Origins of Distress and Disease: Depression, Neurasthenia, and Pain in Modern China* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 19.

<sup>168</sup> Beard, G., *American Nervousness*, p. 176; Beard, G. M., *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>169</sup> Kleinman, A., 1986, p. 19.

“essentially a disease of those who earn their living by brain-work” as there were not enough cases of neurasthenia found in those patients of lower classes.<sup>170</sup>

Charcot was categorical in distinguishing the symptoms of neurasthenia from hysteria, a condition characterised by paralysis, contractures, muteness, deafness, blindness, fixities and seizures in women of the lower classes; however, he approached the conditions in much the same way and recommended the same methods of treatment.<sup>171</sup> Although Charcot acknowledged neurasthenia as a condition he saw in his private practice, he tried to give the condition a universal base and categorise it as he had done with hysteria. His assumption was that conditions such as neurasthenia and hysteria could be approached like any other disease, and the symptomatology of the neuroses came close “to that which belongs to maladies having organic lesions. Thus we are brought to recognise that the principles which govern pathology as a whole are applicable to neuroses.”<sup>172</sup> Until Charcot, the identification of nervous diseases rested solely on post-mortem examinations, which located particular organic lesions or deterioration related to a specific nervous pathology. Charcot systemised an unprecedented method of diagnosing the diseases of living subjects. By acute observation, he correlated external signs and symptoms to an internal state of deformation and degeneration. Charcot’s “clinical-anatomical method” celebrated the correspondences between external physical form and internal organic essence:

The anatomy of the human body’s exterior form does not only concern artists. It is of primary use to doctors ... it is not an inert corpse that one can chart the incessant movements of life, with its infinite variations of

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<sup>170</sup> Clarke, J.M., 1905, p. 175.

<sup>171</sup> Charcot, J.M., *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, 1889, trans. T. Savil, London: New Sydenham Society, 1889, p. 12.

<sup>172</sup> Charcot, J.M., *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, 1889, trans. T. Savil, London: New Sydenham Society, 1889, p. 14.

movement, impresses on all parts of the human body. It is hence on the living that the anatomy of forms should be studied ... It's procedure is the synthesis. Its means are the observations of nudes, its aim to find the multiple causes of the living form and to fix it into a description. ... Exterior forms show, through their relations with interior ones ... what is hidden in the depths of the body through what is visible on the surface.<sup>173</sup>

Visual morphologies and design patterns formed the grammar of Charcot's language of clinical identification. Manifest physical curvatures, contours, contortions, and distended facial gestures provided the correlation between external appearance and internal disorder. The essential visual "trope" in Charcot's system of correspondences between outer physicality and inner pathology was the curve. Nervous diseases, Charcot believed, were caused by lesions or "trophisms" along the spinal cord, which found their physical equivalents in the irregularity, asymmetry, contortion, and curvature in the patient's comportment. As such, Charcot claimed that he had found a law-like regularity with hysteria "in private or hospital practice, in all countries, all times, all races,"<sup>174</sup> and believed he could do the same with neurasthenia. However, he was not as successful. Nevertheless, Charcot's own practice of thinking in images made possible the invention of a new language for diagnosis, which was his greatest contribution as a clinician.<sup>175</sup>

### **An Affliction of the Elite and Educated**

The medical historian Roy Porter noted that neurasthenics were believed to "develop exhaustion and depression because they constituted an ambitious elite living in the fast-

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<sup>173</sup> Richer, P. and Charcot, J.-M., "Note sur l'anatomie morphologique de la region lombaire: Sillon lombaire median," in *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, I, 1888, pp. 14-15, cited and translated in Silverman, D., 1992, p. 94.

<sup>174</sup> Charcot, J.M., *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, 1889, trans. T. Savil, London: New Sydenham Society, 1889, p. 13.

<sup>175</sup> See Richer, P. and Charcot, J.-M., *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, I, 1888.

lane in an economic system whose law was struggling.”<sup>176</sup> Porter’s statement certainly chimes with the work of Dr Adrien Proust and Dr Gilbert Ballet in their 1897 study *L’Hygiène du Neurasthénique* in which they blame the “competitiveness of life and moral preoccupations, more common and above all felt more deeply in certain social classes.”<sup>177</sup> For many French middle-upper class people at the turn of the century, sources of social chaos and cultural nihilism reinforced one another in ways that were all too evident. From this pessimistic perspective, *fin-de-siècle* France was politically divided, militarily disgraced, territorially dismembered, economically lacklustre, psychologically unanchored, socially unstable and artistically fragmented. For those so inclined – by ideology or temperament – there was plenty to worry about. Along with the stresses of professional working life, modernity had created the widespread belief that ‘susceptible’ people could become neurasthenic. As such, French physicians presented the neurasthenic as no longer capable of enduring the accelerated pace of urban life, where “the crowd, movement, a noise, a gesture, [or] a trifle are unbearable.”<sup>178</sup> It was also believed that nothing was more exhausting to a nervous system than a patient’s social life: a constant round of excitements that agitated the nervous system. A busy social life left little leisure time for rest and for the calm and comforting distractions of the home. This, along with copious meals, overheated rooms, inadequate and irregular sleep,

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<sup>176</sup> Porter, R., ‘Nervousness, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Style: From Luxury to Labour’ in M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, and R. Porter, *Cultures of Neurasthenia: From Beard to the First World War*, Clio Medica/Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, 2001 p. 42.

<sup>177</sup> Proust, A. and Ballet, G., *L’hygiène du neurasthénique*, Paris: Masson, 1897.

<sup>178</sup> Borel, V., *Nervosisme ou neurasthénie : La maladie du siècle et les divers moyens de la combattre* Lausanne: F. Payot, 1894, pp. 51-2.

intoxication, the use of narcotics and the preoccupation with the pursuit of pleasure, also weakened the system.<sup>179</sup>

There were also wide concerns that, like fashion, neurasthenia obeyed the ‘trickle down’ effect. The physician and author T. Trotter fretted that, “we shall find that nervous ailments are no longer confined to the better ranks of life, but rapidly extending to the poorer classes.”<sup>180</sup> In a bid to reassure the middle-upper classes that their symptoms were the result of nerve exhaustion and brainwork and not the physical exhaustion experienced by the working classes, Dr Henri de Parville told his readers in his regular medical column published in the highbrow *Annales Politiques et Littéraires*, that mental exhaustion was just as burdensome, if not more so, than the manual exertion of the poorer classes: “It’s always the same prejudice for the worker, intellectual labour does not count.”<sup>181</sup> This distinction between mental and physical fatigue was to a significant degree generated by physicians in order to assuage the anxieties of the middle-upper classes; it was socially acceptable for them to be diagnosed with neurasthenia.

### **Diagnosing Neurasthenia**

A physician’s success in accurately diagnosing neurasthenia largely depended upon their ability to sift and weigh the evidence presented to them by the patient, to listen and take note of that which was important. As Paul Blocq noted, “In no disease is this power more

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<sup>179</sup> Porter, R., ‘Nervousness, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Style: From Luxury to Labour’ in M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, and R. Porter, *Cultures of Neurasthenia: From Beard to the First World War*, Clío Medica/Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, 2001 p. 42.

<sup>180</sup> T. Trotter, *View of the Nervous Temperament*, 1812, p. xvii, cited in Porter, R., ‘Nervousness, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century style: From luxury to labour’, *Clio Med*, vol. 63, 2001, p. 32.

<sup>181</sup> Henri de Parville, ‘Psychologie: Travail de tête et travail manuel’, *Annales politiques et littéraires* September, 1896, pp. 189-190, translated in Forth, C.E., *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*, JHU Press, 2006, p.76.



needed than neurasthenia, and none offers a greater wealth of symptoms, often almost bewildering in their variety and abundance.”<sup>182</sup>

The hallmark of neurasthenia was a multitude of different neurological and physical symptoms, which included anxiety, despair, phobias, fretfulness, insomnia, nightmares, extreme fatigue, migraines, restlessness, palpitations, indigestion, sexual dysfunction, melancholy, depression, eating disorders, mood swings, hopelessness, and a fear of open places or crowds.<sup>183</sup> Despite the neurasthenic patient often appearing outwardly well in their appearance, a few physicians noted how neurasthenic symptoms sometimes manifested themselves on the surface of the body. These visual symptoms are few, however include: blushing; dark, dull and tired eyes; drooping of eyelids; drawn, emaciated face; sunken cheeks; pale and unhealthy skin; sallow complexion; thin, elongated limbs; small waists; heaviness in loins and limbs; difficulty holding themselves nervous hand (flexed wrist, extended fingers, fine tremors and dropped thumb); diminution of tone in the muscle; daydreaming/ inattentiveness; and inflammations.<sup>184</sup>

Physicians recorded cases throughout Europe, in particular France, England, Germany, Russia, and the Netherlands, and of course America. The typical age range of neurasthenic patients was from eighteen to fifty-five years old, however a large number

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<sup>182</sup> Blocq, P.O. and Onanoff, J., ‘Neurasthenia’ translated in Trevelyan, E. F., *Séméiologie et Diagnostic des Maladies Nerveuses*, Paris: Masson, 1892.

<sup>183</sup> For an extensive list of neurasthenia’s neurological and physical symptoms see Campbell, H., *The Anatomy of Nervousness and Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)*, Fourth Ed., London: Henry Renshaw, 1889.

<sup>184</sup> It is worth noting here that visual symptoms did not manifest in all neurasthenic patients. For notes and case files recording visual symptoms of neurasthenia see: Campbell, H., *The Anatomy of Nervousness and Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)*, Fourth Ed., London: Henry Renshaw, 1889; Proust, A. and Ballet, G., *L’hygiène du neurasthénique*, Paris: Masson, 1897; Beard, G. M., *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*, 1880; Savill, T. D., *Clinical lectures on Neurasthenia*, London and New York: Wood, 1902; Schuster, D.G., ‘Personalising Illness and Modernity: S. Weir Mitchell, Literary Women, and Neurasthenia, 1870 -1914’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 79, no. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 695-722.

of cases record an age of between thirty and fifty years. It is very rare to find patient records of neurasthenia in childhood or old age.

Although he had not, as claimed, discovered the condition, Beard's work on neurasthenia was invaluable to the medical community over the course of the late nineteenth century. In his *Practical Treatise*, Beard recommended a 'how to' guide for studying cases of neurasthenia, as he claimed one of the reasons why neurasthenia had been so long neglected was that the symptoms were "subtle, illusory, difficult of analysis and classification."<sup>185</sup> Other practitioners believed the very vagueness of the symptoms was in fact an aid to diagnosis, whilst also noting that certain symptoms occurred again and again with monotonous regularity. These "cardinal symptoms" as Dr J.M. Clarke described the term in 1905, recurred "in different combinations, some predominating in one case, and others in another."<sup>186</sup> They included: dizziness and pains in the head, inability for mental work, disturbed sleep and irritability of temper, pains in the back and weakness of limbs. Charcot termed these "cardinal symptoms" the "*stigmata* of neurasthenia" and claimed the patient's "elucidation is of great aid in diagnosis."<sup>187</sup> Charcot followed the diagnostic criteria suggested by Beard but placed special emphasis on the "neurasthenic hat" used to describe the tight, band-like character of a headache encountered by over three-quarters of patients. Tiredness when waking up in the morning was also a frequent symptom, as well as 'cerebral depression', weakening of the will, and loss of concentration.

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<sup>185</sup> Beard, G. M., *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*, 1880, p. 35.

<sup>186</sup> Clarke, J.M., 1905, p. 197.

<sup>187</sup> Charcot, J.M., *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière*, 1887-1888, cited and translated in Goetz C. G., *Charcot the Clinician: The Tuesday Lessons*. New York: Raven Press, 1987, p. 297.

Over time, physicians in America and Europe became more specific in their classification system. Beard divided neurasthenia into six categories: cerebraesthesia (exhaustion of the brain), myalasthenia (exhaustion of the spinal cord), digestive neurasthenia (nervous dyspepsia), sexual neurasthenia, traumatic neurasthenia, and hysterical neurasthenia.<sup>188</sup> In Europe the classification system was simpler and it was common for doctors to have only two categories: ‘Nervous Irritability’ when the brain was predominantly affected and ‘Nervous Debility’ when the spinal cord was chiefly affected.<sup>189</sup> Physicians believed that neither of these two forms occurred alone, “the cerebral and the spinal are always more or less combined; though generally one or the other predominates.”<sup>190</sup>

By incorporating into a disease picture a host of behavioural symptoms, neurasthenia created and legitimised new roles for physicians and their patients. For patients from the middle-upper classes, it provided a respectable label for distressing, but not life threatening, complaints that were infinitely preferable to its nearest alternatives – hypochondria, hysteria, or insanity. The chief points to differentiate neurasthenia from hysteria and hypochondriasis were often presented in a table format in medical texts on neurasthenia (Figure 2.4). These tables were frequently used by practitioners in order to demonstrate to the rest of the medical community the advances physicians had made: to present radical and inherent distinctions in the diagnosis, and to outline certain symptoms that neurasthenia had in common with other more recognised diseases.

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<sup>188</sup> Beard, G. M., *Sexual Neurasthenia (Nervous Exhaustion): Its Hygiene, Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment*, New York: E.B. Treat, 1884, p. 43.

<sup>189</sup> Schofield, A.T., *Nerves in Disorder: A Plea for Rational Treatment*, New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903, p.57; Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *A Treatment of Neurasthenia*, trans. P. Cambell Smith, London: Henry Kimpton, 1902, p. 129.

<sup>190</sup> Savill, T. D., *Clinical lectures on Neurasthenia*, London and New York: Wood, 1902, p. 26.

Diagnosing neurasthenia also encouraged a different form of communication between doctors and patients. Beard claimed that as a rule it required more than “a few minutes’ conversation to make clear the diagnosis in this disorder, and the cure is not usually to be wrought by a single carelessly prepared prescription.”<sup>191</sup> Neurasthenia offered the practitioner a new label for a disease, with implied precision; it emphasised what the physician could do for their patients. As such, the patient was instilled with confidence in their physician. Diagnosis was closely followed by a course of treatment, which enabled the physician to build upon his relationship with the patient, and subsequently their family members and friends, and this enabled doctors to consolidate their medical practice and reputation. When Beard’s one time partner, A.D. Rockwell, brought out a new edition of Beard’s treatise for physicians in 1901, he noted the neurasthenia diagnosis proved to be ‘often satisfactory to the patient as it is easy to the physician.’<sup>192</sup>

### **Treating Neurasthenia**

According to Beard, two questions were deemed to be the most important to sufferers of neurasthenia and their physicians; these were: “what can be done to cure and relieve these cases?” and ‘what are their hopes for the future?’<sup>193</sup> Physicians tended to believe the majority of neurasthenic cases could be relieved of their ailments, if not substantially cured, though the relief or cure was not instantaneous and required the patient to faithfully carry out a sequence of treatments. Such treatments depended upon which of

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<sup>191</sup> Beard, G. M., *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*, 1880, p. 35.

<sup>192</sup> Beard, G. M., *Nervous Exhaustion*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., rev. and enl. New York: A.D. Rockwell, 1901, p. 3.

<sup>193</sup> Beard, G. M., *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*, 1880, p. 160.

the multiple symptoms the neurasthenic patient displayed and therefore the remedies prescribed and the expected length of recovery varied greatly from patient to patient. For example, sleeplessness or disturbed sleep was considered to be one of the ‘cardinal symptoms’ and one of the most distressing to patients. However, physicians noted that it could sometimes be relieved a mere few days after treatment had begun. As Professor Clarke wrote in 1905, “The test and measure of improvement is not so much the relief of any one symptom [...] as by the average of all the symptoms.”<sup>194</sup> Physicians recorded in some instances their patients’ ‘abnormalities’ would get worse at first, while others grew better, though “on average there is a decided improvement.”<sup>195</sup> In some cases every symptom quickly disappears except one which remains for a long time as a “perplexity and annoyance, although not interfering with the daily routine of active life.”<sup>196</sup>

Neurasthenia was a condition that could be with the patient for many years and physicians thought that it may open the door to a large number of other diseases of the nervous system. However, Beard stated,

It may never go beyond itself; but when neglected or treated improperly, it may, in time advance to any one of quite a large number of familiar maladies of the nervous system.<sup>197</sup>

These “familiar maladies of the nervous system” included: ‘Insanity (Melancholia)’, ‘Hysteria and Hystéro-Epilepsy’, ‘Disease of the Reproductive Organs’, ‘Hay Fever’, and ‘Writer’s Cramp.’<sup>198</sup> As such a list indicates, the quantity of treatments, cures and

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<sup>194</sup> Clarke, J.M., 1905, p. 175.

<sup>195</sup> Clarke, J.M., 1905, p. 175.

<sup>196</sup> Clarke, J.M., 1905, p. 198.

<sup>197</sup> Beard, G.M., *Sexual Neurasthenia (Nervous Exhaustion): Its Hygiene, Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment*, New York: E.B. Treat, 1884, p. 8.

<sup>198</sup> Insanity (Melancholia): A condition developed very gradually to decline away from a nervously exhausted state into the most serious stage of mental disorder.

remedies for treating neurasthenia and other types of nervous disease were as numerous as the symptoms themselves (Figure 2.5). Physicians were in demand to manage them.

The physician would initially carry out a thorough investigation of the symptoms in the patient, to take note of the conditions under which they had arisen, to listen to the circumstances of the patient's life, their habits and surroundings, and to gain an appreciation of the patient's capabilities, both mental and physical. Léon Bourveret stated "the moral influence which the doctor can exercise over the patients plays the greatest role in the treatment of neurasthenia."<sup>199</sup> The physician had to gain the confidence of the patient in order to make an accurate diagnosis, and confidence was often won through the assertion of their authority. Bourveret in a text of 1891 recommended that, "one should also awaken the hope of a cure, and cite examples of cured patients."<sup>200</sup> In a similar vein, Proust and Ballet stressed the moral action of the physician on the neurasthenic, and the importance of listening to a patient's history and gaining their confidence.<sup>201</sup> Successful treatment, through the eyes of nineteenth-century medical practitioners, also depended

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Hysteria and Hystéro-Epilepsy: It was thought that very few cases of neurasthenia would develop into hysteria, however following Charcot's experiments in La Salpêtrière physicians believed that it may develop in patients whose mental organisation was 'weak and ill-trained.'

Disease of the Reproductive Organs: Physicians believed that if left untreated neurasthenia was a 'common excitant of functional and structural maladies of the reproductive organs.' Cases of this kind resulted in many gynaecologists and oculists examining the patient one after the other, in the hope that the ophthalmoscope would reveal something in order to achieve results.

Hay Fever: Considered to be a 'sequel' to neurasthenia, hay fever was caused by external irritants, such as, pollen, sunlight, dust, heat, foul air, smoke, and flowers. It was thought that these external irritants could also cause small-pox and leprosy and while physicians noted that hay fever sufferers were apparently well, in all there was a neurotic element.

Writer's Cramp: A disease of fifteen to twenty symptoms, with the cramp just being one, it was connected to neurasthenia through a local weakness of the nerves and muscles connected with the act of writing. Patients with neurasthenic writer's cramp experienced in writing a pain, aching, heaviness, fatigue, tiredness of the arm; they were sometimes so nervous that they could not write continuously and were compelled to stop for breaks. Marcel Proust is known to have suffered with both Hay Fever and Writer's Cramp. – See Beard, G. M., *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*, 1880, p. 169-170.

<sup>199</sup> Léon Bourveret, *La neurathénie: épuisement nerveux*, Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1891, p. 373.

<sup>200</sup> Bourveret, L., *La neurasthénie: épuisement nerveux*, Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1891, p. 373.

<sup>201</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *A Treatment of Neurasthenia*, trans. Cambell-Smith, P., London: Henry Kimpton, 1902, p. 129.

upon the co-operation of the patient. However, physicians did note the importance of ensuring that the treatment they prescribed was carefully adapted to the ever-different conditions and requirements of each individual patient.

A satirical example of this relationship between physicians and their patients is demonstrated in a coloured lithograph by Ch. E. Jacque circa 1852 entitled ‘Les Maladies et les Médecins’ where a physician is seen prescribing entertainment as a cure for a young woman’s illness (Figure 2.6). Depicted within a domestic interior, the doctor is shown on the far left of the image, sitting at a table with a quill in hand, writing out a prescription for the woman propped up on large cushions lying on the chaise longue to the right of him. Underneath the image is an extract from their conversation, and the doctor states that in order to calm the neuralgia his prescription is to take a box at the Varieties tonight, and a box at the Opera tomorrow, to which the woman replies “Ah doctor! You are a charming man...!”<sup>202</sup>

Silas Weir Mitchell was one of America’s most influential physicians of the late nineteenth century. Following an internship in Europe under the French physiologist Claude Bernard he wrote his highly successful works *Wear and Tear, or Hints for the Overworked* of 1871 and, *Fat and Blood: and How to Make Them* of 1877. In these texts he elaborated on his particular rest-cure, a method of treatment that prized seclusion, enforced bed-rest and electrical treatments, imposed a milk diet and recommended passive exercise through massage.<sup>203</sup> Mitchell insisted this schedule of treatments

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<sup>202</sup> Lettering on the lithograph:

- Pour calmer cette névralgie voici mon ordonnance: vous prendrez ce soir une loge aux Variétés.. demain une loge à l'Opéra... et en outre je tâcherai de faire prendre par votre mari ce cachemire que vous avez vu chez Gagelin et que vous désirez tant!...

- Ah! docteur, vous êtes un homme charmant!...

<sup>203</sup> For information on S. Weir Mitchell see Schuster, D.G., ‘Personalising Illness and Modernity: S. Weir Mitchell, Literary Women, and Neurasthenia, 1870 -1914’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 79,

represented an “organic remedy for a somatic condition.”<sup>204</sup> Patients with poor nutrition, who were thin and emaciated, as well as suffering from excessive weakness were those who were most likely to derive benefit from the ‘Weir-Mitchell Cure.’ Although treatments varied slightly between physicians and practices, doctors in both America and Europe agreed a full treatment schedule should be carried out in treating neurasthenic cases, noting that “any deviation from the essential points of rest, isolation, overfeeding, and massage, is apt to entail failure.”<sup>205</sup> In cases of acute neurasthenia the first step in treatment prescribed by the physician was always absolute rest. As one French doctor described,

The patient should be kept in bed, and as the special senses are often hypersensitive, the room should be darkened, and kept as quiet as possible. The patient should not be allowed to read or to undertake any mental exertion, absolute rest of the mind and body being aimed at. The diet should be light and easy of digestion, as the digestive organs are very often disturbed, but at the same time should contain abundance of nutriment. The bowels must be carefully regulated. It is better in most cases to engage an experienced nurse to look after the patient. Isolation is not necessary at first in acute cases, but visits from relations should be short and few in number. If the patient does not, however, soon begin to improve, it is better to insist on isolation and treatment away from the home.<sup>206</sup>

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no. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 695-722. For an account of mid-nineteenth-century American physicians studying in France and the professional reputations they cultivated as a result, see Warner, J.H., *Against the Spirit of System: The French Impulse in the Nineteenth-Century Medicine*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

<sup>204</sup> Levin, K., ‘S. Weir Mitchell: Investigation and Insights into Neurasthenia and Hysteria’, *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians, Philadelphia*, xxxviii, 1971, pp.168-73; Lutz, T., *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991; Lutz, T., ‘Neurasthenia and Fatigue Syndromes’, in Burrios, G. E. and Porter, R. (eds.), *A History of Clinical Psychiatry. The Origin and History of Psychiatric Disorders*, London: Athlone, 1995, pp. 533-544; Earnest, E., *S. Weir Mitchell, Novelist and Physician*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950; Weir Mitchell, S., *Fat and Blood: An Essay on the Treatment of Certain Forms of Neurasthenia and Hysteria*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1877; Weir Mitchell, S., *Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women*, Philadelphia: Lea, 1881; Weir Mitchell, S., *Doctor and Patient*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1888.

<sup>205</sup> Shorter, E., *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era*, New York: The Free Press, 1992.

<sup>206</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *A Treatment of Neurasthenia*, trans. Cambell Smith, P., London: Henry Kimpton, 1902, p.129.



The rest-cure emerged as the leading treatment for neurasthenia, however, although physicians prescribed the rest-cure to both sexes, it tended to be taken up more often by women during the late-nineteenth century predominantly due to cultural stereotypes of the time; rest for women, exercise for men. The rest-cure grew from the concept that the mental and physical work associated with new social, educational and occupational roles led to the depletion of ‘nerve force’ in middle-upper class men and women. In *Fat and Blood* Weir Mitchell proposed his unique approach to “renewing the vitality” of the neurasthenic patient. His recommendations were particularly confining as, at the beginning of the treatment, the patient was relegated to complete bed rest for approximately one month: “I do not permit the patient to sit up, or to sew or read or write, or to use the hands in any active way except to clean the teeth.”<sup>207</sup> An alternative treatment to the rest-cure was for the neurasthenic patient to engage in vigorous physical activity. These activities were believed to rehabilitate the patient for further success in commerce and intellectual pursuits. As Weir Mitchell wrote in his 1871 book *Wear and Tear: Or Hints for the Overworked*, neurasthenic patients could strengthen their nervous systems by engaging in “a sturdy contest with Nature.”<sup>208</sup> Such a challenge would allow the patient to test their willpower and, if male, reinforce their masculinity, which had been weakened by the feminising effects of nervous illness.<sup>209</sup>

The diet of the neurasthenic patient was of great importance to physicians who were keen to examine the condition of gastric functions.<sup>210</sup> Dr Playfair, Charcot,

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<sup>207</sup> Weir Mitchell, S., 1877, p. 58.

<sup>208</sup> Weir Mitchell, S., *Wear and Tear: Or Hints for the Overworked*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1871, p. 43.

<sup>209</sup> Stiles, A., ‘Go rest, young man’, *American Psychology Association*, Vol. 43, No. 1, January 2012, p. 32.

<sup>210</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., 1911, p. 357.

Bouveret and Ballet carefully followed the precise and prescriptive diet laid out by Weir Mitchell as all claimed that it was a success.<sup>211</sup> Patients were usually fed by a nurse and initially only with milk – four to five pints a day, taking half a pint at a time every two hours. After seven or eight days of the milk diet, patients took a light lunch at noon consisting of only meat. Then at the end of three to four days, bread and butter would be added to the meal in increments, followed by the introduction of new foods. However, the diet would almost exclusively contain foods rich in meat, eggs and butter. From the twentieth day beef-tea was also prescribed; this was prepared in a water-bath with hydrochloric acid. Cod-liver oil was used in the winter, and according to Ballet,

If this fatty substance is badly borne by the stomach, he [Weir] orders it to be taken as an enema mixed with an infusion of pancreas prepared at a temperature of 140-176 degrees F.<sup>212</sup>

A certain amount of alcohol was also allowed in the form of a few drops of whisky or two glasses of champagne.<sup>213</sup> Advice as to alcohol stimulants depended on the patient's habits, though even a small amount taken with food was thought to do harm to the patient; Blocq wrote, "it is doubtful whether it does any good, except in so far as a glass of light beer or wine at meal times improves the appetite."<sup>214</sup> The use of tobacco, alcohol, tea and coffee was also strictly monitored and as a rule tea and coffee were not to be taken by the patient late in the evening.<sup>215</sup> If the Weir Mitchell method was not used by French physicians then a controlled but varied diet was still put in place as it was considered by all to be beneficial for the neurasthenic patient.

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<sup>211</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., 1911, p. 357.

<sup>212</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., 1911, p. 358.

<sup>213</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., 1911, p. 358.

<sup>214</sup> Blocq, P.O. and Onanoff, J., 'Neurasthenia' translated in Trevelyan, E. F., *Séméiologie et Diagnostic des Maladies Nerveuses*, Paris: Masson, 1892.

<sup>215</sup> For more about the effects of tea see Morton, W.J., 'Tea Drinkers' Disorder, or the Toxic Effects of Tea', *Journal of Nervous Diseases*, October, 1879.

Electrical treatment was often considered very useful in the treatment of neurasthenics and electricity was used to give painless exercise to the muscles. Moreover, in order to stimulate circulation, patients were also vigorously massaged, often twice a day for an hour.<sup>216</sup> However, the best form of physical therapy was considered to be the bath. When describing the methods of carrying out an electric bath, Dr Herschell explained,

The bath itself was to be capable of complete insulation, and the current was conveyed to the water by large electrodes placed at the ends of the bath, the one at the head being protected by a wooden frame against which the patient's head and shoulders would rest. The current should be strong enough to be felt, and the duration of the bath ten to fifteen minutes.<sup>217</sup>

Physicians often used a very fine spray of water applied to the spine – it was “sent with such force that the water, although cold, appeared hot, and could be borne by the hand only for a few minutes.”<sup>218</sup> The application of compresses, cold or hot, and of wet sheets, with dry ones wrapped over, were also considered to be of benefit. As Ballet described,

Sometimes, compresses of wet cloths wrung out, and thick dry ones around them, applied to the stomach and liver and genitals, and kept for some time, were considered the most excellent means of relief.<sup>219</sup>

In Paris, water-cure establishments grew in favour, and doctors were able to choose from a range of hydrotherapy treatments for their patients. Patient could be required to have a

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<sup>216</sup> Playfair, W.S. *The Systematic Treatment of Nerve Prostration and Hysteria*, London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1883, p. 281. For more details of this treatment see Beard, G. and Rockwell, A.D. *A Practical Treatise on the Medical and Surgical Uses of Electricity*, New York: Wood, 1881.

<sup>217</sup> Herschell, G., *Polyphase Currents in Electrotherapy*, London: H.J. Glaiser, 1903.

<sup>218</sup> Corbin, A., *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 250.

<sup>219</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., 1911, p. 130.

sheet-bath on rising from bed, or a bath as recommended by Dr. Löwenfeld.<sup>220</sup> The ‘Löwenfeld bath’ required the patient to sit up to their middle in water while an attendant dashed water over their chest and back before rubbed them all over with a loofah or rough towel; in cases of weakness of the legs or arms their limbs were especially rubbed. After this their whole body was immersed in the bath, and finally a cold douche thrown over the head and neck. The whole duration of the bath was six minutes and the temperature was between 76 - 86 degrees F.; the douche water was 8-10 degrees lower.<sup>221</sup> These baths could be carried out in the home, and were therefore useful in the later stages of treatment, or after a return to ordinary life.

Following the preliminary course of treatment and if the patient had improved from rest and isolation, the doctor was then likely to suggest a course of hydro-therapeutics or electrical treatment at a health resort or private clinic, preferably in “the places which lie high and have bracing air are most suitable.”<sup>222</sup> However, staying in a ‘hydropathic establishment’ or similar institution was not advised for more than a short time, from four to six weeks by Dr Dana, as he claimed,

These places are apt to contain too many patients of the same kind, who discuss their ailments one with another, and by such discussions tend to accentuate and perpetuate them.<sup>223</sup>

## **Spaces and Cultures of Neurasthenia**

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<sup>220</sup> For more on the Löwenfeld bath see: Löwenfeld, L., *Pathologie und Therapie der Neurasthenie und Hysterie*, J.F. Bergmann, 1894.

<sup>221</sup> Corbin, A., *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 250.

<sup>222</sup> Ballet, G. and Proust, A., *A Treatment of Neurasthenia*, trans, Cambell Smith, P. London: Henry Kimpton, 1902.

<sup>223</sup> Dana, ‘Medical Record’, 24 January 1880, in Silverman, D., *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 195.

In France, water-cure clinics offering spa therapy maintained their popularity far longer than in other locations in Europe, partly because the country is blessed with a sunnier climate and a greater number of mineral springs, and partly because the faith of the French in the curative power of the waters was fervent enough to have survived to this day. ‘Thermal Fever’ as Edward Shorter calls it, began in the 1820s, with the annual number of health-seekers accelerating from 31,000 in 1822 to 100,000 in the late 1830s, to double that in the late 1860s to 200,000. By the end of the century, French spas were receiving 300,000-400,000 visitors a year and such watering places as Aix-en-Savoie and Vinchy achieved worldwide reputations.<sup>224</sup>

Travelling, although believed to further weaken the nervous system, was one of the ways the middle-upper classes could fashionably attend to their nervous disorders as the principal spas where mineral sources were most plentiful were located in the four mountainous regions of France, in particular the Pyrenees Mountains with waters such as Aix-les-Thermes, Luchon and Bagnères-de-Bigorre.<sup>225</sup> Edouard Egasse and Joseph-Frédéric Guyenot published an extensive guide advising patients of which French spas were suitable to treat the malady they wished to cure.<sup>226</sup> For example, Egasse and Guyenot listed spas at Salins in the Jura, Salies-de-Béarn, and Lamotte as good for treating engorgement of the uterus; Bourbonne and Balaruc were recommended for engorgement of the liver. The waters of Royat, Saint-Nectaire, Sainte-Marguerite, and Châteauneuf were believed to suit patients who were cachectic as a result of depression, and nervous patients who were suffering with stomach pain were recommended to try

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<sup>224</sup> Gerbod, P., “Les ‘fièvres thermales’ en France au XIXe siècle,” *Revue historique*, 277, 1987, pp. 309-334, p. 312.

<sup>225</sup> Wrigley, R. and Revill, G., (eds) *Pathologies of Travel*, Clío Medica: Rodopi, 2000.

<sup>226</sup> Egasse, E. and Guyenot, J. F., *Eaux minérales naturelles autorisés de France*, Paris: Éditions scientifiques, 1891.

Néris, Bagnères-de-Bigorre, and Plombières. If nervous patients were simultaneously hysterical, doctors were advised to send them to Saint-Sauveur, Evian, and Ussat. Their publication also included a list of places to cure neuralgia and paralysis, which included Lamalou, a town where a fountain topped with the bust of Charcot still stands today (Figure 2.7).

As W. F. Hutchinson claimed, “A change of air and scene is undoubtedly of the greatest benefit in neurasthenia, especially in those who are suffering from overstrain.”<sup>227</sup> However some physicians disagreed and believed that it could often cause more harm than good to send neurasthenic patients off on a tour as it involved a certain amount of fatigue and exertion for which neurasthenics were quite unsuited.<sup>228</sup> Regardless, this course of treatment was much more appealing to the patient than bed rest and many took up the opportunity to be treated by going on a tour of a mountain district. It was generally advisable for the patient to visit lower altitudes first, and then gradually work their way up to the higher mountain resorts, if indeed that was permitted (neurasthenic patients were thought to be particularly sensitive to high altitude). The best results were considered to be attained by residence in a place which provided bracing moorland or mountain air, which was sheltered from strong winds, and had wide views and easy walks – a place where it was possible to remain outdoors during the greater part of the day. Mountain air was not to be regarded as a sole means of cure, but most generally as a finish to a course of treatment.

Travel to spas was never very easy or convenient as they were often located in remote areas of France. However, it was made somewhat easier with the expansion of the

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<sup>227</sup> Hutchinson, W.F., ‘Climate Cure for Nervous Diseases’, *Medical Record*, 1878.

<sup>228</sup> Wrigley, R. and Revill, G., (eds) *Pathologies of Travel*, Atlanta, 2000.

railways and the introduction of steamboat ferries in the nineteenth century. The traditional calendar of the spa season reflected the difficulties of mountain travel. Through the winter months, when heavy rains and snow combined to render mountainous roads almost impassable, spa towns were completely deserted apart from local residents. The same was true of early spring and late autumn when rains and flooding routinely subjected mountain travellers to bothersome delays. Spa-goers tended to wait to travel until the best possible weather, thus the season was said to begin “before the end of May and continued past the middle of September.”<sup>229</sup> Even under ideal conditions, travelling to a spa often involved a journey that was measured in days rather than hours. Parisians, for example, had the main of France to cross in order to reach the many spas of the Pyrenees region; the journey from Paris to Vichy could take up to eight days. With an in-depth knowledge of the amount of time required to travel to the mountain spa location, as well as the many challenges they would face going on this journey, spa-goers would rarely spend less than three weeks at their intended destination. Guidebooks and postcards reveal that everyday life at the spas was an all-embracing medical matter, despite the luxurious settings, balls and social functions laid on for the patients. Postcards from Aix-les-Bains demonstrate just how luxurious these spa establishments were for patients who could afford to attend (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). The grand entrance hall with high ceilings, balconies, glass and decorative ironwork seems simple in comparison to the ornate bathroom. Tiled floor to ceiling with elaborate patterns, this treatment room with a large bath and shower in the centre of the room has been carefully prepared for the patient’s hydropathic treatment.

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<sup>229</sup> Mackaman, D. P., *Leisure Settings: Bourgeois Culture, Medicine and the Spa in Modern France*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998, p. 15.

Concern with one's health was considered fashionable among the upper classes, and functioned as a preoccupation that at once affirmed the older image of the superior but delicate sensibility of that class and provided an easy rationale for a three-week stay at a health spa or resort. By 1900, France had adapted to treating patients suffering with nervous conditions caused by the stresses of modern life, and the treatment of neurasthenia was very much part of a wider health tourism industry. Apart from doctors themselves, numerous others, such as nurses and other personnel in the many institutions or resorts where neurasthenic patients hoped to get cured, held a stake in the 'neurasthenic business.'<sup>230</sup>

The interaction of modernity, medicine, and tourism helped make neurasthenia fashionable to both men and women.<sup>231</sup> However, despite the desirability of travelling outside Paris to the Alps or the French Riviera to receive treatment, such trips cost a significant amount of money, took a considerable amount of time, and offered no guarantee as far as a trusting relationship with a resort physician was concerned. Neurasthenic patients would often resort to seeing a physician in private practices closer to home. As such, doctors in the city were extremely busy; as François Leuret, a French anatomist and psychiatrist who studied under Esquirol, famously stated, he could not spend more than eighteen minutes with each patient over a year.<sup>232</sup> However, there was a

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<sup>230</sup> Gijswijt-Hofstra, M., *Cultures of Neurasthenia*, 2001, p. 26.

<sup>231</sup> Mackaman, D.P., *Leisure Settings: Bourgeois Culture, Medicine, and the Spa in Modern France* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; Weber, E., *France, Fin-de-Siècle*, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1986, p. 177-179; Corbin, A., *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 57-96.

<sup>232</sup> Wolpe, J., 'François Leuret: A progenitor of behaviour therapy', *Journal of Behaviour Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1971, p. 19. François Leuret (1797-1851): a French Anatomist and Psychiatrist who studied under Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840) and was later chief physician at the Bicêtre in Paris. An important figure in early French psychiatry, he stressed the importance of using a rational and humane approach in the treatment of the mentally ill. His



family of physicians who had established an upper class private practice which adopted principles of discreet independence over that of the working class *assistance publique*, and which was conveniently located on the outskirts of Paris. This family offered their patients the best in medical treatments and practices for nervous conditions – the Blanche doctors.

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publications include: *Du traitement morale de la folie*, 1840, and *Anatomie comparée du système nerveux, considéré dans ses rapports avec l'intelligence*, volume 1-1839, Volume 2-1857.

## Chapter 3

### La Maison du docteur Blanche

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On August 17, 1893, the front page of *Le Figaro* printed in capital letters the death of two prominent figures of French medicine and society, Professor Jean-Martin Charcot and Doctor Emile Blanche (Figure 3.1). From 1863-1893, Charcot's La *Salpêtrière* hospital was at the centre of pan-European debates about the impact of modernity on the nervous system.<sup>233</sup> The work carried out within its walls was regarded across Europe as cutting edge and as such, Charcot was one of the most celebrated neurologists of the nineteenth century, achieving an international profile during his own lifetime in particular for his work on hysteria. However, this public announcement of Charcot's death alongside that of another, seemingly unknown doctor indicates that Charcot was not alone in his efforts in the field of neurology in France during the late nineteenth century. Dr Blanche and his private clinic La maison du docteur Blanche in Passy had a more exclusive identity than La Salpêtrière, which has led to its erasure from this same history. When standing at the entrance of the property in Passy where Blanche's private psychiatric clinic once was – now the Turkish embassy – there is a small, grey, marble commemorative plaque acknowledging the building's history and its patients – but there is no mention of Dr Blanche himself. On the plaque it reads: "In the Hôtel de Lamballe stayed Gérard de Nerval in 1853 and 1854, Charles Gounod 1857, and Guy de Maupassant from 1892 to the time of his death in 1893" (Figure 3.2).

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<sup>233</sup> Sigmund Freud studied with Jean-Martin Charcot at La Salpêtrière in 1885-1886. See, Freud, S. "Report on my Studies in Paris and Berlin," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 1953-74.

In contrast to Charcot and his work on hysteria amongst working class women in particular, the Blanche doctors treated the middle and upper classes for nervous ‘maladies’ for over a century. However, their fashionable clinics, the work they carried out and the long list of well-known patients the Blanche doctors treated were scarcely recognised in discussions of the histories of psychiatry and neurology in France at the turn of the century, until the publication of Laure Murat’s book in 2001.<sup>234</sup>

An overlooked figure in the history of French psychiatry and medicine, Doctor Esprit Sylvestre Blanche (1796–1852) was the fifth child of a bourgeois family. He was born in Rouen on 15 May 1796 to a family of surgeons who were well known within the French medical community.<sup>235</sup> He was the psychiatrist responsible for founding the Blanche establishment and an individual who dedicated his career to the study of mental illness and innovative forms of ethical treatment for his patients.<sup>236</sup> His father, Antoine-Louis Blanche (1752–1816) qualified as a surgeon in 1780. Despite his training and practice as chief surgeon of the military hospital in Rouen, Antoine-Louis had a professional interest in psychiatry.<sup>237</sup> Antoine encountered the work of Philippe Pinel and Etienne Esquirol in Paris, and advocated their precepts relating to the humane treatment of madness. He was fascinated by mesmerism, a therapeutic system of hypnosis devised by the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), and he often ordered his

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<sup>234</sup> Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche: Histoire d’un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001.

<sup>235</sup> Esprit was lucky to survive due to a dreadful famine of the same year that had doubled the mortality rate of the population. Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d’un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, p. 20.

<sup>236</sup> Esprit Blanche published three times during his lifetime: *Essai sur les anévrismes du cœur*, these présentée et soutenue le 5 août 1818, Didot, 1818; *Du danger des rigueurs corporelles dans le traitement de la folie*, A. Gardembas, 1839; *De l’état actuel du traitement de la folie en France*, A. Gardembas, 1840.

<sup>237</sup> For more information about Antoine-Louis Blanche see Murat, L., 2001, pp. 20-21.

patients to be magnetised, the results of which were not always conclusive.<sup>238</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, few physicians at this time specialised in psychiatry; compared to his contemporaries, Antoine-Louis was both unusual and forward thinking. This was the dynastic context in which the young Esprit Blanche was encouraged towards his vocation. He was part of a new generation of asylum physicians, filled with confidence in its ability to heal.

In the previous chapter I considered the impact of the pioneering work of Pinel and Esquirol on the French medical community in the nineteenth century. This third chapter will focus on the practice of one family of physicians: the Blancches. It will explore this family's interest in the teachings and medical practices of Esquirol in particular, and Esprit Blanche's decision to devote his efforts to psychiatry by founding his own exclusive private practice for the upper-class elite of nineteenth-century Paris. How typical was it to found a *maison de santé*? How were nervous diseases treated by the Blanche doctors? And what was the role of such private establishments in the regulation, treatment and representation of nervous disease in Paris? In answering these questions, this chapter will explore the two clinics founded and maintained by Esprit Blanche and later by his son, Emile Blanche: *La Folie-Sandrin* and *La Maison du docteur Blanche*. By examining the locations, layouts, treatment methods, patients and operations of these *maison de santés* in Paris, this chapter will reveal the uniquely chic, yet 'homely' environment of the Blanche establishments. Over the life span of both Blanche doctors (from 1796 to 1893), a century in the history of psychiatry had elapsed; this chapter will demonstrate how the Blanche doctors treated a surprisingly large number of illustrious

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<sup>238</sup> See Doerner, K., *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie: A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981, pp. 110-113.

patients in their *maison de santé*, which became known as the most fashionable place to be treated in Paris. The chapter will also establish how this *maison de santé* was not a typical childhood residence for Jacques-Émile Blanche, son of Emile. The young Blanche built close relationships with the patients, guests and neighbours who shared his family home. It was from within this fashionable establishment that, I will argue, Jacques-Émile Blanche brought together portraiture and neurology and began his artistic career as a portraitist.

### **La Folie-Sandrin**

Let us not be mistaken, there are a few able men who are willing to spend their lives in such asylum, unless, by its importance, it offers a food of self-esteem and education. It takes a special calibre of mind to cultivate this brand of fruit with the art of healing, it takes a lot of time at his disposal, and having done so, somehow, the abnegation (self-denial) of self.<sup>239</sup>

In Esquirol's profile of the modern psychiatrist from his *Treatise on Insanity* he acknowledged it would take a particular kind of alienist to dedicate themselves to the requirements of an innovative establishment for psychiatric ailments. Yet, is it in this picture described by Esquirol that we can recognise Esprit Blanche? Following in his father's footsteps, Esprit decided to study medicine at *l'Ecole de médecine de Paris* and upon receiving his doctorate in 1819 - examined by three medical celebrities: Philippe Pinel, Antoine de Jussieu and René-Nicolas Dufriche Des Genettes (also spelt Desgenettes) - Esprit Blanche became a noted physician for the treatment of the insane, writing two texts on the topic, titled *Du Danger des rigueurs corporells dans le traitement*

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<sup>239</sup> Esquirol, E., *Mental Maladies: a treatise on insanity*, translated by E.K. Hunt, 1845, p. 394.

*de la folie* and *De l'État actuel de traitement de la folie en France*.<sup>240</sup> Upon completion of his medical training, Esprit returned to Normandy for three years and worked exclusively on the planning of a new type of private sanatorium for the treatment of nervous conditions. Founding such an institution was an expensive feat and Esprit had no experience, reputation or suitable property. Nevertheless, he was determined and left his native Normandy in 1821 with a goal to buy his first *maison de santé* in Paris. Just four years later he bought an eighteenth-century building positioned in the Montmartre hills, a few streets away from Place du Tertre at 113, rue Trainée, in the district of Saint-Denis. It was named *La Folie-Sandrin* and it became his first private practice.<sup>241</sup>

Originally converted into a *maison de santé* in 1806 by Dr Pierre-Antoine Prost, former surgeon of Hotel-Dieu de Lyon, the building outwardly maintained the impression of a country mansion.<sup>242</sup> A few years after Esprit Blanche moved into *La Folie-Sandrin*, Paul Glon Villeneuve depicted the establishment in his painting *Vue de la colline de Montmartre du côté Nord* of 1834 (Figure 3.3), which was subsequently copied in M. de Mathan's drawing of ca. 1835 (Figure 3.4). The painting by Villeneuve presents the picturesque hills of Montmartre, with its blue skies, green fields, winding pathways and windmills; the location appears idyllic. In the centre of the composition, *La Folie-Sandrin* stands out among the few neighbouring houses. The Blanche residence is much larger than the others, with a white façade shining brightly across the landscape, and numerous large, glass panelled windows. These windows brought light into each room of the

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<sup>240</sup> Blanche, E., *Du Danger des rigueurs corporells dans le traitement de la folie*, Paris: Gardembas, 1839 ; *De l'État actuel de traitement de la folie en France*, Paris: Gardembas, 1840.

<sup>241</sup> *La Folie-Sandrin* had retained this name for over half a century before the arrival of Esprit Blanche. *La Folie-Sandrin* so-called after its first owner the prestigious chandelier master and merchant, Antoine-Gabriel Sandrin and is the name popularly known for the building; however other names included *La Folie-Cendrin* or *Maison des Rochers*. It is still possible to visit the original clinic of Dr Blanche now located at 22, rue Norvins, Montmartre, Paris.

<sup>242</sup> Prost, P. A., *Essai physiologique sur la sensibilité*, Demonville, 1805.

building, while also acting as ventilation systems, supplying the space with fresh air.<sup>243</sup>

The dark green trees and hedging which slightly obscure the front of the building provided a sense of privacy for those convalescing inside. The windmills dotted in the adjacent fields enforced Esprit's claim in his 1825 advertisement that the clinic was located to take full advantage of the pure air and beautiful surroundings (Figure 3.5),

Blanche, Doctor of Medicine, institution for mentally disturbed in Montmartre. This institution, where there are baths constructed according to the most recent model of those at Salpêtrière, is quite detached from the nursing home<sup>244</sup> and rest home<sup>245</sup> which receives the sick, the convalescent and resident patients. It is there also that baths are available, either ordinary, sulphurous, gelatinous, steam, sand etc., as at Tivoli. This house is located in a unique way to take advantage of the links between the purity of the air and the beauty of the site.<sup>246</sup>

The painting visually locates the *maison de santé* high above the city of Paris, on top of the Montmartre hills. Architectural historians Nicola Imrie and Leslie Topp identify that elevated sites such as the Montmartre hills were favoured primarily so patients who had been removed from the “unhealthy city” could be relocated to a “healthful” setting with restful views and a closer proximity to nature.<sup>247</sup> By taking advantage of the breeze and unpolluted air up on the hills of Montmartre, Esprit was one of the first French physicians to put into practice new medical treatments and techniques

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<sup>243</sup> Topp, L., *Architecture and Truth in fin-de-siècle Vienna*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 76.

<sup>244</sup> Maison de santé – in this instance it has been translated to ‘nursing home’, although it can actually be used to mean ‘asylum’. In this case, where the difference between the two centres of treatment is made clear, ‘nursing home’ is better – not quite a hospital, but a place providing medical care.

<sup>245</sup> Maison de plaisance is quite tricky to translate, however, the idea of ‘rest home’ or ‘convalescent home’ makes sense considering the geography of the property. The French term does seem to have a special sense in this context and the use of «plaisance» suggests both relaxation and pleasure for those convalescing.

<sup>246</sup> Duverneuil, La Tynna, J. and Bottin, S., *Almanach du commerce de Paris, de la France, et des pays étrangers. 1825*, Paris: Au bureau de l'Almanach du commerce, 1797-1838, p. 315.

<sup>247</sup> Leslie Topp and Nicky Imrie, ‘Modernity follows Madness? Viennese architecture for mental illness and nervous disorders’ in Blackshaw, G. and Topp, L. (eds.) *Madness and Modernity: Mental Illness and the Visual Arts in Vienna 1900*, London: Lund Humphries, 2009, p. 84.

circulating in early nineteenth-century medical literature on nervous illness, which included a strict daily regime of light, fresh-air cures and mechanotherapy – active and passive exercises prescribed to promote healing and rehabilitation. Yet Esprit also realised that the visual impression made by the institution – its image – was important. Therefore, as well as advertising in the press, an image of *La Folie-Sandrin* was also reproduced onto postcards of the time, which presented an image of the Montmartre establishment as a grand, residential home nestled within a community (Figure 3.6). With few streets and people to be seen, anyone considering a stay here knew they would not have to travel far from Paris to experience peace and quiet. It is remarkable that Esprit was so far ahead of his contemporaries in recognising that in order to build a successful and popular *maison de santé* emphasis would have to be placed on a visual landscape that would “distract the patient from the fact of his or her illness and confinement rather than reinforcing it.”<sup>248</sup>

With the development of the illustrated press and emphatically visual advertising campaigns, the image projected by such buildings became crucial. Postcards were the perfect medium for Esprit to distribute this image of *La Folie-Sandrin*, as they were stocked in shops across Paris, and were collected and posted across the country and Europe, by tourists, visitors, friends, guests and patients. Esprit’s progressiveness can be seen in his understanding of benefits of an elevated site, his practicing of new treatments, his advanced advertising techniques, and his decision to locate his clinic within a

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<sup>248</sup> Leslie Topp and Nicky Imrie, ‘Modernity follows Madness? Viennese architecture for mental illness and nervous disorders’ 2009, pp. 93, 95. See also for an account of the villa system: Leslie Topp, ‘The Modern Mental Hospital in Late Nineteenth-Century German and Austria: Psychiatric Spaces and Images of Freedom and Control’, in Topp, L. Moran, J. and Andrews, J., (eds.) *Madness, Architecture and the Built Environment: Psychiatric Spaces in Historical Context*, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp.248-251; Nicola Imrie, ‘The Architecture and Culture of Sanatoria for Nervous Ailments in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1890-1914’, Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2008, pp. 49-134.



comforting, grand residential space that was far removed from the typical *hôtels particuliers* positioned within the urban centre of Paris.

The only contemporary description of this house was written by M. Fourcaut-Pavant around 1800, and was published in a brief construction report in the 1910 edition of *Le Vieux Montmartre*. He writes, “this beautiful country house consisted of ground floor rooms, topped by two floors and a large square attic, with beautiful stairs.”<sup>249</sup> He continues,

On the ground floor is a large lounge, a dining room, a billiard room, an office, a kitchen and stables and sheds. The first floor had *10 rooms*, with a large lead tank receiving rainwater outside. On the second floor, there were only *9 rooms*, but all formed 24 units, plus the large attic. The home was large. At the front of the house there was a garden of 6 acres, staggered rows of elms were planted and behind another garden of 70 acres, designed partly ‘in the English style’. There were wells, groves, rocks, and also *underground passages*.<sup>250</sup>

The internal and external arrangement of *La Folie-Sandrin* and the division of its functional spaces shows the influence of another building type: the grand, chic hotel. As noted in a guide for hotel layout,

Typically the ground and perhaps the first floor of a hotel would be given over to public spaces for dining and entertainment while the upper floors

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<sup>249</sup> *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie du XVIII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement. Le Vieux Montmartre*, 1910 [Online] <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32889630f/date1910.r=La%20Folie-Sandrin%20à%20Montmartre.langFR> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>250</sup> « ... comprenait un rez-de-chaussée sur caves, surmonté de deux étages carrés et d'un grand grenier, avec beaux escaliers. ... Au rez-de-chaussée se trouvaient un grand salon, une salle à manger, une salle de billard, un office, une cuisine et les écuries et remises. Le premier étage avait *10 pièces*, avec, en dehors un grand réservoir en plomb recevant les eaux pluviales. Au deuxième étage, il n'y avait que *9 pièces*, mais l'ensemble formait toutefois 24 pièces avec, en plus, le grand grenier. Le logis était vaste. Devant la maison, il y avait un jardin de 6 ares, planté d'un quinconce en ormes ; derrière, un autre jardin de 70 ares, dessiné partie « dans le genre anglais », partie en potager. On y trouvait des puits, des bosquets, des rochers, et aussi *des souterrains*. » *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie du XVIII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement. Le Vieux Montmartre*, 1910 [Online] <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32889630f/date1910.r=La%20Folie-Sandrin%20à%20Montmartre.langFR> [accessed May 2012].

would be reserved for the guests' private rooms or suites. Kitchens, laundry and other services would be contained in the basement.<sup>251</sup>

Such parallels show Esprit's awareness of how his *maison de santé* would meet the needs of his upper class and aristocratic clientele at his fee-paying, and profit-making, establishment. *La Folie-Sandrin* quickly gained an exclusive social identity within the city. As one commentator speculated,

Perhaps this was one of those discreet little houses very fashionable in the eighteenth century [...] in which the nobles of the time managed to combine good dinners, good accommodation and rest.<sup>252</sup>

With this privileged environment, Esprit was able to develop a very popular *maison de santé* that was always fully booked.<sup>253</sup> Esprit preferred his patients to seek treatment of their own free will, and once they were admitted, he would treat them with compassion. The majority of his patients were those suffering with *névrosisme* but on occasion he took in syphilitics, alcoholics and – less frequently – the incurably insane.<sup>254</sup> Despite the atmosphere of the *maison de santé*, rigorous discipline prevailed and included: physical therapy, extensive exercise programs and, when necessary, a range of baths including Scotch baths (hot and cold showers used alternatively) designed to shock patients out of their torpor or fury. Violent patients, under constant supervision by his

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<sup>251</sup> Lachmayer, H., Gargerle, C., and Hajos, G., 'The Grand Hotel', AA Files, 22, 1991, p. 37 in Topp, L., 'Modernity follows Madness?' 2009, p. 87.

<sup>252</sup> « Peut-être était-ce une de ces petites maisons discrètes fort à la mode au XVIIIe siècle ; ... dans lesquelles les grands seigneurs de l'époque avaient habilement su combiner bons soupers, bons gîtes et le reste. » The quote continues : « Toutefois ce qui se pratiquait aisément aux Porcherons à Chaillot ou à Popincourt était d'une réalisation bien difficile dans un quartier aussi perdu et d'un accès si difficile. Rien ne permet de découvrir dans le sieur Cendrin ou Sandrin - ce ne sont que des conjectures puisque nous ignorons à peu près tout de lui - l'étoffe d'un grand seigneur, le tempérament d'un artiste ou l'âme d'un poète. » *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie du XVIIIe arrondissement. Le Vieux Montmartre*, 1910 [Online] <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32889630f/date1910.r=La%20Folie-Sandrin%20à%20Montmartre.langFR> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>253</sup> Murat, L., 2001, p. 103.

<sup>254</sup> Murat, L., 2001, p. 105.

staff, were placed on another side of the house. Straightjackets were rarely used, and instead of imposing periods of isolation, he would encourage patients to engage with other people. Esprit also believed in the positive effects of patients being treated within a family environment, using his own family members as staff. Esprit's wife, who lived on the premises with her husband, played an important role as "a perfect mother image, with whom patients identified and to whom they responded."<sup>255</sup>

With fees at approximately 1100 francs per month per patient, Esprit saw the turnover of the clinic grow year on year and as a result he not only became very wealthy, but he also increasingly began to move in sophisticated and influential social circles.<sup>256</sup> He entertained the best of French high society, including politicians, aristocrats and celebrities, but, according to his son Jacques, he was most comfortable in the company of artists such as Eugene Delacroix, Alfred de Vigny and Hector Berlioz.<sup>257</sup> In 1841 Esprit began looking for a more spacious residence. As E. de Crauzat noted in his monograph: "It is high time that Dr Blanche left Montmartre", adding that the reason must be "due to expansion [...] as the experience of his *maison de santé* and the concern he has for his patients made it so successful."<sup>258</sup> Five years later Esprit was delighted to find that the Princess de Lamballe's former mansion was available to let, and in 1846 he began renting

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<sup>255</sup> Knapp, B.L., 'Gérard de Nerval, 101', *French Fairy Tales: A Jungian Approach*, SUNY Press, 2003 p. 188.

<sup>256</sup> In comparison, the price to stay at asylums was much different: « 1080 francs par an pour les homes à Saint-Anne, 1020 pour les femmes (i.e. what the *maison du docteur Blanche* asked *per month*); 840 francs pour les hommes à Ville-Evrard pour les hommes, 756 pour les femmes; 900 francs pour les hommes à Bicêtre et à la Salpêtrière, 780 pour les femmes. » See A.M.-P., tome XVII. Séance du février 1877, p. 404. The price charged by Dr Blanche was the equivalent to what one would expect to pay in one of the most exclusive clinics in the Swiss Alps.

<sup>257</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 8.

<sup>258</sup> « Il y a beau temps que le docteur Blanche a quitté Montmartre, ... « pour cause d'agrandissement », comme on dit communément, la maison de santé que son expérience et sa sollicitude pour ses malades avaient rendue si florissante. » *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie du XVIIIe arrondissement. Le Vieux Montmartre*, 1910 [Online] <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32889630f/date1910.r=La%20Folie-Sandrin%20à%20Montmartre.langFR> [accessed May 2012], p. 333.

the property situated just below the village of Passy, between Auteuil and the Chaillot hillside.<sup>259</sup> With its climate, spas and location barely three kilometres from the Port Royale, Passy had begun attracting nobles and affluent, upper-class Parisians in search of country retreats from as early as the seventeenth century; as seen on a map of circa 1820, there are a number of properties newly built on the hillside (Figure 3.7). Esprit wasted no time in transferring his clinic from Montmartre to the Hôtel de Lamballe. His son, Dr Emile Blanche (1820-1893), once married in 1854, took over the management of his house in Passy. The newly named *La maison du docteur Blanche* was brought into being.

### **La Maison du docteur Blanche**

I'm in Passy, with friends, in a superb house, and in wonderful gardens.  
Don't worry about this countryside where I need to stay for a few days.  
What I'm going to have to find here is a simple health supplement.<sup>260</sup>

This was how Gérard de Nerval described Emile Blanche's establishment in a letter to his father dated 1 September 1853. Gérard had first been admitted in such a delirious state he had been forced to wear a straightjacket.<sup>261</sup> The poet described the 'tiny garret' he occupied in *Aurelia* (1855), which was written in the clinic along with *Pandora* and *The Chimeras* (1854), and he noted,

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<sup>259</sup> Princess de Lamballe: Princess Maria Teresa of Savoy-Carignan (Marie Thérèse) (8 September 1749 – 3 September 1792) was a member of a cadet branch of the House of Savoy. She was married at the age of 17 to Louis Alexandre de Bourbon-Penthièvre, *Prince de Lamballe*, the heir to the greatest fortune in France. After her marriage, which lasted a year, she went to court and became the confidante of Queen Marie Antoinette. Her death in the massacres of September 1792 during the French Revolution initiated the implementation of the Reign of Terror.

<sup>260</sup> Unpublished Letter from Nerval to Étienne Labrunie, 1 September 1853, Ms 7039, Blanche files, Institut de France.

<sup>261</sup> An unusual method of treatment for Emile to use as he believed in 'moral treatment' methods and restraining a patient was generally a last resort as this was an extreme measure. However, the Blanche doctors knew Nerval well and twelve years earlier Esprit Blanche had treated him in the Montmartre clinic.

My room lies at the end of a corridor, on the one of which live the insane, and on the other the asylum servants. The only privilege it has is a window, overlooking the courtyard, planted with trees, which is used as a walking area in the day.<sup>262</sup>

Although this description of the room Nerval occupied may be considered to be less accurate than his letters due to its location in one of his novels, it demonstrates how the location of the room occupied by the patient during their time at such a clinic was considered important. Emile allowed Nerval to bring his “clutter” with him to the clinic in Passy, which included a “narghile brought back from Constantinople”, the city he desperately wished to return to when he left the clinic in the spring of 1854.<sup>263</sup> But despite moaning about his room, it was the atmosphere of the *maison Blanche* that inspired Nerval to write so earnestly in a letter to his physician and mentor, “Your house is an enchanted palace that is not easy to leave.”<sup>264</sup>

The archives of the Blanche family provide the only description found to date of the new *maison du Docteur Blanche* in Passy, in an advertisement for the sale of the house in 1920. It reads,

The property comprised of three main buildings, each capped with a tiled roof and two pavilion bathrooms, opening onto a courtyard between a hillside and garden of seventy acres adorned with a well and a terrace with elms planted in staggered rows. The main house, whose windows were lined with oak shutters, consisted of a ground floor with a large salon, a

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<sup>262</sup> Nerval, G., *Aurélia*, 1855, p. 742. « Ma chambre est à l’extrémité d’un corridor habité d’un côté par les fous, et de l’autre par les domestiques de la maison. Elle a seule le privilège d’une fenêtre, percée du côté de la cour, plantée d’arbres, qui sert de promenoir pendant la journée. » Following text not included in quote but from the same passage describing the Blanche *maison de santé* in *Aurélia*: « Mes regards s’arrêtent avec plaisir sur un noyer touffu et sur deux mûriers de la Chine. Au-dessus, l’on aperçoit vaguement une rue assez fréquentée, à travers des treillages peints en vert. Au couchant, l’horizon s’élargit ; c’est comme un hameau aux fenêtres revêtues de verdure ou embarrassées de cages, de loques qui séchent, et d’où l’on voit sortir par instant quelque profil de jeune ou vieille ménagère, quelque tête rose d’enfant. »

<sup>263</sup> Unpublished Letter from Nerval to Dr Blanche, 1 September 1853, Ms. 7039, Blanche files, Institut de France. In fact, Nerval went to Germany, where he fell ill again, which led to another spell in Passy and ultimately to his suicide by hanging in a sordid part of Paris, in a lane behind Châtelet in 1855.

<sup>264</sup> Unpublished Letter from Nerval to Dr Blanche, 1 September 1853, Ms. 7039, Blanche files, Institut de France.

boudoir, a billiard room, a dining room, kitchen and offices, and the upper two floors consisted of nine rooms on each. A Chinese pavilion built in 1810 stood in the garden and gave an exotic twist/touch to this intellectual environment otherwise drowned in countryside, just a few kilometres from the capital where the roofs and the chimneys break up the horizon.<sup>265</sup>

A painting by Nicolas Jean-Baptiste Ragueneau, titled *Quai et village de Passy* of 1757 pre-dates the move of the Blanche doctors to Passy, but it shows how the house would have looked in its surrounding landscape (Figure 3.8).<sup>266</sup> The walls of the property were located between the Seine and the Bois-de-Boulogne, the main building therefore overlooked the Seine from the hillside with a view of Paris, in the foreground of which was the gilded dome of the Invalides, and later the Eiffel Tower. A classical eighteenth-century building in design, *maison Blanche* was a graceful summer palace with fluted pilasters and terraced gardens. On the ground floor there was a reception room with a limestone and Languedoc marble tiled floor, a drawing room, lounge, and music room (Figures 3.9 and 3.10). There was a dining room with adjoining library, kitchen, chapel, and various closets (Figures 3.11 and 3.12). The second floor was comprised of six large rooms with en-suite dressing rooms and bathrooms, which was home to the Blanche family and also a few of the privileged, non-violent patients. Above the Blanche quarters were the upper floors, where the accommodation for both patients and staff was able to house up to eighty-five at full capacity.

Surrounded by a five-hectare estate, the house had gardens blessed with natural springs which allowed for the expansion of the hydrotherapy facilities the doctors felt so

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<sup>265</sup> Unpublished advertisement for house sale, 1920, Ms. 7027, Blanche files, Institut de France.

<sup>266</sup> Today, the gardens no longer extend down to the Seine, since the property was divided up in the 1922 and since 1945 the house has been home to the Turkish Embassy in Paris.

passionately about.<sup>267</sup> The garden became home to the Orangery and the billiard pavilion but also, amid the lime trees and jasmine, a red and black terracotta tiled bathhouse where people could indulge in the healthy delights of baths in lidded copper tubs (Figure 3.13). As a result of the hydrotherapy equipment installed at the *maison de santé*, a wide range of iron-rich mineral water baths (recommended by the Faculty of Medicine for their health benefits since 1650 and just like those listed in the advertisement for Montmartre clinic), were offered to patients, and they became a popular method of treatment for the Blanche doctors. A monumental perron with two flights of nineteen steps led down to the three-level terraced garden, which descended to the Seine. Today, the double staircase leading down into the grounds is the only surviving original feature of the residence (Figure 3.14). Behind its elegant, classical appearance, the building is merely an identical reconstruction of the original, undertaken in 1925 by the Count and Countess de Limur. Blanche describes why the building work was required in his book, *Passy*,

Once restoration had begun, they tried probing a wall to bring light what centuries had concealed. Old painted joists were uncovered, but a fatal and unfortunate blow with a pickaxe resulted in a shower of debris and proved that this venerable building was begging for mercy, that it would collapse one day or another on the heads of its new occupants. The old rubble stone ‘folly’ was demolished. The new ‘chateau’ stands slightly further back; it is built in dressed stone, without its pretty ornamentation; it is solid, but jammed between the retaining wall of Balzac’s house and a road ruined by ugly buildings.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Observations from my own visit to the house in summer of 2012. At number 17 rue Berton stood the Princesse de Lamballe’s townhouse, which became the Turkish Embassy in Paris in 1925. In 1846, Dr Blanche transferred his clinic from the rue Norvins in Montmartre to this property, which he rented from the banker, Sanlot, its owner at the time. In 1850, Sanlot sold the property to Alphonse Roubo, who left it in his will to a Madame Delamotte. In 1890, her nephews sold it to Dr Meuriot, who had succeeded Dr Blanche as the director of the clinic in 1872. Following his death in 1901, his heirs portioned off the land, on which the avenue Lamballe and the Général Mangin were subsequently built.

<sup>268</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Passy*, Paris: Lafitte, 1928, cited and translated in unpublished information from the Turkish Embassy archive, p. 30.

The Limur's did their utmost to make the reconstruction as faithful as possible to the original house. The count ordered research to be made into the history of the old building, while the countess supervised the interior decoration. No expense was spared as is shown by the exorbitant bills from suppliers and decorators kept in the Turkish Embassy archives. The Limur family felt like guardians of the building and collected rare items in order to bring the house back to the life it knew before its extensive restoration.<sup>269</sup>

The journey to the outskirts of Paris to stay at the *maison Blanche* appealed to patients because they were still able to enjoy the same luxuries and receive the same treatment as that offered in the spas in the heights of the Swiss Alps, but without the inconvenience and expense of travel. Compared with other private clinics in Paris, the *maison Blanche* was rural, but not inaccessibly so, and it appealed to not only Parisians but also English and other foreign patients. The clinic also provided patients with the opportunity to socialise with Emile's family as well as his visitors and guests, who were often fashionable and elite members of high society. Jill Steward notes patients and health seekers "tended to be attracted by the social tone of a place as well as the medical reputation of its waters, air and climate."<sup>270</sup> Luxury, calm and salubriousness were believed to soothe the distress of the residents catered for in the Blanchés' rest home for weary intellectuals. The visitors all waxed lyrical about its transfer to such an idyllic location: the critic and novelist Jules Janin (1804–1874) described it as "the charming hill where it seems one could better spread one's wings to fly off into infinity."<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Unpublished information from Turkish Embassy archive, p. 30.

<sup>270</sup> Jill Steward, 'Travel to the Spas: The Growth of Health Tourism in Central Europe, 1850-1914', in Blackshaw, G. and Wieber, S., (eds.) *Journeys into Madness: Mapping Mental Illness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*, Oxford and New York: Berghan Books, 2012, p.74.

<sup>271</sup> Letter Jules Janin, Ms 7666, dated 1870, Blanche files, Institut de France. A French writer and critic; often referred to as the 'prince of critics'. Jules Janin was a prolific French writer of the mid-1800s, and he worked on *Le Figaro* and the *Quotidienne*, among others, until 1830 when he became a dramatic



## Dr Emile Blanche and 'le traitement moral'

Despite being a prominent and popular psychiatrist, very little is known about the medical opinions of Esprit's son, Dr Emile Blanche. He did not publish anything in terms of medical literature and any unpublished documents have either been lost or were destroyed by the doctor himself. Jacques-Émile Blanche wrote,

It is not for me to say the touching and noble reasons why my father destroyed his 'reports' of forensic medicine, and has published nothing of his work, for example his studies on marriages between families of the mentally ill, the 'law' of heredity, so appalling and revealing. Excessive philanthropy was the only cause for its deletion [...]. One of the 'reports' he had promised to develop into a book was devoted to dreams, to sexual emotion among the hysterical patients. By reading articles on Freud, I thought I almost heard the words of my father. But for many years, when he knew this, he was silent.<sup>272</sup>

Therefore, only published accounts by his father Esprit, patients, friends, his son, newspapers and the private letters available in the archives are able to assist in building a picture of the man who ran one of the most famous private clinics in Paris.

A shy man in private life and seemingly obedient to his authoritarian father, Emile married a distant cousin, Félicie, on 28 July 1854 at his father's direction. He was not in love with Félicie, but both Blanche doctors knew she had the personality required for the

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critic of the *Journal des Débats*. He also published a number of novels, such as *L'âne Mort et la Femme Guillotine* (*The Dead Donkey and the Guillotined Woman*) 1829, *La Confession*, 1830, and *Barnave*, 1831.

<sup>272</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Passy*, Paris: Lafitte, 1928, p. 38. « Il ne m'appartient pas de dire les raisons touchantes et nobles pourquoi mon père a détruit ses « rapports » de médecine légale, n'a rien publié de ses travaux, par exemple ses études sur les mariages entre familles d'aliénés, sa « Loi » de l'hérédité, si effroyable et révélatrice. Une philanthropie excessive, et selon moi déplacée, fut la seule cause de son effacement [...]. Un de ses « rapports », qu'il avait promis de développer en un livre, était consacré aux rêves, à l'émotivité sexuelle chez les hystériques, malades dont il s'était particulièrement occupé. En lisant des articles sur Freud, j'ai cru presque réentendre la parole de mon père. Mais pendant bien des années, quand il me savait présent, il se taisait. »

mistress of a *maison de santé*.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, Félicie was highly conscientious in her tasks around the sanatorium, working there ceaselessly for forty years. Emile, like other trained physicians of the time, would often carefully observe and have discussions with the patient for some time to gain knowledge of a case; this was considered “an essential preliminary to the carrying out of the treatment appropriate to a particular condition present.”<sup>274</sup> He also practiced and favoured the *traitement moral* medical techniques practiced by his father and other French physicians before him. Emile’s father taught him to sit on the patient’s bed and to talk to them. Sometimes he would reprimand them, other times he would listen to, moralise, sermonise, encourage, and comfort; regardless, the doctor was always present and the time spent with the patient was not rushed.<sup>275</sup> Most importantly, Emile continued Esprit Blanche’s practice of putting patients in the context of a family environment.

Emile, his wife, their children Joseph and Jacques, and their governess lived amongst their patients on the second floor of this rather unique family house. Some of the patients were allowed to circulate relatively freely through rooms on the first floor and in the garden, as long as they were not considered dangerous or violent. On the ground floor, beige floral furnishings in the Louis-Philippe style welcomed visitors into the reception room adorned with Ionic columns and tall Louis XV carved doorways (Figure 3.15).<sup>276</sup> In the adjacent room, residents and guests played billiards, a game thought to aid

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<sup>273</sup> Murat, L., 2001, p. 93.

<sup>274</sup> Tinel, J., *Conceptions et Traitement des États Neurasthéniques*, Paris: J.B. Baillière et Fils, 1941, p. 31.

<sup>275</sup> Murat, L., 2001, pp. 95-99.

<sup>276</sup> The author took this image in 2012 and so it is not the original building but that following the extensive reconstruction works by the Limur family in 1925. However, although they are not the original furnishings, the staff of the Turkish Embassy assured me that the rooms are decorated and furnished with replicas of those there during the time Doctor Blanche and his family were living and working at the maison du Blanche.

digestion.<sup>277</sup> Gymnastics were practiced in the garden. Patients could spend hours, or even a whole day, in a lidded bathtub in the bathhouse, since Emile was, like his father, an enthusiastic advocate of hydrotherapy. More ‘agitated’ patients were kept to their own quarters; screams from behind the walls would occasionally frighten passers-by in the Rue Raynouard.<sup>278</sup> Emile did not only accept people showing symptoms of neurasthenia. Several of his patients also suffered from extremely severe mental disorders. One such patient was the popular nineteenth-century writer and protégé of Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, who had become increasingly unwell as syphilis attacked his spinal cord.<sup>279</sup> He became obsessed with the notion that there were flies devouring his brain and in January 1892 he attempted to shoot himself. When he failed, he rammed a paper knife into his throat. He was admitted to the clinic the next day and placed in Room 15. The Goncourt brothers wrote of a conversation Emile had with the editor and art critic Charles Yriarte (1833–1898) regarding Maupassant,

Maupassant apparently spends the whole day talking to imaginary people, who are all without exception bankers, stockbrokers, and financiers; and one can hear him suddenly say: ‘Are you trying to make fun of me? What about the twelve million you were due to bring me today?’ Dr Blanche added: ‘He doesn’t recognise me any more: he calls me *Doctor*, but for him I am a Doctor What’s-his-name, not Doctor Blanche.’ And he gave me a pitiful description of his appearance, saying that he now had the face of a real madman, with his haggard eyes and slack mouth.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Louis XIV (1638-1715) played billiards under Doctor's orders as it was recommended that the exercise of stretching across the billiard table would improve his digestion. See Drayson, A.W., *The Art of Practical Billiards for Amateurs*, Editorial: G. Bell, 1919.

<sup>278</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Passy*, Paris: Lafitte, 1928, pp. 33-40.

<sup>279</sup> By the latter half of the 1880s, Maupassant's health was in decline. His friends began to remark on his unusual behaviour and his writing became shocking and, on occasions nothing short of outrageous. Maupassant had always had a taste for the macabre but, combined with his fears for himself, he now produced a series of disturbing stories such as *Yvette*, *Pierre et Jean* and *Le Horla*, which presented a diary account of the narrator's descent into madness.

<sup>280</sup> ‘Wednesday 17 August 1892’, Dyer, G., *Pages from The Goncourt Journal*, New York: NYRB, 2007, p. 377-378.

His mother did not visit the writer during the six months he spent in Passy before his death there on 6 July 1893, a little before his 43rd birthday.<sup>281</sup>

The *maison Blanche* was a largely self-sustaining clinic (a model Charcot also adopted for the Salpêtrière in 1882 when he transformed the hospital to a self-contained ‘city within a city’<sup>282</sup>): it had a vegetable garden, an orchard, clean spring water, and the patients provided much of the labour that kept the institution running. Patients worked in the kitchen as cooks, nursing assistants or *filles de services* (ward girls), and helped with the vast amounts of laundry. Those patients who were of a particular medical interest to Emile but could not afford the 3000 francs a year to be treated would work in return for bed and board. Other patients would work in the gardens and at meal times food was served to the Blanche family, their guests and other more privileged patients (who were invited to dine with the Blanche family) by working patients of the clinic. This system created an interesting hierarchical structure within the *maison Blanche*, as the non-fee-paying resident would take on more domestic responsibilities in the clinic than those who were paying patients. This system of being fully self-sufficient also allowed Emile to control every aspect of his clinic and home by using the patients as staff.

The Goncourt brothers observed in their diary how much of a great philanthropist he was: “the doctor’s kind and gentle face revealed little of his endless acts of charity.”<sup>283</sup> The portrait of *Le docteur Émile Blanche*, 1890 by his son, Jacques-Émile, shows a thoughtful, serious-looking doctor with flushed pink cheeks and a hint of grey hair

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<sup>281</sup> He was the last patient to be treated by Dr Blanche, who died shortly afterwards on 15 August the same year. Unpublished information from Turkish Embassy archive, p. 28.

<sup>282</sup> See Micale, M., ‘The Salpetriere in the Age of Charcot: An Institutional Perspective on Medical History in the Late Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1985, pp. 713-714.

<sup>283</sup> ‘Wednesday 28 January 1874’, Dyer, G., *Pages from The Goncourt Journal*, New York: NYRB, 2007, p. 205.

appearing from underneath his black hat (Figures 3.16 and 3.17). Depicted seated against a dark green and black background, there are two fragments of paintings on the wall that nod to his artistic interests and bring a hint of colour to what is otherwise a dark composition. On his knee is a folded copy of the *Journal des Débats*, of which his old friend John Lemoine (1815-1892) was the editor, which he holds in place with his left hand. His blue eyes stare directly out of the canvas while his right hand is raised to his face, with his index finger pressing against his temple as if in deep thought. He is dressed in a formal black suit, waistcoat and frock coat of the same colour, with only a glimpse of his white shirt at the collar and cuff, while his *Légion d'Honneur* is on display on his left lapel. Daniel Halévy, son of author and playwright Ludovic Halévy remarked, “he was an old-fashioned physician, always in a frock coat.”<sup>284</sup> The decision to depict his father seated within a room largely unrecognisable due to the cropped background and picture frames creates an image intended to have maximum impact on the viewer. For Blanche, his father was a man of great importance and his portrait deserved to portray that. As such, all the components of this portrait painted by his son serve to underline the enigmatic authority of Dr Blanche as a physician who took his responsibilities seriously, kept a wide circle of contacts and took a keen interest in current affairs.

His wife constantly complained about her husband’s frequent absences, and with rumours circulating of Emile being unfaithful and keeping mistresses in Paris, she became very unhappy about maintaining the upkeep and running of the *maison de santé* in his absence.<sup>285</sup> From the early 1870s she requested that Emile build another house around the corner from the *maison de santé* to which she and her young family could

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<sup>284</sup> Unpublished letter from Daniel Halévy to unknown, 26 August 1885, Ms 7031. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.

<sup>285</sup> Murat, L., 2001, p. 101.

retire in the evening away from the patients. She also encouraged Emile to hand over his position as director to his trusted colleague and close friend, Dr Meuriot.<sup>286</sup> In 1873, Emile complied with his wife's requests and built a house in Auteuil, just a five-minute walk from the clinic. He left his post as director to take up more teaching at the *Faculté de médecine de Paris* and to also lecture alongside Charcot at the *Salpêtrière*, despite thinking he was “*un comédien.*”<sup>287</sup> Yet even with the new house in Auteuil and his busy teaching schedule he continued to work at the clinic, to treat patients and occupy rooms at the *maison Blanche* until his death in 1893.<sup>288</sup>

### **Jacques-Émile Blanche and the Patients**

It was in this very grand and very unusual setting that his son, the Parisian painter Jacques-Émile Blanche was born on 31 January 1861. He was Emile's fourth child but only the second to survive, along with his brother Joseph, who was born in 1856. Understandably, Madame Blanche, saddened at the loss of two infant children, became preoccupied with the health and wellbeing of her young boys. The small Jacques, who had been born premature, and his elder brother Joseph, who was considered to have a stronger constitution and was his father's favourite, were inseparable and grew up among the patients of the *maison de santé*. His upbringing was a genteel one, filled with opportunities to mix with and observe the social and nervous elite of Paris. In his book *Passy*, Blanche described in immense and vivid detail the topography of the grounds of

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<sup>286</sup> Murat, L., 2001, p. 102.

<sup>287</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Passy*, Paris: Lafitte, 1928, p. 38.

<sup>288</sup> Blanche, J. É., 1928, p. 40.

the house he grew up, where “both children were as much prisoners as the patients.”<sup>289</sup>

He writes,

At the end of the avenue of ancient chestnut trees, along the rue Guyot, was a section from which passers-by could hear cries and which was reserved for the more disturbed patients (*agités*), whose doctor, their guardian angel, sometimes managed to calm their furious fits. Their padded cells had thick grills. The doctor would have preferred not to have such patients for whom his care and his words had no value, but he devoted himself to them all the more scrupulously since they were in no state to complain about their guardians. At various times, day or night, he carried out rounds accompanied by two assistants, sometimes by his wife who donned a veil before entering this bleak place. As far as the ‘*dames agitées*’ were concerned, my mother did not fail to pass through their rooms, after my father, night and day.<sup>290</sup>

Blanche describes his father’s rounds a little more in *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, writing,

My father made his rounds four times a day and during the night, seconded by one of his interns, to the cage-like padded cells of the raving lunatics whose screams we could hear. My mother would also go about, both day and night, comforting the deranged women patients.<sup>291</sup>

Blanche often wandered around the gardens with his nanny, Noud’jac, and various other nurses and governesses for company. He visited patients he particularly liked in order to escape the overwhelming attention he received from his mother. He describes the “permanent fixtures” in his writings, for example patients such as the Comtesse d’Agoult, who was “truly my educator”<sup>292</sup> and who lived on a daily basis – like the other calmer patients – with the Blanche family, taking their meals in the dining room, served with the quasi-military exactitude instituted by Blanche’s grandfather.

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<sup>289</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Passy*, Paris: Lafitte, 1928, p. 35.

<sup>290</sup> Blanche, J. É., 1928, pp. 33-34.

<sup>291</sup> Blanche, J. É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris: Flammarion, 1949, p. 32.

<sup>292</sup> Blanche, J. É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 33.

Recalling Mr G. Henry Marsh, “one of the [neurasthenic] boarders at Passy”, Blanche writes,

The room adjoining that in which I was born had been occupied for years by Mr. Marsh. He had furnished it with his library and a collection of plants and flowers which, in his capacity of botanist, he had gathered in Switzerland during the summer months. His walls were hung with mezzotints of churches and cathedrals, and amongst them was Peterborough. He himself might have been preferred, had he not been prevented by poor health and a tendency to neurasthenia, which my father was attempting to cure. In the morning, when I went into the passage that passed our rooms [...] Mr Marsh in his puce taffeta, dressing-gown, which caught and reflected the light, saw me at the end of the passage, he would invite me to taste the muffins and orange marmalade he enjoyed, sitting by the fire, his window wide open summer and winter. A few pages of *The Times* were scattered over the floor. The old man with skinny ankles and bare feet seemed to find pleasure at the touch of the pile carpet and eiderdown. Bedroom slippers, that might have aroused the jealousy of Cinderella, lay some way off, ready to be put on when he had finished his long and complicated toilet. [...] Every afternoon he went out into the centre of Paris, walking very fast along the Seine, holding an umbrella, for he always had some visit to pay either at the Embassy or to a bookseller. [...] Mr Marsh was very popular amongst our fashionable Anglo-maniacs ... but his vagaries during his brainstorm, his sudden crazy hatreds, sometimes led him to quarrel without apparent reason with his most faithful friends. I know of no one except my father and mother with whom he was never out of temper – at Passy we were only too thoroughly accustomed to his morbid peculiarities.<sup>293</sup>

Blanche also recalls the writer Comtesse d’Agoult (pen name Daniel Stern) making him a present of a volume of the letters of Madame de Sévigné that he read at her knees. It was a happy childhood on the surface, during which the two little boys divided their time between the lessons given by various tutors and their games in the grounds, with rare moments of joy when they were allowed to enter ‘the sanctuary’ of their always-absent father’s office, to gaze at his Delacroix watercolours.<sup>294</sup> In 1868, Blanche’s brother died suddenly of peritonitis. Lonely, in a home plunged into mourning, he understood that he

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<sup>293</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, pp. 11-12.

<sup>294</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 14.



would be forever marked by this loss, as he realized, “I will never be more than an observer of life, without anyone with which to share it.”<sup>295</sup> Blanche was constantly reminded by his father, “there are more madmen than sane people”, while his mother complained that “too early in life, he had a weakness for bizzare people.”<sup>296</sup> Blanche writes he had realised very early in life that he was not quite like everybody else when his father told him, “Some men are born in cottages, some in manor houses. You were born in an overpopulated ‘no man’s land’: a madhouse.”<sup>297</sup>

### Artistic Beginnings

After my retirement, I would really have liked poor Joseph to continue our family tradition. Joseph would have understood me, the staff adored him in Passy. It was simply not your cup of tea, you the artist, you are too much like your mother... a bag of nerves.<sup>298</sup>

As his father reveals, Blanche was not interested in becoming a physician. Yet despite the prospect of the family vocation coming to an end, Emile sensed the seriousness of his only son’s vocation for art and did not quash his artistic ambitions. Rather, the doctor and his wife began to allow Jacques-Émile to accompany his father on his business trips to Belgium, Holland and England towards the end of the summer every year. They would visit museums together and meet Emile’s friends, colleagues, associates and patients. As we have seen with Blanche’s description of Marsh, his lack of interest in the practicalities of medicine did not prohibit his interest and desire to build intimate relationships with the

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<sup>295</sup> Blanche, J. É., *La Peche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 34.

<sup>296</sup> « Que de trop bonne heure, [son fils avait eu] un penchant pour les êtres bizarres. » Blanche, J.-É., *La Peche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 34.

<sup>297</sup> « Les hommes naissent dans une chaumière ou dans un manoir. [Moi je] naquis dans un *no man’s land* surpeuplé : l’hôpital de la déraison. » Blanche, J.-É., *La Peche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 38.

<sup>298</sup> Letter Dr Blanche to J. É. Blanche, Unpublished. Ms. 7033. Institut de France, Paris.

patients who shared his home at Passy and were of much interest to him. The patients played a significant role in his life, and specifically in the formation of his early artistic inclinations. Blanche notes the influence of one particular patient of his father's, Monsignor Talbot de Malahide, "whose quarters were underneath our schoolroom." He writes,

I will not say much about Talbot, for he is well known and I am unable to piece together his story and the reasons for his enforced stay at Passy. However, the jars of colours, brushes, Chinese white and ink, compasses and rulers which the terrifying Monsignor used for his enormous astronomical charts delighted me and quickened my childish imagination. He made me feel that I had ventured into the den of a magician who sought the philosopher's stone and cabalistic signs in the stars.<sup>299</sup>

Emile realised his son had an artistic predisposition from an early age and encouraged the development of his already impressive drawing skills. Dr Blanche also took a keen interest in the arts and the walls of the *maison de santé* were filled with works of art he bought at auction or through dealers; occasionally he would also receive paintings as presents from friends or even in lieu of fees for their stay at the *maison Blanche* and the Delacroix watercolours that Blanche loved so much came from his parents' friends, the Duponchels.<sup>300</sup> However, although Emile lacked daring as a collector, he was undoubtedly interested in amassing a rich collection of artworks and clearly sought his son's opinion of contemporary art and artists, many of whom sat

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<sup>299</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 13. For information see [online] <http://www.malahideheritage.com/Malahide%20Castle%20and%20the%20Talbots.htm> [accessed June 2012]. The Second Baron of Malahide was succeeded by his brother, Lord James Talbot, Third Baron, who had five sons and four daughters. The Fourth Baron, also a Lord James Talbot was a Lord-in-waiting to her Majesty, Queen Victoria. He was also president of the Royal Irish Academy. He was created a Peer in the U.K. as Baron Talbot de Malahide on the 9th November, 1856. He died in 1883. A brother of his, The Right Rev. Monsignor George Talbot, was Cannon of St. Peters and Chamberlain to Pope Pius IV.

<sup>300</sup> Meeting with Jane Roberts, January 2013. Paris. Henri Duponchel (1794-1868) had been the Director of the Paris Opera and an accomplished painter and silversmith persuaded the Comte de Mornay to take Delacroix on his trip to Morocco in 1832.

around his dinner table at Passy and Auteuil, including Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir and Henri Gervex. Emile owned Corot's *The Seine at Mantes* (1868-70), which bore the inscription 'gift of Corot to Doctor Blanche', and his 'pink peonies' by Manet were a gift from Dinah Felix, the actress Rachel Felix's sister. Emile appreciated "well-painted" works of art and who much preferred Gervex to Manet; he told his son that he found Manet's painting "funny", but nevertheless thought it did have "something" to it.<sup>301</sup> Emile very nearly acquired *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* of 1863. He wrote in a letter to his son,

I was in discussions with Edouard to buy his '*Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*' because we have the perfect place for it in our dining-room. But your mother was frightened by the nudity. On reflection, she was perhaps right about that; but we should have simply put the painting away for you and you could have had it later, since you like his kind of painting. And I feel maybe you are not wrong.<sup>302</sup>

Jacques-Émile Blanche began attending the Lycée Condorcet at the age of 15, the same school which his father had attended when Condorcet was still named Collège Bourbon.<sup>303</sup> He found many of the lessons to be slow and noted in his letters to his parents he found the school routine to be boring without any drawing classes. Blanche found an enthusiasm for literature, and his teacher Stéphane Mallarmé, who was also a family friend, took a liking to him. Mallarmé encouraged Blanche's acquisition of

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<sup>301</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 20.

<sup>302</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Propos de peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1919, p. 11.

<sup>303</sup> Lycées provide a three-year course of further secondary education for children between the ages of 15 and 18. Pupils were (and still are today) prepared for an academic qualification called the *baccalauréat* which was first introduced by Napoleon I in 1808. The *baccalauréat* can lead to higher education studies or directly to professional life. The Lycée Condorcet was founded in 1803 in Paris, located at 8, rue du Havre, in the city's IXe arrondissement. Since its inception, various political eras have seen it given a number of different names, but today its identity honours the memory of the Marquis de Condorcet. Aside from Blanche, some of the school's other famous alumni include: Henri Bergson, Pierre Bonnard, Jean Cocteau, Georges Eugène Haussmann, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Francis Poulenc, Marcel Proust, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Valéry and Édouard Vuillard.

English, correcting his homework “in red ink and in the ravishing handwriting of a spinster.”<sup>304</sup> He let Blanche perfect his written English language skills by allowing him to correct the work of his fellow classmates and encouraged Blanche’s love of French modern authors who

Tempted me by their novelty, thanks to my tutor, who lent me the Romantics, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, and – shall I confess it? – Zola and Maupassant, books forbidden at the Lycée. The classics remained a closed book to me.<sup>305</sup>

As well as taking an interest in art and modern literature, Blanche had a passion for music, which his father also shared. No musician himself, the doctor was a friend of many musicians, such as Gabriel Fauré and Charles Gounod, yet he had a weakness for Hector Berlioz.<sup>306</sup> Emile was also one of the proud founders of the Concerts Colonne Society, and introduced Blanche to music at an early age. His music teacher and family friend Gounod noted Blanche could decrypt the most difficult of scores.<sup>307</sup> The doctor would also take his son to the Conservatoire or the Châtelet Theatre almost every Sunday to hear the best solo pianists in Paris and to develop his taste for serious music.<sup>308</sup> From Berlioz to Léo Delibes, from Saint-Saëns to Chabrier, and from Massenet to Fauré or of course Halévy, a lifelong friend of the Blanche family, Blanche was wholly familiar with the musical elite of Paris.

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<sup>304</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Aymeris*, Paris: La Sirène, 1922, p. 77.

<sup>305</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 24. By taking an interest in these modern authors, Blanche is reading the writing of people who were known to his father and who often sat around the dinner table. It demonstrates Blanche was forward thinking and his interest in Zola and Maupassant indicate an interest towards the modern. Zola is also interesting here too because of his analysis of generations of a ‘degenerate’ family. For more see Zola’s twenty-novel series *Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le Second Empire*, in particular, *Le Reve* (1888), *La Joie de Vivre* (1884), *Une Page d’Amour* (1878) and *l’Assommoir* (1877).

<sup>306</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 112.

<sup>307</sup> Roberts, J., *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>308</sup> Blanche, J. É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 30.

While Blanche was growing up, the *maison Blanche* developed into an exclusive establishment with space to welcome the *crème de la crème* of those suffering from mental illness. The price charged for staying in the clinic was prohibitive, far too expensive for Baudelaire's mother, who had to abandon the idea of sending her son there in 1866.<sup>309</sup> People, like the depressive erotomaniac, Ismail Bey came from as far afield as Constantinople to consult Dr Blanche, who had become one of the most sought-after psychiatrists in Paris, known by some as the "remarkable confessor to the insane."<sup>310</sup> His patient registers convey the extent of his influence: Count le Tonnelier de Breteuil, France's consul general in Venice; Count Arthur de Montesquiou Fezensac, a descendant of D'Artagnan; Monseigneur Georges Talbot de Malahide, former papal valet who believed he was Galileo; the melancholy Juliette Grévy, sister of Jules, future president of the French republic; Madame Musard, a wealthy American collector,<sup>311</sup> the Halévy family (the composer's wife, brother and sisters); the brilliant Marie d'Agoult, Franz

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<sup>309</sup> Hayden, D., *Pox: Genius, Madness and the Mystery of Syphilis*, Basic Books, 2003, p. 112. In his later years, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) experienced physical and mental complaints (Hayden believes to be indicative of progressing syphilis): "Is it illness which spas the intelligence and the will, or is it spiritual cowardice which tires the body? I don't know. But what I feel is an immense sense of discouragement, a feeling of intolerable isolation, constant fear of some vague disaster, complete lack of faith in my powers, total lack of desire." He complained of digestive and nervous trouble, culminating in a mild bout of paralysis (which he did not connect with an old syphilitic infection). Early in 1858, he complained to his mother: "I believe I am sick, and a sick man, even if the sickness is imagined, is a sick man. What else could these perpetual fears, these palpitations, and this breathlessness, especially during sleep?" Baudelaire left one of the most poetic descriptions of an intimation of insanity: "I have cultivated my hysteria with enjoyment and terror. I always have vertigo now, and today, 23 January 1862, I have experienced an unusual warning: I felt pass over me *the wind of the wing of madness*."

<sup>310</sup> Murat, L., 2001, p. 12.

<sup>311</sup> Mme Musard, née Blakenez, was placed into the *maison du docteur Blanche* by her husband on 25 January 1879. The description of her stay are written in a few lines: « 10 février 79: Démence avec excitation maniaque et paralysie générale; très grande agitation; bouleverse tout, se déshabille pour tout donner aux pauvres, gâte parfois; incapable de se diriger elle-même. [...] Mars : Alternance d'excitation et de dépression profonde pendant laquelle la patiente est absolument incapable de parler ou d'agir. [...] Avril : Souvent en proie à des hallucinations terrifiantes pendant lesquelles elle pleure ou crie sans pouvoir dire ce qui l'effraye. Reste parfois des journées entières dans une stupeur complète sans dire un mot, sans faire un mouvement sans rien pendre. [...] 12 mai 1879 : Décédée à 9 h du soir des suites d'une paralysie générale progressive. » Unpublished Registres Maison du Blanche, VIII. Turkish Embassy archive, p. 393.

Liszt's ex-companion; and Theo van Gogh, admitted after his mental breakdown on 14 October 1890.<sup>312</sup> Guests, friends, and neighbours included Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir, Berthe Morisot, Henri Fantin-Latour, Henri Gervex, Edmond Maître, Charles Gounod, the Goncourt brothers, Marcel Proust, the Comtesse de Castiglione and many more. It was no longer just a *maison de santé*, but also a salon where a unique gathering of aristocrats, diplomats, artists and heiresses liked to meet. The impact this unique environment had on Blanche is fascinating, and his decision to become a portraitist is even more significant.

### **'Les dîners des philosophes'**

Fashionable salons of the 1880s provided a distinct venue where those who attended could discuss the latest in literary, musical or artistic news. They served as bridges between artists and the *grand bourgeoisie*.<sup>313</sup> The upper classes could meet bohemians in a luxurious setting, and artists were happy to comply since they would often come away with new commissions. Madame Blanche held literary Salons and philosophical banquets, which were much in vogue at this time, which were organised by a fellow doctor, Jean Bouley, in a pavilion in the garden. From a young age Blanche was expected to attend the *dîners des philosophes* hosted by his parents and remembers at first he felt "too young to follow the sparkling conversation of these distinguished men."<sup>314</sup> Yet when

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<sup>312</sup> Unpublished Registres Maison du Blanche, VIII. Turkish Embassy archive, p. 393.

<sup>313</sup> Kale, S.D., *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848*, JHU Press, 2005, p. 66.

<sup>314</sup> Blanche, J. É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, 1949, p. 38

he began his school tuition, he would return for the *dîners*, taking the opportunity to speak with those gathered around his father's table in Passy.<sup>315</sup>

*Les dîners des philosophes* at the Blanche residence were attended by such people as Ernest Renan, Alphonse de Lamartine, Charles-François Gounod, Jules Michelet, George Sand and Louis Pasteur. Charles Gounod regularly sat down to play the piano at Emile's musical evenings, also attended by fellow composers Hector Berlioz, Georges Bizet, Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré. On other occasions, his fits of madness caused him to be hurriedly admitted as a patient.<sup>316</sup> Emile's neighbour, the beautiful Countess de Castiglione, Napoleon III's former mistress, also visited him on a social and professional basis. The doctor would act as a food taster for this very paranoid lady, whose meals were then delivered to her home in the nearby Rue Nicolo. Blanche writes of these *dîners*,

At my father's table which the philosophers, artists and men of science so much appreciated, there sat also every evening certain of these free boarders afflicted more or less with neurasthenia.<sup>317</sup>

Nervous maladies were privileged in polite French society in the nineteenth century as tokens of their victims' cultivation; establishments like the *maison Blanche* played an important role in turning 'nervousness' into a mark of social distinction, a signifier of an individual's superior sensibility. As one guest memorably mused, "patients and guests

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<sup>315</sup> Blanche, J.É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, 1949, p. 38

<sup>316</sup> Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d'un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, p. 111.

<sup>317</sup> Blanche, J.É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, 1949, p. 38.

mingled so easily that it was sometimes hard to know who was insane and who was not.”<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Unpublished letter from Carolus-Duran to Dr Blanche, 17 January 1883, MS 6280, Turkish Embassy archive.



## Chapter 4

### Jacques-Émile Blanche: People, Places and Portraits

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Blanche's unique home environment, his cultured upbringing and participation in the famous *dîners* hosted weekly by his parents resulted in him having an in-depth knowledge of the work of many artists, writers, musicians and other creative minds in Paris at the turn of the century. Blanche currently has a reputation in art history as an antimodernist. However, through extensive archival work in Paris, Rouen and Offranville and examination of Blanche's own writings, I have been able to piece together Blanche's early history as a portraitist, revealing how he positioned himself as an artist with modernist sympathies. Upon completion of his Baccalaureate in 1880, Blanche was free to think about which direction he should take in his career, and he wavered between a profession in music or painting for a couple of years. His family encouraged his artistic proclivities, and so Blanche decided on a career as a portrait painter, understanding how he could capitalise on his father's connections. Whether it was a patient, artist, literary figure, stage performer, art connoisseur, musician, or member of fashionable society, Blanche tried to get to know them all.<sup>319</sup>

His father's friend, Edmond Maître (1840-1898), also played a significant role in Blanche's decision to dedicate himself to painting. A well-known character of the Parisian art world by the end of 1880, Maître was an energetic figure on the rue de Seine, where he lived as a wealthy bachelor. He had his table reserved every evening at the legendary Café Guerbois on the Grand rue des Batignolles, which was visited by artists such as Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Paul Cézanne, Alfred Sisley, Claude Monet,

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<sup>319</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937.

Camille Pissarro, Auguste Renoir and Frederick Bazille.<sup>320</sup> Maître rarely missed a private view or concert. A popular figure, he appeared in a number of artworks of the time, including *L'atelier de Bazille* (1870) by his friend Frédéric Bazille (1841-1870), who had painted his portrait in profile the previous year (Figure 4.1). *L'atelier de Bazille* allows a glimpse into the intimate relationships that connected these artists and writers. The scene is set in the studio in the rue de la Condamine that Bazille shared with Renoir from 1 January 1868 to 15 May 1870. Bazille is at the centre, a palette in his hand, but he did not position himself here – as he wrote in a letter to his father, “Manet painted me in.”<sup>321</sup> It is certainly possible to see Manet’s vigorous style in the tall, slim figure of the young man, and indeed, Manet, wearing a hat, is looking at the canvas placed on the easel. On the right, Edmond Maître is shown seated at the piano. Above him, a still life by Monet is a reminder that Bazille helped Monet financially by buying his work. The three characters on the left are more difficult to identify – Gary Tinterow has tentatively identified them as Monet, Renoir and Zacharie Astruc.<sup>322</sup> Bazille depicted his studio as an informal place for his friends to gather and to work. He illustrates how the artist’s studio in the second half of the nineteenth century was a place that embraced the rhythm of modern life.<sup>323</sup> By surrounding Manet and his admirers with some of his paintings that were refused by the

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<sup>320</sup> A quintessential Parisian café filled with marble-topped tables, cheap metal chairs, smoke and a few paintings on the dark walls, the Café Guerbois came alive at night and seconded as a meeting place every Thursday for Impressionist masters such as Manet, Monet, Bazille, Renoir, writer Émile Zola and countless others who participated in lively discussions from 1866 to 1874. The Café Guerbois and many other cafés in Paris during the days of modern art played an influential role in artistic individuals to discuss ideas that led to artists challenging the perception of art and how it should be viewed. But, most importantly, if the passions of these Impressionist artist taught us anything when they sat leisurely in their chairs, huddled in the corner of the Café Guerbois, it’s that modern art is meant to be more than a representation of a person, landscape or Parisian street; it is meant to be the subject of intellectual thought and debate.

<sup>321</sup> Bazille, F., ‘l’intérieur de mon atelier’, no. 25, 1992, p. 178, cited in Tinterow, G., *Origins of Impressionism*, Exhibition Catalogue, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, p. 336.

<sup>322</sup> Tinterow, G., *Origins of Impressionism*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, p. 336.

<sup>323</sup> Alsdorf, B., *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting*, New Jersey and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Salon, such as *The Toilette* above the sofa, *Fisherman with a Net* higher up on the left, and Renoir's *Landscape with Two People* rejected at the 1866 Salon (the large, framed canvas to the right of the window), Bazille covertly expresses his criticism of the Academy, and professes his own artistic sympathies. Maître's inclusion in this painting demonstrates just how central and well connected he was to some of the city's key avant-garde artists, wholly conversant with their ideas and practices. Maître also features in the famous, yet more formal, group portraits by Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904) *Un atelier aux Batignolles* (1870) and *Autour du Piano* (1885).

Edmond Maître encouraged the young Blanche to paint seriously and especially to visit the studios and salons of his many artist friends. Although he did not specifically encourage him to paint portraits, it was as a result of Maître's advice that he began to copy the Old Master paintings at the Louvre. His *Copie du Parnasse de Mantegna* (1880, Offranville, France) was considered so successful that fellow artists Paul Baudry, Gustave Moreau and Léon Bonnat all wished to buy it.<sup>324</sup> Blanche also tried his hand at many other subjects, including painting studio models in interiors or landscapes, still life flower arrangements and oil sketches of his fellow students at their easels.<sup>325</sup> However, despite experimenting with other subjects, it was in the art of portraiture that Blanche would really excel. On discovering his aptitude for the genre he declared, "I am a portrait

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<sup>324</sup> Bergé, P., *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche*, Paris: Fondation Pierre-Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent/Skira Flammarion, 2012, p. 10.

<sup>325</sup> *Les Artistes Pierre Ernest Levallois et Blussé dans l'atelier de Jacques-Fernand Humbert et Henri Gervex* (1883) is a dynamic sketch painted in Henri Gervex's studio where Blanche attended drawing classes. The work depicts two of his fellow-students viewed from behind working at their unfinished canvases: the Paris-born painter Levallois is wearing a white smock and holding a paint palette in his left hand, and Blussé, "a bawdy, one-eyed old Dutchman", is shown in profile looking off to the right of the canvas and dressed in a dark suit. For more information on this work see, Roberts, J., *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, 2012, p. 14.

painter and want to be one above all else, a portrait painter of everything and everyone.”<sup>326</sup>

In the first section of this chapter I will address Blanche’s decision to become a portrait painter. I will discuss Blanche’s teachers and early influences – who and what defined his early practice and techniques? Who did he want to emulate? What style did he want to align himself with? In the second section I will explore how Blanche became a portrait painter, where he had his studios, and how he supported himself financially. In the third section I will analyse Blanche’s early portraits of the 1880s considering what it was about the genre of portraiture that appealed to him. In the fourth section I will turn to Blanche’s establishment as a portraitist, examining his *maison Blanche* contacts and his skilful negotiation of the Parisian salon system. The fifth and final section of the chapter will consider Blanche’s network and the reputation he acquired within artistic networks in Paris and Dieppe.

### **‘Bring me a Brioche’: Teachers and Early Influences**

Blanche knew he could not be deemed as ‘self-taught’; if he wanted to be successful he had to set about deciding where and with whom he should receive his artistic training.

He struggled to make a decision and seriously contemplated entering the *École des Beaux-Arts*,

Should I enter the *École des Beaux-Arts* or should I go to the Julian Academy? How can I manage to paint living nude models? What would really suit me best would be to find a painter whom I admire above all

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<sup>326</sup> « Portraitiste je suis et veux l’être, portraitiste en tout et de tout. » Blanche, J.-É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 134.

else, to whom I could be apprenticed, preparing his colours, helping him at all times, like the true disciple of a Renaissance painter.<sup>327</sup>

Ultimately, he decided against such formal schooling, lacking confidence in his ability and fearing the competition of other artists. He wrote, “I will not expose myself to the sneering of those Beaux-Arts types.”<sup>328</sup> Instead his mother found a solution of sorts in the form of Henri Gervex (1852-1929) who was only nine years older than Blanche and who was a very close friend of the family who spent every summer holidaying with them in Dieppe. Gervex had opened a studio at 62, rue de Rome that he shared with the artist Ferdinand Humbert (1842-1934). The studio was only open to a few students and they were taught to practise the idealising of form, fine brushwork, and the mixing of a sombre colour palette that was popular with the Salon. Blanche knew that this studio was a purely commercial enterprise and that most of the students had been refused entry to the more prestigious Académie Julian, but he accepted his mother’s wishes and nevertheless started his training with Gervex.<sup>329</sup>

The scandal surrounding Gervex’s painting *Rolla* of just a few years earlier in 1878 did not seem to bother the conservative Madame Blanche when choosing her son’s tutor, and the reason for this was perhaps that while Gervex’s subject matter was risqué, his style was impeccably academic.<sup>330</sup> From very early on in his career he had sought

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<sup>327</sup> « Un autre problème se posait : entrerais-je à l’école des Beaux-Arts ou chez quelque Julian ? Comment étudier d’après le modèle nu ? Ce qui me conviendrait le mieux, ce serait un peintre que j’admirasse, chez qui je compléterais mon apprentissage en broyant les couleurs, l’aidant, comme faisaient les disciples les maîtres de la Renaissance. » Blanche, J.-É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 134.

<sup>328</sup> « Non, je ne m’exposerais point aux brimades de l’école des Beaux-Arts » Blanche, J.-É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 137.

<sup>329</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 32.

<sup>330</sup> *Rolla* caused a scandal in 1878 when it was removed from the Salon for immorality. However, it was not judged indecent by the nudity, rather most of the controversy around this painting focused on the

prestige, wealth and recognition by exhibiting at the *Salon des Artistes* and later the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*. It was here that Gervex exhibited works of titillating mythological and modern day literary themes, as well as society portraits. In 1880 he completed a rather sombre pastel of Blanche's father *Portrait of Antoine-Emile Blanche* (Figure 4.2). Depicted in his familiar black frock coat and hat, Gervex portrays Dr Blanche against a dark muted background. While the face is highly detailed, the bottom of the composition remains rough and Gervex has allowed the brown paper to show through, possibly so his inscription to the doctor can be clearly seen in the bottom left. Despite the *Rolla* scandal, Gervex was to become an establishment figure, entrusted with several important official paintings and the decoration of public buildings.<sup>331</sup>

Despite training with Gervex, Blanche would often say how little he liked his academic painting style and how his thoughts for his preferred teachers and mentors leant more towards “Manet, Degas and Renoir, who drew me away from official teaching and such painting classes as were held at the famous Julian academy.”<sup>332</sup>

There is no doubt that Édouard Manet (1832-1883) was Blanche's first choice of teacher, but in 1880, when Blanche was looking for tuition, Manet was in poor health and had decided to not take on any new students. Despite this he encouraged Blanche to visit him at his studio on the rue St Pétersbourg, and after an initial visit accompanied by Maître, Blanche returned several times later on his own. Manet encouraged the young painter to try new subjects and techniques. Although he was training with Gervex,

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heap of clothes that accompanied the reclining nude, as the disposition and nature of the clothes indicate the female's consent in sexual intercourse and her status as a prostitute.

<sup>331</sup> Among the first was *The Distribution of Awards* (1889) at the Palais de l'Industrie (now in the Versailles Museum).

<sup>332</sup> « Manet, Degas ou Renoir, qui m'a attiré loin de l'enseignement officiel et de telles classes de peinture comme ont été tenues à la célèbre académie Julian. » Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 29.

Blanche considered himself a loyal disciple of Manet.<sup>333</sup> He carefully followed Manet's work between 1879 and 1882 when Manet was producing a series of pastel portraits, the most freely produced of his career.<sup>334</sup> A few of the works are done on paper – the traditional vehicle for the medium – but most are on some type of treated canvas.<sup>335</sup> This medium offered Manet fresh, saturated colour and a powdered material that flattered the face more than paint, delighting his female sitters. Manet chose to have his sitters pose in their most elegant clothes, often wearing a large dark hat or toque, and would surround their pale complexion with tones of black, grey or blue. The pastels are remarkably similar: conventional bust-height profiles or views *en face* of female sitters. A striking example from this series of pastel portraits is Manet's *Portrait d'Irma Brunner* (Figure 4.3). Shown in profile, Manet presents Brunner in a pink blouse against a plain grey background, with his signature written in black in the bottom left. Her stark pale complexion contrasts strongly against her velvet-black hair and dark features. The touch of red on her lips adds sharpness to this elegant harmony. The black outlines characteristic of Manet call attention to the surface on which the image is created. The brilliant white flecks of her collar, the arched effect of her tilted hat and the carefully considered wisps of her hair at her temple together demonstrate Manet's confidence and mastery of the pastel medium. Interestingly, the rapid increase in Manet's use of pastel

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<sup>333</sup> Gervex had met and worked with Manet in 1876 and had frequented many of the Impressionist group haunts, but he did not fully embrace their ideas on painting.

<sup>334</sup> Manet's series of pastel portraits created between 1879-1882 consist of 78 portraits, of which only 19 are portraits of men, and only three-quarters of the subjects have been identified; see Dolan, T. (ed) 'Manet's Synesthetic Portrait: Composing Cabaner', *Perspectives on Manet*, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012, p.139; Rouart, D. and Wildenstein, D., *Édouard Manet: Catalogue raisonné*, vol 2., Lausanne and Paris, 1975, p. 2.

<sup>335</sup> Edmond Bazire noted that Manet did not 'stump' or fix his pastels, which is undoubtedly the reason for their ruinous condition. Bazire, *Manet*, 1884, cited in Courthion, P. and Cailler, P., (eds.), *Portrait of Manet by Himself and His Contemporaries*, trans. Michael Ross, New York, 1960, p. 179.

towards 1880 can be attributed to his failing health: pastels were more easily handled than oil.<sup>336</sup>

Yet even if he turned to pastel through equal parts necessity and choice, Manet took to it and applied his pastel with striking assurance. The effects he achieved are somewhat lost in most reproductions, but the pastels remain dazzling in actuality. Blanche would have almost certainly seen the portrait of Brunner, along with many others, while visiting Manet in his studio and witnessed for himself the confidence with which pastel was handled as an alternative for oil in the creation of a portrait depicting contemporary Parisian femininity, bringing an incomparable freshness to the portrait. The increased use of pastels by modern artists during this time signalled their dropping of conventions in order to attain images of spontaneity, innovation and sincerity. Pastel became established as a favoured means of composing portraits during the late nineteenth century, in particular those of demanding, high society sitters. With its flattering effects, pastel easily lent itself to expressing the individual's delicate skin tone and expensive fabrics as shown here, and it was increasingly identified as a modern as opposed to a traditional medium.<sup>337</sup> Blanche already had a keen awareness of people, their individual characters and psychological conditions when he began painting and Manet was among those who motivated him toward creating portraits where sitters were captured with respect to modern life.

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<sup>336</sup> By 1880 Manet was having bouts of physical unsteadiness believed to be from an untreated syphilis infection. After vain attempts to save him by amputating his leg, Manet died in 1883. See McAuliffe, M., *Dawn of the Belle Epoque: The Paris of Monet, Zola, Bernhardt, Eiffel, Debussy, Clemenceau, and their Friends*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011, p. 133

<sup>337</sup> See Callen, A., *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp.71-74.



On 16 October, 1882, Blanche was tasked with the “*test ultime pour le peintre*” while visiting Manet in his new studio at 77 rue d’Amsterdam, to paint an ordinary bun, “bring me a brioche, I want to see you paint a brioche, if you can paint a brioche then you can call yourself a painter.”<sup>338</sup> Blanche set to work, presenting the canvas to his mentor a few weeks later. *La Brioche* (1882) is a small painting with the brioche carefully placed at the centre of the composition. Sitting proudly on a table covered with a light blue grey cloth, in front of a small cup of steaming tea just visible from the shadows, the brioche is where Blanche focused his painterly attentions. The shiny buttery dough reflects a glint of bright light on the top of its rich, tender crumb. Blanche executed a delightful depiction (Figure 4.4) and recalling the event later in his life wrote, “I still have that little unassuming canvas that I daubed in front of him [Manet] and that he was kind enough to look pleased about’; adding: ‘well I never, he paints a brioche like a natural.’”<sup>339</sup> When comparing Blanche’s brioche canvas with Manet’s own work *La Brioche* (1870) (Figure 4.5) it is clear to see the similarities in style and painterly technique between the two artists. Manet was, however, focused on paying attention in his own canvas to mastering texture and therefore he surrounded his buttery bread with items to stimulate all the senses – soft peaches, frosted plums, a precious box, a knife glinting in the light – and topped the brioche, following the French fashion, with a sweet-smelling white flower.

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<sup>338</sup> « Apportez une brioche, je veux vous en voir peindre une : la nature morte est la pierre de touche du peintre. » Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 143.

<sup>339</sup> « J’ai encore chez moi la petite toile que je barbouillai sous ses yeux et dont il parut content – « Cet animal-là, dit-il, il vous fait une brioche comme père et mère. » ! » Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 143.

When Manet died on 30 April 1883, Blanche was inconsolable, “I loved him, he understood me better than anyone.”<sup>340</sup> He was incredibly grateful for everything Manet had taught him, affirming, “Manet revealed to me what painting really was.”<sup>341</sup> As well as introducing Blanche to the complexities of oil painting through the challenge of depicting a simple brioche, Manet also taught him to appreciate pastel as an effective medium for portraiture, especially as a means to convey femininity, Parisian society and modern life.<sup>342</sup>

Blanche looked to Auguste Renoir as another choice of art teacher. In comparison to the elderly Manet, Renoir was young. Commercially successful and critically esteemed, Renoir exhibited regularly at Durand-Ruel and had six of his paintings selected for the first Impressionist exhibition of 1874.<sup>343</sup> He was a founding member of the Impressionist movement, though he ceased to exhibit with the group after 1877. Blanche met Renoir as early as 1879 at Wargemont, near Dieppe, where he was working on a commission for his patron Paul Bérard. Blanche was charmed by him, writing,

His face was already lined and wrinkled with a sparse and ragged beard, brilliant small teary eyes under bushy fierce eyebrows that didn't manage to make him look any less gentle. He spoke like a working-class labourer with a rasping guttural Parisian accent.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> « Je l'aimais, il m'a mieux compris que qui ce soit. » Blanche, J.-É., *La Peche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 125.

<sup>341</sup> « Manet m'avait révélé la peinture. » Blanche, J.-É., 1949, p. 125.

<sup>342</sup> Taken as a group, Manet's pastel portraits show the various types of femininity, but they also resonate with the broader consumer culture, the rise of industrialism, and the difficult consequences derived from the marketplace.

<sup>343</sup> Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922), a well known French art dealer associated with the Impressionists and one of the first modern art dealers who provided support to painters with stipends and solo exhibitions. During the final three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paul Durand-Ruel became the best-known art dealer and most important commercial advocate of French Impressionism in the world. Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley are among the important Impressionist artists Durand-Ruel helped to establish. Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, C., *Paul Durand-Ruel: Discovering Impressionists*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2015.

<sup>344</sup> « Le visage de Renoir était déjà ravagé, creux, plissé, les poils de sa barbe clairsemés, et deux petits yeux clignotants brillaient, humides, sont des sourcils que cette broussaille ne parvenait pas à rendre

Famed within the history of art for his sensual nudes and charming scenes of bourgeois leisure, Renoir was a far more complex and thoughtful painter than generally assumed. Interestingly, portraiture sustained him financially, after he attracted the attention of a range of patrons and other artists with avant-garde sensibilities in the 1880s. He encouraged Blanche to “capture the secrets of the soul” when painting his own portraits.<sup>345</sup> As art critic and early essayist of the Impressionists Albert Aurier wrote of Renoir,

With such ideas, with such a vision of the world and of femininity, one might've feared that Renoir would create a work which was merely pretty and merely superficial. Superficial it was not; in fact it was profound, for if, indeed, the artist has almost completely done away with the intellectuality of his models in his paintings, he has, in comprehension, been prodigal with his own. As to the pretty, it is undeniable in his work, but how different from the intolerable prettiness of fashionable painters.<sup>346</sup>

Despite Renoir's success, and his sincere encouragement of Blanche in his artistic vocation, Madame Blanche was not impressed with her son's choice of tutor. She had been persuaded by Blanche to commission decorative panels from Renoir in the style of Fragonard on the Wagnerian theme of Tannhäuser and Venus for her new dining room in her villa in Dieppe. Madame Blanche had invited Renoir to dinner at Bas Fort Blanc, but had found him “scruffy, witless, uncouth, bad-mannered and just plain vulgar.”<sup>347</sup>

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moins doux et moins bons. Son parler était d'un ouvrier parisien qui grasseye et traîne. » Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 237.

<sup>345</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 22.

<sup>346</sup> Albert Aurier, 'Review of 1892' cited in Volland, A., *Renoir, An Intimate Record*, Knopf, 1925, p. 24.

<sup>347</sup> « [...] débraillé, sans esprit, barbouilleur, mal élevé, voire carrément vulgaire. » Archival letter from Mme Blanche, 21 July 1881, ms 7036, Fonds Blanche, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris.

Unable to see beyond his lack of social graces she wrote in a letter to her husband dated 21 July 1881,

Jacques can only lose out by taking lessons with him. He is so crazy in his painting, in his conversation, without any education, no doubt very good, but hating anything healthy in life.<sup>348</sup>

Blanche turned instead to Edgar Degas, whom he had known since childhood, for guidance. Degas did not take on students but he did exchange a number of letters with Blanche in which he offered sketches, drawings and advice (Figure 4.6), and he would often meet with Blanche and Ernest Rouart (1874-1942) at the Louvre.<sup>349</sup> Blanche also received advice and guidance from other painters he met in the Grand Hall, such as Ernest Hébert (1817-1908) and Carolus-Duran (1837-1917), who came to “watch over the youth.”<sup>350</sup> Despite never being formally trained by Degas, Blanche developed a strong relationship with the artist and wrote of him fondly, saying, “I owe Degas a lot for scrupulously encouraging me to draw after the Masters.”<sup>351</sup>

Degas had a lively, scientific interest in a wide range of media, and his paintings, pastels, drawings, engraving, monotype, and even his photographs reveal ingenious pictorial strategies and technical innovations. However, it is his mastery and innovation

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<sup>348</sup> « Jacques ne peut que perdre avec lui, il est tellement fou dans sa peinture, dans sa conversation, sans instruction aucune, très bon mais méprisant tout ce qui est sain. » Archival letter from Mme Blanche, 21 July 1881, ms 7036, Fonds Blanche, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris.

<sup>349</sup> Ernest Rouart; Painter, water-colourist, pastellist, engraver and French collector. He married Julie Manet (the only child of Berthe Morisot and Édouard Manet) in May 1900. The wedding took place in Passy and was a double ceremony in which Julie's cousin (who was also a close family friend of Blanche's school teacher, Stéphane Mallarmé), Jeannie Gobillard married the French poet, essayist and philosopher Paul Valéry (1871-1945).

<sup>350</sup> Rosenblum, R., *Paintings in the Musée d'Orsay*, New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989, p. 126. Duran was an artist of great interest for Blanche as he was best known as a portrait painter and also head of one of the principal ateliers in Paris. He was also a teacher to some of the most brilliant artists of which included John Singer Sargent, Theodore Robinson and Mariquita Jenny Moberly. Carolus-Duran also participated in the creation of the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts in 1890 and became a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1904.

<sup>351</sup> « Je dois beaucoup à Degas d'avoir dessiné scrupuleusement d'après les maîtres. » Blanche, J.-É., *La Peche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 136.

in using pastels that is of interest when considering the influence he had on Blanche's early artistic development. Denis Rouart and others have described the remarkable number of ways in which Degas worked in pastel, a traditionally minor medium that he endowed with the versatility and power of a major one at a time when few other artists – Manet excepted – were using it.<sup>352</sup> On their first visit to Degas's studio in 1874, the Goncourts wrote in their journal that Degas was

The one who has best been able, in representing modern life, to catch the spirit of that life. Now will he ever achieve something complete? I doubt it. He is too restless a spirit.<sup>353</sup>

But not two years later, in 1874, the critic Duranty attributed most of the important ideas in Realist and Impressionist tendencies to the underlying intellectual power and originality of Degas, “a man of the rarest talent and the rarest intellect.”<sup>354</sup> Blanche, who wanted to become technically accomplished and to achieve a deep, psychological penetration of his subject, admired Degas's power and ingenuity in creating such psychologically compelling, modern compositions.<sup>355</sup> An early pastel of a nude woman of 1882, documents Blanche's absorption of images by Degas (Figure 4.7). The woman's nude body turned to face the bed becomes an intimate study. At the same time, Blanche poses the woman against a geometrically segmented background, which further reinforces the artist's familiarity with the aesthetic concepts of composing a portrait, as

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<sup>352</sup> Degas began working seriously with pastels in the early 1870s, before Manet's series of pastel portraits. Rouart, D., *Degas à la recherche de sa technique*, Paris, 1945 pp. 16-34. See also Cooper, D., *Pastels by Edgar Degas*, New York, 1953, pp. 12-13; Dunstan, B., 'The Pastel Techniques of Edgar Degas', *American Artist*, 36, no. 362, September, 1972, pp. 41-47; Callen, A., *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

<sup>353</sup> Dyer, G., 'February 13 1874', *Pages from The Goncourt Journal*, New York: NYRB, 2007, pp. 164-165.

<sup>354</sup> Duranty, L.E., (ed.) *La Nouvelle Peinture*, Paris: M. Guérin, 1946 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1876], p. 43, translated in Reff, T., *Degas: The Artist's Mind*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976, p. 305.

<sup>355</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 239.

found in the work of Degas (Figure 4.8). These devices – where Blanche recomposed a portrait according to his own inclinations and the painters he appreciated – also help to place him within a group of younger artists who were simplifying their compositions so that attention would be redirected from the environment in which the model was situated to the figure itself. But the portrait of a young woman is significant for another reason: it demonstrates that Blanche was striking a balance between the reality of the model and the artist's desire to create a harmonious, semi-abstract composition with muted colours that partially rearranged reality. In fact, portraits of the 1880s reveal Blanche's attempt to modify what he saw according to his own making where surface effect – figures compressed against the frontal plane as in Manet's and Degas's portraits – was most important.

Degas, who was always parsimonious with his comments on Blanche's work, began to take him seriously when his passion to succeed as an artist became clear, and by 1885 it was obvious they had each become prominent figures in one another's social and artistic networks. It was also by 1885 that most of Degas's important works were done in pastel, including his *Six Friends at Dieppe* (1885).<sup>356</sup> Completed in Blanche's studio in Dieppe, this large group portrait shows six friends; from front to back they are Albert Boulanger-Cavé (1830-1910), Henri Gervex and Blanche, the writers Daniel Halévy (1872-1962) and his father Ludovic (1834-1908), and the English painter Walter Sickert (1860-1942) (Figure 4.9). The drawing evokes the performance of a tableau, for which Degas handpicked the cast from the holidaying families and their guests.

Adopting a narrow, elevated viewpoint, Degas drastically foreshortened the composition

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<sup>356</sup> Before 1880, he generally used oils for his completed works, which were based on preliminary studies and sketches made in pencil or pastel. But after 1875, he began using pastels more frequently, even in finished works, such as *Portraits at the Stock Exchange* (1876).

and placed the figures against a muted background, which allows them to be perceived all at once from several angles. Yet this design does not conceal his sympathetic understanding of their diverse personalities and it was this understanding of personality that was important for Blanche's artistic training.<sup>357</sup> The complimentary blue and orange colour scheme and dense pastel marks create a lively surface and light suggestive of the late summer sun. Degas presented the pastel portrait as a gift to Madame Blanche upon leaving Dieppe.<sup>358</sup> Jacques-Émile Blanche recalled,

He [Degas] was in the most complete intimacy with us. He was like a respected, cherished uncle for my wife, her sisters, the protective deity of our home.<sup>359</sup>

As a frequent visitor and guest to the Blanche family homes in Paris and Dieppe, Degas was also photographed regularly with Blanche inside his studio and also on the steps of his house with Madame Blanche, Gervex, the Halévys and others (Figure 4.10). However, their close relationship was brought to an end when the two men fell out over a portrait Blanche painted of Degas in 1902. Blanche painted and presented it to Degas as a gift, but on accepting the portrait Degas explicitly banned any reproductions of the picture to be made.<sup>360</sup> However, Blanche's portrait was printed in error without Degas' knowledge and illustrated on a full page in a review featured in the influential journal *International Studio* (Figure 4.11). Despite the mistake, and despite being printed alongside a number of Blanche's other portraits, Degas was furious at the reproduction of

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<sup>357</sup> Reff, T., *Degas: The Artist's Mind*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976, p. 196.

<sup>358</sup> O'Brien, M.C., Roberts, M., Robins, A.E., et al., (eds.) *Edgar Degas: Six Friends at Dieppe*, Museum of Art: Rhode Island School of Design, 2005.

<sup>359</sup> Interview quoted in Barazzetti, S., "Jacques-Emile Blanche, portraitiste de Degas," *Beaux-Arts*, no. 220, March 19, 1937, p. 3, translated in Reff, T., 1976, p. 326.

<sup>360</sup> Degas did allow Blanche to have the portrait photographed by the photographer Crevaux for his private portfolio. For more information see interview quoted in Barazzetti, S., "Jacques-Emile Blanche, portraitiste de Degas," *Beaux-Arts*, no. 220, March 19, 1937, p. 3, translated in Reff, T., 1976, p. 326-327.

his portrait and blamed Blanche for the error. He broke off all contact with Blanche and returned the painting to him. When the original portrait of Degas was destroyed in the Glaspalast fire in Munich on 6 July 1931, Blanche painted a second version of the portrait around 1932.

As Blanche met and interacted with artists in his Parisian network, it became clear he was developing his own style of painting. He found himself moving away from the strictly academic style Gervex had introduced him to and began experimenting with more progressive techniques and materials, identified with the work of Manet, Renoir and Degas. Portraiture was practiced by all three of these avant-garde artists, who each formulated diverse approaches to the problem of how to represent the individual character or psychology of the sitter. It is possible to see the huge influence these three artists had on his work (despite formally continuing his training with Henri Gervex), and Blanche began to advance as a portraitist rapidly from 1880 onwards. He claimed,

To extract the secrets of the soul, whatever they may be, while observing and listening to the model, is it not the intoxication felt by the psychologist, the moralist and of course the painter of portraits?<sup>361</sup>

### **Becoming a Portrait Painter**

Taking everything he had learnt from Manet and Degas, Blanche began working with pastels in 1880, a medium he quickly mastered and which he used regularly until 1900. He became intent on studying the psychological character of his sitter. Lucien Corpechot observed Blanche's approach to portraiture in his preface to the artist's posthumously published memoirs,

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<sup>361</sup> « Arracher le secret d'une âme, quelle qu'elle soit, en observant, en écoutant le modèle, n'est-ce pas l'enivrement du psychologue, du moraliste comme du peintre de portraits ? » *Jacques-Émile Blanche 1861-1942*, Exhib. Cat., (eds) Daniel Halévy, Lucien Corpechot et Félicien Cacan, Paris : Musée de l'Orangerie, 1943, pp. 11-12.



He did his best to see through the smoke screens of conceit or the modesty behind which his sitters would hide. At this game, Blanche was a master [...]. He used to say: I wouldn't give a stranger posing in front of me twenty minutes before he is at least half unveiled. A great danger for a model, I agree, but all to my advantage.<sup>362</sup>

Financially supported by his wealthy parents, Blanche was also freed from commercial dictates and the demands of patronage, meaning that as a portrait painter he could do what very few painters could allow themselves to do: he could choose his own models and paint them as he preferred. Commissions were not important; rather, “if he found a face interesting, he would stop at nothing to paint that face, he would request the honour of painting that face.”<sup>363</sup> He painted not only middle to upper class Parisian intellectuals, who often did pay for their portraits, but also his parents, their friends, as well as artists and personalities whom he simply had an affinity with and a desire to represent.

His parents' wealth allowed Blanche to have his own studios in all three of their homes in Passy, Auteuil and Dieppe and this widened his scope for painting portraits considerably. His first studio in Passy was a dedicated room within the clinic itself. It was a vast space with large sash windows, furnished with Oriental porcelain and lacquered furniture, Persian carpets, eighteenth-century furniture, and paintings his father had collected over the years.<sup>364</sup> The painting by Blanche of his *atelier* of around 1895 shows just a small detail of this studio (Figure 4.12). An upholstered chair in yellow striped velvet sits next to an armchair covered in a floral fabric, behind which many Chinese

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<sup>362</sup> Lucien Corpechot in Blanche, J.-É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 127.

<sup>363</sup> *J.E. Blanche 1861-1942*, Exhib, Cat., 1943, p. 7. When Blanche didn't have any 'subjects' to paint, he could call upon Lucie Ensault, his Auteuil locksmith's daughter, or on 'Pouponne' (Baby face), Zelinska, whom he painted at every age, dressing them up in all sorts of disguises, which he kept in his studio. His favourite model, Désirée Manfred, was an enigmatic little girl and later a mysterious young woman who had a miserable and lonely existence “as if encased in asbestos armour”, whom Blanche painted no fewer than fifty times. See Roberts, J., *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, 2012, p. 66.

<sup>364</sup> Unpublished information from Turkish Embassy archive, p. 25.

vases are balanced. On the walls, hung so close as to be touching each other, part of the family's collection of paintings can be seen. One of his father's favourite acquisitions *La Répétition* by Degas, which the doctor bought in 1888, hangs above the chintz-upholstered chair.<sup>365</sup> Madame Blanche later decided she wanted to have Blanche's studio extended to the garden, though it was not possible due to the layout of the grounds. When their new house at Auteuil was completed, she applied to the architectural practice Howard & Sons, who were accustomed to working with brick, to build his new studio and furnish the interior (Figure 4.13). The spacious room was very similar to that of his studio in Passy with Blanche requesting the same windows he had in the clinic for the workshop at Auteuil (Figure 4.14).<sup>366</sup>

In 1878 Madame Blanche persuaded her husband to build a family cottage in Dieppe, a seaside town the Blanche family had been visiting for two generations that had become a rather fashionable place with the upper classes for its curative sea waters – it therefore attracted Dr Blanche for business as well as pleasure.<sup>367</sup> As his patient Jules Janin claimed, “A well brought-up person is familiar to Dieppe as with the Chaussée

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<sup>365</sup> To the left of *La Répétition* is believed Delacroix's study for *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1834) and indicates the doctor bought from his close friends the Duponchels. The Delacroix is significant, as the painting is known to have served as a source of inspiration for the Impressionists (and later by Picasso who completed a series of 15 paintings and numerous drawings in 1954). It is even more significant that the artists and writers who were visiting the Blanche clinic would have had unlimited access to viewing a drawing of this work, notable for its sexual connotations and orientalism.

<sup>366</sup> Blanche archive letter to Madame Blanche from Jacques-Émile Blanche, ms. 7035, Fonds Blanche, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris. Blanche declared “the sash windows of this building [at Auteuil] were a novelty for Paris. Soon the style miscalled ‘English’ became a craze amongst fashionable Protestant society.”

<sup>367</sup> As early as 1578, Dieppe became known for its curative qualities when the doctors of King Henry III of France prescribed sea baths to treat skin diseases. The first Maison de Santé Thermale Marine (Seawater Bathing Spa) opened in 1778 in Dieppe and society ladies would come to Dieppe to bathe. See Braun, J., *On the curative effect of baths and waters; being a handbook to the Spas of Europe*, London: Smith and Elder, 1875.

d'Antin.”<sup>368</sup> The Blanche family usually lodged with family or friends when visiting Dieppe, but when Madame Blanche found the perfect location for their new home, a very enthusiastic Jacques wrote to his father,

As for the view, it is extremely panoramic and exceptionally beautiful. And for my part, that is really what I'm after. If you don't want to build a house, we could at least build a really nice studio and wait for neighbours to come and settle around us. It's quite obvious that I will be a painter. Nothing could be more useful than this studio.<sup>369</sup>

In 1879 Dr Blanche instructed building to begin on a villa called Bas Fort Blanc in the Norman style particular to Dieppe of the seventeenth-century. The doctor also managed to persuade their lifelong friends, the Halévys (who believed their family was cursed with mental illness and were long-standing patients of Dr Blanche), to take Les Rochers, the villa next door to Bas Fort Blanc.<sup>370</sup> Blanche was allocated a room in the villa as his studio, though he soon realised it “did not have sufficient light.”<sup>371</sup> Dr Blanche decided rather than move his son around the new house to search for the best light, he would commission a Swiss engineer who had exhibited at the Champs de Mars to design and build a special studio built of wood and iron for his son to paint in.<sup>372</sup> The new studio overlooked the sea in the garden of the family's villa and Blanche always spent his

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<sup>368</sup> Letter of Jules Janin to unknown, 20 March 1870, ms 7666, Fonds Blanche, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris. For Honoré de Balzac “The heart of Paris today beats between rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin and rue du Faubourg Montmartre.” Chaussée-d'Antin is located to the north west of the heart of Paris, just beside Passy, today the IXe arrondissement of Paris. Located on the higher ground, it was thought to provide healthier air and a series of glamorous *hôtels particuliers* were erected along the Chaussée-d'Antin which attracted the upper classes in the eighteenth century. However, over the course of the nineteenth century, commercial establishments changed the character of the street and shops opened in the ground floors of the old residences.

<sup>369</sup> Letter to Doctor Blanche from Jacques-Émile Blanche, c. 1878, Fonds Blanche ms. 7035, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris.

<sup>370</sup> Carter, W.C., *Proust in Love*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>371</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 31.

<sup>372</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Les Cahiers verts*, LXVIII, 1926.

holidays there. He particularly enjoyed the occasions when his father came to visit with his friends and contacts, as Blanche describes,

If and when my father could at last get away from Paris and take a couple of days holiday, as soon as his top hat and frock coat were spotted, we were awash with visitors [...] Alexandre Dumas in his reefer jacket, Porto-Riche, [...] Antoine Vollon, Paul Bérard, Charles Ephrussi, Edouard de Beaumont, Gabriel Fauré, sometimes Claude Monet.<sup>373</sup>

Blanche's new seaside studio soon became as full of notable guests in the summer months as his Parisian ones were during the rest of the year. In 1885, Dr Blanche and his wife diplomatically invited their son's teacher, Henri Gervex, along with Paul César Helleu (1859-1927) and Rafael de Ochoa (1858-1935), who stayed with the family for a fortnight. Daniel Halévy recalled with nostalgia the summer of 1885,

There was indeed a summer about which we would not speak without getting emotional. All our families were in Dieppe, John Lemoine, Halévy and Blanche without exception. The Sickerts were there, Whistler, Degas and Cavé stayed for a fortnight. Helleu came for a fortnight and stayed with the Blanches. I still jump for joy when I remember it.<sup>374</sup>

Blanche's studios quickly gained a reputation on both sides of the Channel as the place where many artists, painters, writers and other distinguished guests of the day would meet, offer advice to one another, socialise, paint or sit for one of Blanche's portraits.

### **Early Portraits**

Blanche's early portraits provide valuable insights into his working methods and demonstrate his rapid development and accomplishment as an artist. For his first portrait Blanche chose to paint his mother in 1880 (Figure 4.15). It is documented through their

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<sup>373</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 134.

<sup>374</sup> Daniel Halévy and Jean-Pierre Halévy, *Degas parle*, Paris : Éditions de Fallois, 1995, p. 83.

vast correspondence to each other that they had an incredibly close relationship; Blanche did nothing without consulting her first, so it is obvious she would be his first sitter.<sup>375</sup> This early portrait depicts his mother at sixty years of age, dressed all in black, with only the fleck of a white collar and sleeves from her shirt appearing from beneath her shapeless clothing. With her hair parted in the middle and pulled back tightly to expose her face in full, the natural sunlight shines onto the left hand side of her face while casting a dark shadow onto her right side. Using the natural light source from the left, it appears Blanche has separated his mother's face into two halves; the left showing the lighter, paler skin, with a hint of rose blush in her cheek, the right side appearing in shadow, almost blue and purple in colour. Dark circles accentuate the lines around her right eye, and continue down her face to the cheek and chin. She is seated against the background of a delicate yellow floral sheet, possibly pinned up temporarily by the artist to create a somewhat different background to their *maison de santé* quarters. Leaning slightly out of her seat, Madame Blanche folds her arms across her black leather bag positioned in her lap, and a gold wedding ring is shown on her left hand. With her straight face, pursed lips and dark eyes her expression is blank, and her vacant stare suggest her thoughts are elsewhere.

Despite training with Gervex, it is clear to see how this early, inexperienced portrait is stylistically indebted to Manet. The intense black of his mother's dress and hat, set off by the pale yellow of the curtain background, gives the portrait an abrupt

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<sup>375</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919. Three days before his mother's death he married Rose Lemoine, who took over his mother's role. This union was not, however, to his mother's taste. She predicted there would be problems ahead which she pointed out to Jacques: "As soon as you marry, I shall not linger. I am too old and you know how much I like to be mistress of my home ... Rose whom I adore still has her mother and her sisters: you will be marrying four women. Rose lived with Blanche for forty-four years, but often turned a blind eye to Blanche's friendships with men, as he admitted: "You will always forgive everything because you take me as I am." Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 1937, p. 55.

expressiveness that is reminiscent of Manet's portrait of *Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets* (1872) (Figure 4.16). Madame Blanche and Berthe Morisot have the same dark, intense eyes staring out of the canvas, are dressed all in black with hints of white from beneath their collars and both are wearing black hats. In a move away from his usual technique of using perpendicular, uniform lighting in his portraits, Manet chose to light his model vividly from the side on this occasion. Morisot's face is all light and shadow – a method Blanche adopted when lighting his own mother's face.<sup>376</sup> Blanche also uses the black outline of his mother's clothing to outline his mother's profile, flattening her against the canvas. This is perhaps due to Blanche's inexperience as a young artist, but his canvas is carefully painted and he pays close attention to the detail. Manet's portrait of Morisot was widely considered by his friends to be one of his masterpieces and was bought by the art critic Théodore Duret, who was also an acquaintance of the Blanche family. Blanche had high hopes for his portrait, writing, "It is always said that the image of his mother gives an artist a special opportunity to excel," yet it was not to be – the Salon rejected it in 1881.<sup>377</sup>

Edmond Maître was the next sitter to be painted by Blanche in 1881, when he was just nineteen years old (Figure 4.17). The little portrait in oil was painted meticulously and was likely meant as a gift to Maître. Described as "a sallow-cheeked Bordelais with delicate features," Blanche depicts a sickly, emaciated Maître.<sup>378</sup> Seated against a plain mustard background, Maître is shown with a full beard and a shaved

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<sup>376</sup> Foucault, M., *Manet and the Object of Painting*, trans. Matthew Barr, London: Tate Publishing, 2011, p. 58.

<sup>377</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 1937, p. 74. Blanche presented his painting to Antoine Souchart, one of his parent's former servants, but after his death, his children sold everything they had inherited to a junk shop. His friend Robert de Rothschild came across the painting by chance in 1920 in an antique dealer's in Vichy, and returned it to the painter. Author meeting with Jane Roberts, 2013, Paris, France.

<sup>378</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 112.

head. His gaunt face is almost yellow in colour and the dark skin underneath his eyes accentuates his wide, expressionless stare. Wearing an orange scarf tied at the neck, a fleck of a white collar appears from underneath a heavy black coat. In comparison to Blanche's portrait of his mother, it is possible to see him experimenting here with a looser approach to painting, using broader brushstrokes and dashes of paint, while allowing the panel to still be seen through Maître's dark coat. Blanche gives Maître a bohemian look, in contrast to other depictions of him painted in his customary three-piece suit, representative of the class he belonged to.<sup>379</sup>

Blanche's technical experimentation in painting is evident in a further two portraits of his mother, both painted in 1890. One is a sombre, contemplative, three-quarter-length view depicting Madame Blanche seated, holding her dog, with her knitting lying abandoned in her lap (Figure 4.18), and the other is a more vibrantly coloured, *plein-air* portrait depicting her seated pensively in the garden at the *maison Blanche* in Passy (Figure 4.19). In the first of these two portraits Blanche has represented his mother in her ordered domestic sphere in all its prosaic detail, creating a dense, tapestry-like effect. The frontal position and close-up format directly engage the viewer. Madame Blanche's intelligent, slightly world-weary gaze and weathered face are the focal point of this matter-of-fact, yet sympathetic, portrait. The critic Camille Mauclair praised the delicate greys and subtle study of its diffused light.<sup>380</sup> In the second Blanche is much more confident in his application of looser, impressionistic brushwork, in turn creating a much more lively painted surface. Paradoxically, although there is less

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<sup>379</sup> Jean Frédéric Bazille, *Portrait of Edmond Maître*, 1869; Henri Fantin-Latour, *Un atelier aux Batignolles*, Oil on Canvas, Musée d'Orsay, 1870; Pierre Auguste Renoir, *Portrait of Edmond Maître*, Oil on Canvas, Private Collection, 1871; Henri Fantin-Latour, *Autour du Piano*, Oil on Canvas, Musée d'Orsay, 1885.

<sup>380</sup> See Camille Mauclair, 'Jacques-Emile Blanche,' *L'Art décoratif*, no. 48, September, 1902.

specific physiognomic detail, this third portrait of his mother provides a more complex, psychologically evocative image that suggests melancholy and isolation. The light-coloured, reflective bonnet and parasol contrast with Madame Blanche's black cape, while the green lawn and flowers provide a decorative foil for the sitter.

In total Blanche's mother posed for him on four separate occasions, and the last time was in June 1895, a few weeks before her death. Seated in an oversized wicker chair, knitting in the garden at their new house in Auteuil, Blanche describes how his mother was, "emaciated, her mouth crooked, knitting in a wickerwork garden seat with her pug Trixy at her feet" (Figure 4.20).<sup>381</sup> In this final portrait, Blanche skilfully balanced realist observation with psychological content and decorative effect. The flattened space and sharply delineated forms are stylistically reminiscent of portraits by Blanche's teachers and mentors, Manet, Degas and Renoir, and yet also suggest a familiarity with the Japanese prints so admired by these artists.<sup>382</sup> This final portrait was accepted and exhibited at the 1891 Champ-de-Mars Salon. The art historian Heather McPherson writes that this evocative and technically accomplished portrait is emblematic of Blanche's lifelong effort to "update portraiture stylistically without undercutting its iconic and commemorative functions."<sup>383</sup> Therefore, even though Blanche respected the traditions of portraiture as a genre, it did not mean he was traditionalist. Rather, Blanche's painting from the 1880s and early 1890s manifested his realist proclivities, his preoccupation with the relationship between sitter and milieu, and

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<sup>381</sup> « Emaciée, la bouche de travers, elle tricote au fond d'un siège-guêrite d'osier, son carlin Trixy à ses pieds. » J.-É., *La Pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris : Flammarion, 1949, p. 244.

<sup>382</sup> See Weisberg, G. "J.É. Blanche and the Stylish Portrait, 1880-1905" *Arts Magazine*, LIX/10, Summer 1985, pp. 97-101; and Sutton, D., "Jacques Emile Blanche: Painter, Critic and Memorialist" *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January-February 1988 pp. 159-172;

<sup>383</sup> McPherson, H. "Jacques-Émile Blanche: The *Écriture* of a Portraitist" in *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 151.



his indebtedness to the Impressionist school, as well as the work of Manet and Degas. Fellow artists and Blanche's models also attested to his virtuosity and the rapidity and sureness of his execution. Maurice Denis commended him as the only contemporary painter able to bring off a lifelike *esquisse* in a single sitting and to retain the spirit of the sketch in the finished portrait.<sup>384</sup>

### **Salons and Salon Culture: Establishment as a Portraitist**

With a keen sense that the key to his success as a portrait painter would be his access to members from high society circles in France, as well as England, Blanche worked hard to establish himself within Parisian salons as a serious portrait painter rather than simply “the son of the famous nerve doctor” and to widen his already considerable social circle.<sup>385</sup> He met some of his most important neurasthenic sitters, friends, contacts and acquaintances through his father's clinic who were also members of the Parisian salon network, namely Robert Montesquiou, Marcel Proust and the Comtesse de Castiglione. The French writer Maurice Sachs, who closely observed Parisian intellectual life, wrote of Blanche, “he was the only portrait painter of the time who chose proper models.”<sup>386</sup>

Such assiduous efforts were rewarded and Blanche received numerous introductions and invitations to the most exclusive salons of Paris, including those of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the Plaine Monceau, as well as the Opera, stage performances and exhibitions in Paris, London, Bayreuth and Salzburg. The “goings

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<sup>384</sup> Denis cited in Jacques Wilhelm, “Cinq portraits par Jacques-Émile Blanche” *Bulletin du Musée Carnavalet*, 2, November 1951, p. 3.

<sup>385</sup> Bergé, P., ‘Préface’, *Du côté de chez Jacques-Émile Blanche*, Paris: Fondation Pierre-Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent/Skira Flammarion, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>386</sup> Maurice Sachs, *Au temps du boeuf sur le toit*, Paris, *La Nouvelle Revue Critique*, 1939, republished Paris : Grasset, *Les Cahiers Rouge*, 1987, p. 180.

on of society women” at these salons were recalled by the older “writer of nerves”, Edmond de Goncourt, who knew Blanche and his father.<sup>387</sup> Goncourt recollects an incident at a salon with the Princesse Mathilde in his *Journal* of Wednesday 17 April 1889,

The Society women of today really are rather astonishing. They behave just like madwomen from La Salpêtrière turned loose by Charcot. The ill-bred eccentricities of these lunatics are beyond belief: this evening for instance, after we had dined on a bouillabaisse which the Princess had had sent from Marseilles, the Lippmann woman went round with all manner of mad, childish gestures which were not without charm, breathing the garlic bouillabaisse into the faces of people she knew.<sup>388</sup>

Such idiosyncrasies of salon culture were familiar to Blanche and despite only being in his twenties he was not intimidated by these grand, and often eccentric, occasions. Rather, he was noted by Marcel Proust to be equipped with “the old fashioned education of a true gentleman; elegant and presentable, witty and cultivated.”<sup>389</sup> Blanche routinely attended a number of salons; one of the most popular salons was that of Madame Straus. The daughter of the composer Fromental Halévy (whose wife and brother were both patients of Dr Blanche), this society hostess had first been married to the famous composer Georges Bizet, and then after his death married Emile Straus, the Rothschild’s lawyer. Madame Straus’s salons took place on Saturdays on the mezzanine of 134 Boulevard Haussmann, at the corner of the avenue de Messine. The Straus drawing room in Paris, decorated with paintings by Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766), Georges de La Tour (1593-1652) and Claude Monet (1840-1926), attracted an elegant society of artists, politicians and nobility that captivated Blanche and his friend Proust, both of whom were

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<sup>387</sup> Baldick, R., *Pages from the Goncourt Journal*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984, pp. 345-346.

<sup>388</sup> Baldick, R., *Pages from the Goncourt Journal*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984, pp. 345-346.

<sup>389</sup> Marcel Proust ‘Preface’ in Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, pp. ii-iii

schoolmates of Geneviève's son, Jacques Bizet. In combining her patronage of the arts, a vast circle of friends, nobility and a great fortune, Madame Straus occupied a high position in Parisian society. The Goncourt brothers described the scene,

She wears a light-coloured silk dressing gown, she lolls lazily in a deep armchair, her eyes of black velvet darting feverishly around, striking the coquettish poses of an invalid, with Vivette, her miniature black poodle on her lap. [...] And the charming deco is wholly suited to the woman.  
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Madame Straus was known among her circle to suffer with nervous illness. Following a period of two months of illness, Proust wrote of Madame Straus in a letter to her husband, "I think with Madame Straus the only troubles there are nervous and functional ones."<sup>391</sup> She was, therefore, a woman Blanche certainly found interesting, but despite this there is no formally identified portrait of Madame Straus by Blanche to date. Her refined elegance and melancholic air were, however, immortalised on canvas by Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), Giovanni Boldini (1842-1931), Auguste Toulemouche (1829-1890) and Jules-Élie Delaunay (1828-1891).

Blanche would also make time to attend the Salon of Madame Bonnières (1854-1906), wife of the writer and *Le Figaro* critic Robert de Bonnières (1850-1906), who was painted by Jean-Louis Forain (1852-1931), James Tissot (1836-1902) and Paul-César Helleu (1859-1927), and lived on the avenue de Villars, in Vincent d'Indy's house. Madame de Bonnières relished the company of artists and was painted by a number of artists, including Besnard, Tissot, Helleu, Forain and Renoir. He recalled,

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<sup>390</sup> Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, '28 March 1887', *Journal, Mémoires de la vie littéraire III, 1887-1896*, Robert Laffont, Paris 1989, p. 25. Jean-Marc Nattier (1685–1766), French painter, was born in Paris, the second son of Marc Nattier (1642–1705), a portrait painter, and of Marie Courtois (1655–1703), a miniaturist. He is noted for his portraits of the ladies of King Louis XV's court in classical mythological attire.

<sup>391</sup> Marcel Proust, 'Friday 29 October 1915', *Correspondance Générale, Correspondance avec Madame Straus*, translation by Chris Taylor, Paris: Plon, 1936, p. 15.

I had seen my first Rodin marbles at her house. The voracious Henriette, always forewarned of new trends and an ardent huntress of celebrities, would ferret out for her husband all the personalities who could be of use.<sup>392</sup>

In his pastel portrait dated 1887, Blanche depicts Henriette de Bonnières seated against a light brown background, while her right arm nestles into a large white feature boa (Figure 4.21). Dressed in a long black dress with full-length sleeves and black gloves, her exceptionally thin waist is highlighted by the simple white ribbon which encircles it. A black feather hair ornament is shown sticking out from the top of her chignon, while her pale face is highlighted with touches of makeup and bold red lips. Blanche specifically recalled her *maquillage* in his memoirs,

Her desire to please was painted onto a face devoid of beauty, but artfully made up with cold cream, powdered in pink, with a touch of rouge added to the high cheekbones.<sup>393</sup>

Art historian Tamar Garb explores *maquillage* in nineteenth-century female portraiture, claiming, “the efforts of make-up and the work of painting came together in the manifestation of the feminine.”<sup>394</sup> Madame de Bonnières clearly wanted to project an image of desire, fashionability and wealth, but Blanche’s portrait and recollections bring into question whether she had any agency in the creation of her portrait. Blanche paints a Realist image with a personal objective and commitment of his own to reveal the ‘truth’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘soul of the sitter’ in his portraits.<sup>395</sup> Yet in doing this, Garb argues that

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<sup>392</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, pp.38.

<sup>393</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime 1870-1914*, London, 1937, p. 56.

<sup>394</sup> Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>395</sup> Realism, as an historical movement in the figurative arts and in literature, attained its most coherent and consistent formulation in France, with the echoes, parallels and variants elsewhere on the Continent in England and in the United States. Preceded by Romanticism and followed by what is now generally termed Symbolism, it was the dominant movement from about 1840 until 1870-80. Its aim was to give a

Blanche, and others like Manet, “mobilised the aesthetics of mimesis in the interests of veracity, but in so doing risked opening women to unseemly scrutiny at the same time as revealing their physical imperfections and moral vulnerability.”<sup>396</sup> If nineteenth-century female portraiture conventionally presented a smooth inviting body/paint surface to the desiring eye of the viewer, Realism’s commitment to observation and objectivity produced portraits that disrupted desire. This is illustrated in the poet Henri de Régnier’s response to Blanche’s image of Madame de Bonnières in 1894,

This singular portrait of Madame de B. by Blanche in which, because of the clinched waist of a black dress, the bright red lipstick and the hairdo, she looks something between a dragonfly and a clown.<sup>397</sup>

Another popular salon Blanche attended was that of comtesse Greffuhle (1860-1952), who was married to comte Greffuhle, a rather brutal and irascible character who was “constantly unfaithful to his beautiful and often unhappy wife.”<sup>398</sup> As a distraction from her unfaithful husband, the comtesse decided she would often entertain a few ‘regulars’ at her salon, including comte Costa de Beauregard, the Marquis de Lau, comte Louis de Turenne and comte Louis de Breuille; she especially enjoyed the company of her artist friends.<sup>399</sup> Blanche had a particularly privileged entrée into the comtesse

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truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life. Nochlin, L., *Realism*, London: Pelican Books, 1971, p. 13.

<sup>396</sup> Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 68.

<sup>397</sup> « Singulier portrait de Mme de B. par Blanche où cause de la taille serrée d’une robe noire et fard vif des lèvres et des cheveux, elle a un vague air à la fois de libellule et de clownesse. » Henri de Régnier, *Les Cahiers 1887-1936*, Paris : Pygmalion-Gérard Watelet, 2000, p. 369.

<sup>398</sup> Newton, J., ‘Whistler’s French Connections: Robert de Montesquiou and Countess Greffulhe’, *Laurels*, vol. 53, no. 1, 1982, p. 31. *Née* Elizabeth de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, was descended from both Belgian and French aristocracy, the daughter of Joseph de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay (1836-1892) and his wife, *née* Marie de Montesquiou-Fézensac.

<sup>399</sup> See Michel-Thiriet, P., *The Book of Proust*, London, 1989; Daniel, M.R., *Edgar Degas, Photographer*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.

Greffuhle's salon thanks to his friend Robert de Montesquiou, who was the comtesse's first cousin. Blanche wrote in an unpublished letter of the comtesse,

The comtesse Greffuhle certainly holds her own. All the worries and sorrow in her lamentable home don't stop this energetic madcap. The powerful attraction of her charms is perfectly understandable.<sup>400</sup>

A regular visitor to Dieppe, the comtesse Greffuhle would open her villa *La Case* up to her family and friends during her stay in the summer months. In September, however, she would leave it to her cousin Robert de Montesquiou and his aesthete friends, while her husband – who didn't care much for these “excessive” characters<sup>401</sup> – was away hunting. Blanche was very much a part of this social circle: Montesquiou, Barrès, and Proust would become central figures in his portfolio of portraits. Blanche painted the comtesse Greffuhle in Dieppe in 1889; however, the family have disowned the portrait believed to be of Madame Greffuhle by Blanche. The grandson of the comtesse has openly disagreed with Blanche art experts, claiming despite the significant physical similarities to Madame Greffuhle in this portrait by Blanche, the colour of her eyes were brown, not blue as shown in the work (Figure 4.22).<sup>402</sup> The identity of the women in this imposing, full-length portrait, now known as *Portrait de femme* (1889), is therefore unconfirmed. Depicted in profile, the woman stands straight in order to showcase her magnificent silk dress, decorated with a subtle floral print, and magnificent jewellery. The delicate colours of her cream dress and her pale skin, contrast against the dark, neutral background. Her downcast eyes and serious expression take the viewers attention

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<sup>400</sup> « La comtesse Greffuhle [...] se défend bien. Les soucis et les chagrins de son lamentable intérieur ne rident pas l'énergique écervelée. On comprend la puissance de son attrait. » Blanche unpublished letter, ms 7041 Bibliothèque Institut France, Paris.

<sup>401</sup> Munhall, Edgar, *Whistler and Montesquiou. The Butterfly and the Bat*. New York: Flammarion, 1995, p. 21.

<sup>402</sup> Author meeting with Jane Roberts, 2013, Paris, France.

away from the beautiful dress to create a melancholic mood in this impressive society portrait.

Of the handful of Blanche's portraits mentioned here, it is possible to see these society portraits of the 1880s reflect the social and cultural complexities of the Third Republic by deftly capturing modern life through the deportment of each individual, the elimination of traditional academic modelling, the consideration of the materiality of paint and the fashionable demonstration of personality. It was during the 1880s that a constellation of significant events began to change the art world Blanche was working in. They included, but are not limited to: the breakdown of stylistic hegemony and the collapse of the Salon system; a last ditch attempt at reforming arts administration; the development of alternative exhibition venues, such as the Salon des Indépendants (created in 1884); and the emergence of art dealers like Georges Petit and Durand-Ruel who organised exhibitions in their galleries and marketed individual artists. It was in these fast changing times that Blanche's ever-expanding network of artists, writers, musicians, patrons and salonnières would become crucial, enabling the continuation of his artistic education, the building of new friendships, and the establishment of his career.

### **Networks: Paris and Dieppe**

Blanche travelled widely, moving between England and France on a frequent basis. When back in Paris, he would book appointment after appointment with friends and other potential sitters he felt suitable for his portraits in his studios in Passy and Auteuil. He was just as busy in his Dieppe studio during the summer, especially when his English

friends Charles Conder, Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur Symons, Walter Sickert and George Moor, among other artists such as John Singer Sargent, chose to visit. Blanche also became friends with Paul-César Helleu, and they regularly saw each other in Paris, Dieppe and London. During this same period Blanche also saw a great deal of Giovanni Boldini, who was already a recognised artist in Paris as well as Italy. Following their time in Blanche's studio they would go to the Café des Tribunaux, the Café Suisse or the Casino café, where they would order pre-dinner drinks and talk painting and poetry.<sup>403</sup> It is clear from Blanche's summers at his family house in Dieppe – where he played host to so many of his artist friends – that he played a tremendously important role in popularising Dieppe as an artistic colony.

Portraiture was often a reciprocal business; while in Dieppe, some artists took the opportunity to paint Blanche. John Singer Sargent painted him in 1886 (Figure 4.23). Bringing Blanche to the front of the canvas, Sargent pictures him in a dark and swampy looking atmosphere of a primitive garden. Standing in front of a green tree trunk, Blanche wraps his left arm protectively across the front of his body while staring directly out of the canvas with sorrowful looking eyes. Sargent painted Blanche in exchange for a Louis XV armchair and inlaid desk rather than some of the latter's paintings, as was his custom with friends.<sup>404</sup> However, the moist, lugubrious atmosphere of Sargent's portrait of Blanche may attest to his dim view of the Frenchman. Their friendship ended following a trip to Dieppe in the late 1890s when Oscar Wilde, a close friend of Sargent's, was outing

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<sup>403</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p.102.

<sup>404</sup> Fairbrother, T., 'Possessions and Props: The Collection of John Singer Sargent,' *Antiques*, February, 2001, p. 318.



his friends as being homosexual and, in doing so, upset Blanche.<sup>405</sup> Blanche and Wilde informed Clive Bell that Sargent's sexual exploits "were notorious in Paris, and in Venice positively scandalous. He was a frenzied bugger."<sup>406</sup> To which Sargent responded, "I did not much care for Blanche, he was rather a slimy creature all round [...]. A jellyfish with a sting."<sup>407</sup>

In 1895 Aubrey Beardsley visited Blanche in Dieppe where Blanche took the opportunity to paint his portrait (Figure 4.24). Already very ill and a suffering neurasthenic, Blanche painted Beardsley just three years before his death of consumption aged twenty-four. He was staying in a hotel in Dieppe with his mother, who acted as his full-time nurse. In a half-length portrait Blanche depicts Beardsley seated slightly to the left wearing a grey three-piece suit, with a white shirt and matching grey bow tie. With a blank stare avoiding that of the viewer, Beardsley is set within a gloomy landscape background of grey and brown. His gloved right hand delicately holds a thin wooden cane with a gold tip, while his other gloved hand rests at his trouser pocket. Blanche described Beardsley as having an "emaciated face, a terribly hooked and bony nose between two little piercing hazel eyes, under a fringe of hair the colour of blond mahogany, often described as auburn, which he carefully combed and parted in the

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<sup>405</sup> « De memes tendances que les miennes. » Blanche was a renowned, though closeted, homosexual. Jacques-Émile Blanche, *La pêche aux souvenirs*, Paris: Flammarion, 1949, p. 166. Léon Daudet described him a « grande fille zézayante » (big, lisping girly girl). Léon Daudet, *Salons et journaux*, part four of *Souvenirs des milieux littéraires, politiques, artistiques et médicaux*, 2 vols. Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1920, p. 601. After Wilde's trial in 1895, Blanche married Rose Lemoine, but the union remained unconsummated. See Loyrette, H., *Degas*, Paris: Fayard, 1991, p. 532.

<sup>406</sup> Bell also notes that Blanche told Ethel Sands at lunch that Sargent was a homosexual. Clive Bell (quoting Blanche) to Mary Hutchinson, 31 July 1927, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, quoted in Fairbrother, T., 'The Complications of Being Sargent', *John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the Wertheimer Family*, Exhib. Cat., (ed) Norman L. Kleeblatt, New York: Jewish Museum, 1999, p. 39.

<sup>407</sup> Syme, A., *A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-siècle Art*, University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010, p. 98

middle of his wide forehead.”<sup>408</sup> He left perceptive portraits of Beardsley in print as well as paint, writing,

Clothed for the day in a light grey suit, wearing a flower in his lapel, gloved, he always held his large cane vertically, in the middle, and struck it upon the ground chanting sentences to accompany his words.<sup>409</sup>

It is evident in Beardsley’s portrait that by the 1890s Blanche had refined his ability to capture a sitter’s individuality and disposition. Blanche’s application of oil and his loose brushwork, the kind he was experimenting with in his portraits of the 1880s, comes to life as he succeeds in capturing the reality of his sitter’s nervous and infectious illnesses. Daniel Halévy describes how Blanche’s technique would make for an intense sitting, but how it produced incredible effects,

The long sessions he required of his sitters were the joy of his life. To the man or woman in front of him, he applied all the investigative talents of his eyes and ears. Paintbrush in hand and always very talkative, he never let himself be dazzled by his own words. His models took his conversation for a distraction [...], if he kept talking it was purely to animate the face opposite him, to get his model to talk. And not one word was lost on the paintbrush, skilful at extracting the prize.<sup>410</sup>

In an unpublished letter Blanche summed up his philosophy on portraiture, writing,

For me, portraiture is only one of the ways I use to express like: the observation of human beings being the most essential occupation of my mind, I pick up paintbrush or pen alternatively and just gather documents together.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Collet, G.-P. *Jacques-Émile Blanche. Le peintre-écrivain*, Paris: Bartillat, 2006, p. 88. See also Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 116

<sup>409</sup> « Toujours vêtu, le jour, d’un costume gris clair, une fleur à la boutonnière, ganté, il tenait verticalement, par le milieu, une grosse canne de jonc, dont il frappait le sol pour scander ses phrases et accompagner ses mots. » Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de Peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris : Émile-Paul, 1919, p. 116.

<sup>410</sup> Dagen, P. *Jacques-Émile Blanche, peintre*, exhibition catalogue Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 15 October 1997 – 15 February 1998, Édition de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1997, p.7.

<sup>411</sup> Unpublished letter from Jacques-Émile Blanche to Dr Blanche, ms 7031, musée des beaux-arts de rouen.

Over his lifetime Blanche never formulated a comprehensive theory of portraiture, despite his obsession with the genre itself. Rather, as Heather McPherson argues, he spent his lifetime asserting the validity of portraiture as an artistic and intellectual enterprise.<sup>412</sup> However, in *Les arts plastiques* Blanche writes his most detailed discussion on the subject of portraiture, sketching a brief history of the French portrait over the past sixty years and classifying portraits as the work of either early believers in ideal beauty, or seekers of the truth. Significantly, he places himself in the latter category. Blanche believed that the portrait should not only impart a record of the sitter, but also render certain sociological and psychological elements specific to them.<sup>413</sup>

Blanche's many portraits demonstrate not only a unique painterly technique derived from working with, and learning from, a number of successful avant-garde artists of the day, but also his own personal ambition to, as he described it, delve into the soul of his sitters. He enumerated the qualities that had traditionally constituted the portrait – namely, analysis, psychological synthesis, a carefully meditated composition, and the impression of life.<sup>414</sup> Through his choice of sitter, painterly technique, and bringing of the figure close to the frontal plane of the canvas, he also suggested an intensity and passion for the 'new' in literature and the visual arts. It is clear to see from Blanche's portraits that he tested the parameters of Realism. Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, a contemporary critic, acknowledged this when he characterised Blanche's approach to portraiture as a sort of

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<sup>412</sup> McPherson, H. *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 165.

<sup>413</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Les Arts plastiques*, Paris: Édition, 1931, p. 204; Blanche, J.-É., *Portraits of a Lifetime*, London, 1937.

<sup>414</sup> Blanche also notes here that a certain grand style of portraiture remained in vogue at the Royal Academy but was little practised in France. See Blanche, J.-É., *Les Arts plastiques*, Paris: Édition, 1931, p. 205.

“psychological impressionism” based on penetrating observation, intuition, technical mastery, and rapid execution.<sup>415</sup> Blanche’s portraits are, therefore, more complex than they initially appear. In comparison to the work of some of his contemporaries they do, undoubtedly, reassert the traditional function of portraiture, but they also act as an index of modern individual and collective identity.<sup>416</sup> Heather McPherson believes Blanche, to his detriment, has been viewed as an antimodernist unable or unwilling to swim in more progressive currents. She states,

This misreading, which reflects the ambiguous status of the portrait within the artistic hierarchy, fails to take into account the range of critical opinions about portraiture and the stylistic eclecticism that characterised fin-de-siècle art.<sup>417</sup>

As I have shown in this chapter, Blanche was associated with modernist, not traditionalist painters. As such, Blanche makes an interesting study as he straddles what we identify today as the avant-garde on the one hand and the academy on the other – he ‘sits on the fence’.<sup>418</sup> This position provides researchers and scholars looking back on the history of portraiture in nineteenth century with a wholly interesting view on French cultural and artistic life. We can appreciate that an artist could conceive of himself as a modernist despite not exhibiting as a modernist. It is possible to see modernism was as much about friendship, conversation and socialising as it was about exhibitions, formal associations

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<sup>415</sup> Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintures, pastels et lithographs*, Paris: Hotel de Jean Charpentier, 1924.

<sup>416</sup> The term portraiture refers to the making of visual representations containing likeness of people (including artists themselves), in a variety of media, including painting, drawing and sculpture.

<sup>417</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p.146

<sup>418</sup> The term ‘Academy’ refers to the inauguration of artistic education within officially recognized academies and was one of the most significant institutional developments in the social history of renaissance art. The academies also importantly contributed to, and were themselves part product of, a newly forged social order in Western Europe based on capitalism and the rise to power of a wealthy new middle class. For more information see Boime, A., *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Phaidon, 1971.

and manifestos, though this is not how much of the secondary scholarship describe it.<sup>419</sup>

Art historians want their academicians on one side and their avant-garde on the other –

Blanche disrupts this and that is what makes him so interesting – he moves so effortlessly from one side to the other.

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<sup>419</sup> A central theoretical and critical term within the cluster of concepts and themes that dominates discussion of the socio-historical place of art since the mid nineteenth century. Modernism refers, sometimes confusingly, both to the visual and tactile character of selected artworks produced in this epoch and to influential accounts of them, concerned with their origin, meanings, and significance. Its most important critics have included Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss.

## Chapter 5

### Jacques-Émile Blanche and Modern French Portraiture, 1859-1914

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The portrait, that type of painting which appears so modest, calls for an immense intelligence. No doubt the artist's submissiveness must be great, but his power of divination must be equally so. Whenever I see a good portrait, I can guess at all the artist's efforts, who must not only have seen at once all that lay on the surface but must also have guessed at what lay hidden. I compared him just now to the historian, and I might also compare him to the actor ... If you care to examine the matter closely, nothing in a portrait is a matter of indifference. Gesture, grimace, clothing, even décor – all must serve to realise a *character*.<sup>420</sup>

*Salon du 1859* by Charles Baudelaire is a remarkable review of the Salon exhibition held at the Palais de Champs-Élysées in Paris of the same year.<sup>421</sup> Printed as a series of four letters addressed to the editor of the *Revue Française*, it is renowned for being the first criticism of its kind to provide a commentary on the medium of photography.<sup>422</sup> While in his review Baudelaire recognises the practical applications of photography and the absolute modernity of the medium, he raises concerns about the creative position of the artist working in such a mechanically progressive age. He condemns the artist who adopts a photographic approach to painting, and to portraiture in particular. In contrast to

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<sup>420</sup> Baudelaire, C., translated by Jonathan Mayne, 'The Salon of 1859' in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies*, Doubleday Anchor Book, 1956, p. 274

<sup>421</sup> The French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire was born on April 9 1821 in Paris, France and died there forty-six years later on 31 August 1867. He is considered to be one of the most influential French poets in history and one of the greatest poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century influencing an era of poetic symbolism. He is most famous for his controversial poems *Les Fleurs du Mal (Flowers of Evil)*, (1857), his translations and commentaries of the work Edgar Allen Poe and his depiction of the modern artist in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne (The Painter of Modern Life)*, (1863). He was also known to be a perceptive and original commentator on the art of his day, one who evolved a critical method that rejected a cold, neutral approach in favour of one that was 'partial, impassioned, and political', as well as being amusing and poetic. For more biographical information see: Gowing, L., 'Baudelaire, Charles', *Biographical Encyclopedia of Artists, vol.1*, New York: Facts on File, 2005.

<sup>422</sup> The Salon opened on 15 April at the Palais de Champs-Élysées. The whole review was originally published in four instalments between 10 June and 20 July in the *Revue Française*. The name of the editor was Jean Morel. The nine sections of the review are as follows: I The Modern Artist; II The Modern Public and Photography; III The Queen of Faculties; IV The Governance of the Imagination; V Religion, History, Fantasy; VI Religion, History, Fantasy (continued); VII Portraiture; VIII Landscape; IX Sculpture.

photography, portrait painting, as he declares, required “immense intelligence” on the part of artists – it needed to remain an art. Interestingly, Baudelaire does not support his argument with any references to the art works included in the Salon exhibition of 1859 – the images hide behind the writing, coming second to the statements on aesthetics he wishes to make. Even Baudelaire’s denunciation of photography is, in effect, a device, included to introduce the artistic genres and practices he considers truly important.<sup>423</sup> Specifically, he uses *Salon du 1859* to assert portraiture as a mode of painting that requires tremendous intuition as well as technical skill. It is intricate and multifaceted; it is uniquely demanding of artists. In declaring the need for “character” to be realised in a portrait, Baudelaire argues that rather than attempting to represent observed reality through a literal representation of the sitter, artists should move towards a more subjective and conceptual interpretation of visual appearances. This view was emblematic of the repositioning of the painted portrait in contradistinction to photography: Baudelaire foreshadows the new directions the modern portrait would take during the second half of the century.

In this chapter I intend to explore these issues concerning portraiture’s status, value, interpretation and transformation as far as they relate to Blanche’s work and that of his contemporaries. How did modern portraiture in Paris differ from what preceded it, and what was ‘modern’ about it? What was the relationship between rapid social change on the one hand and radical shifts in psychology on the other, and how did both contribute to the image of the distinctly modern individual? What impact did Impressionism have on the representation of this individual? What contribution did

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<sup>423</sup> Hannavy, J., (ed.) *Encyclopedia of nineteenth-century photography: A-I*, Index, Volume 1. Taylor & Francis, 2008, p.119.

Blanche make as a mature portraitist, and how might we think about his work as what was termed by one of his contemporaries as ‘psychological impressionism’? How instrumental was Blanche in the construction of modern individual and collective identity? And lastly, returning to Baudelaire and his concerns about the future of portraiture in the age of the camera, how did Blanche’s contemporaries negotiate this new technology, using it alongside, as opposed to in place of, the brush?

The Impressionist and Post-Impressionist eras are not generally singled out for achievements in portraiture and figure painting, but a closer look at the genre in this chapter demonstrates that the image of the individual played a more significant and innovative role than has been generally realised.<sup>424</sup> There was in fact a remarkable number of approaches to portraiture in the decades that followed the advent of photography, and this shows how the genre adapted, responded to change, and ultimately developed. Portrait painting had to offer more in the age of photography, when it became ever easier to produce an image of a physical likeness. What role did Blanche and, to a lesser extent, his contemporaries play in this transformation of the portrait? Ultimately, this is the question I aim to address in this chapter.

### **Pre-Modern Portraiture**

In 1795, the maintenance of French cultural life was entrusted to a new body, the Institut Français, which retained strong consultative powers with regard to the École des Beaux-Arts. In 1816, a section of the Institut was renamed the *Académie*. It reinstated history painting in the grand manner – the style *historique* – representing scenes of Classical,

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<sup>424</sup> The exhibition ‘Faces of Impressionism: Portraits from the Musée d’Orsay’ held at Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, 19 October 2014 – 25 January 2015 is the most recent exploration of the character and development of the portrait in French Impressionist painting and sculpture.



biblical and contemporary history.<sup>425</sup> Academic artists were restricted in their choice of themes and subjects by the legacy of aristocratic notions concerning what was worthy of representation. This decorum was encoded in a hierarchy of genres. History painting was thought more elevated than portraiture, which in turn was more worthy than genre painting (depicting the daily lives of ordinary people). Landscape was even lower, with still life at the bottom of the hierarchy. This sliding scale in subject matter ran parallel with a scale of required skill and expertise. The more serious the category of painting, the greater the expectation of expertise in drawing and of complete and highly polished finish.<sup>426</sup> Placed just second in the hierarchy of genres, portraiture was considered to be a significant practice with a long and authoritative history.

Despite the ubiquity of the portrait in societies ranging from ancient Greece to *fin-de-siècle* France, portraiture was perceived in some quarters as being aesthetically problematic and critically suspect, and this was due to a number of reasons. For some commentators, a specialisation in portraiture was an indicator of an artist's lack of imagination. Motivated by commissions and fashions, a portraitist's idealisation of a sitter's features was denigrated by many as being inauthentic and hence unsuited to the modern age. Accusations of idealisation were, however, somewhat easier to accept than a critic's attack on an artist's inadequate or flawed representation of anatomy and expression, or their poor sense of judgement when it came to the selection of a portrait setting or composition. As Shearer West has argued, such criticisms were not necessarily

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<sup>425</sup> Norman, G., *Nineteenth-century Painters and Painting: A Dictionary*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1992, p. 87; *The Academy and the Limits of Painting in Seventeenth-Century France*, ed. Paul Duro, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; White, Harrison, C., *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 7-18.

<sup>426</sup> Charles, V., *French Painting*, Parkstone International, 2014, p. 6. 'Allegory'; Halliday, A., *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution*, p. 5.

particular to the modern period; they have reverberated throughout the history of the genre.<sup>427</sup> They were however accentuated at times of artistic change, and the late nineteenth century was certainly such a period. But in many ways such age-old criticisms of portraitists were alleviated by the modernist turn, which sought to emphasise far more than an individual's physical likeness. In portraits by such modern painters as Courbet, Manet, Degas, and – I would add – Blanche, character came to the fore, and this character was profoundly shaped by the social changes that typified the modern period. Scholars agree that modernity was complex, contingent and contested: what impact did this have on the concept and resultant image of the modern individual?

#### **“Paris changes!”: transformation of the portrait in modern France**

In his foundational text of 1986, *The Painting of Modern Life*, T. J. Clark argues that French Impressionist painting was a response to the urban crisis in which Paris was plunged in the second half of the nineteenth century, as result of what became known as Haussmannisation. He draws our attention to “a connection between the modernisation of Paris put through by Napoleon III and his henchmen – in particular by his prefect of the Seine, Baron Haussmann – and the new painting of the time.”<sup>428</sup> Baudelaire was one of the first writers to take this experience of modernisation as an important theme in his work. In his famed essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1863, Baudelaire used the term *modernité* to articulate a sense of

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<sup>427</sup> West, S., *Portraiture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>428</sup> Clark, T.J., *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 23.

difference from the past and to describe a peculiarly modern identity.<sup>429</sup> For Baudelaire, the life of contemporary Paris was “rich in poetic and marvellous subjects,” ironically so, because the ‘rich’ texture of contemporary life was the result of modern oppression – as Clark, a Marxist art historian, emphasises. Baudelaire captured this when he lamented in his poem *Le Cygne* (*The Swan*),

Paris changes! but nothing of my melancholy is lifted.  
New palaces, scaffoldings, blocks, old outer districts:  
for me everything becomes allegory and my  
cherished memories weigh like rocks.<sup>430</sup>

After the overthrow of the Second Republic in 1852, Napoleon III proclaimed Paris a capital of modernity – a new city that needed a new face.<sup>431</sup> Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809-1891), prefect of Paris, was appointed to modernise Paris. Beginning around 1859, his plan included the demolition of medieval streets and the implementation of a massive new building programme.<sup>432</sup> The old, congested city was opened up. As Haussmann claimed,

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<sup>429</sup> Baudelaire, C., ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ in *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays*, London: Phaidon, 1964, p.13. The modern context does not mean merely of the present but represents a particular attitude to the present. Baudelaire relates this attitude to a particular *experience* of modernity, which is characteristic of the modern period and distinct from other periods. In *The Writer of Modern Life*, Walter Benjamin reveals how effectively Baudelaire used poetry to inject value back into capitalist society. Benjamin’s essays characterised this poetry as ‘terrifyingly *symptomatic* of Baudelaire’s era—and ours.’ - Michael W. Jennings, introduction to *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, by Walter Benjamin, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>430</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*), ‘Tableaux parisiens’ (‘Parisian Scenes’), ‘The Swan’, trans. Keith Waldrop. Original French text: Le Cygne /À Victor Hugo /II /Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N’a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs, / Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie / Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs. [online] <http://library.brown.edu/cds/baudelaire/fleursdumal5.html> [accessed June 2014].

<sup>431</sup> The Second Empire included the period from 1851-52 to 1870.

<sup>432</sup> For more on Haussmann and Haussmannisation see: Pinkney, D.H., *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, Princeton University Press, 1972; Jordon, D.P., *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labours of Baron Haussmann*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995; Jordon, D.P., ‘Haussmann and Haussmannisation: The Legacy for Paris’, *French Historical Studies*, Vol 27. No. 1. Winter 2004, pp. 87-113; Schwartz, V.R., *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, California: California University Press, 1997.

We ripped open the belly of old Paris, the neighbourhood of revolt and barricades, and cut a large opening through the almost impenetrable maze of alleys piece by piece, and put in cross-streets whose continuation terminated the work.<sup>433</sup>

While Haussmann was eventually forced to resign on account of extravagance, his vision dramatically altered the centre of Paris; the city became the site of wide, open spaces and new, *grandes maisons*. Few works are more evocative of these changes to the architectural and social experience of Paris than Gustave Caillebotte's *Paris Street: Rainy Day*, 1877 (Figure 5.1), in which smartly dressed, middle-class men and women are depicted promenading along the rainy boulevards of Paris, the city unfurling beneath a tightly choreographed ensemble of grey silk umbrellas.<sup>434</sup>

As Baudelaire suggests in his melancholic poem, the new conditions of modern life brought about by Haussmannisation had a profound impact on an individual's sense of self: it was no longer secure, and this created a sense of troubling, disquieting malaise. As Marshall Berman describes, paraphrasing an article by Baudelaire of 1867,

[Baudelaire] accepted modern man in his entirety, with his weaknesses, his aspirations and his despair. He had thus been able to give beauty to sights that did not possess beauty in themselves, not by making them romantically picturesque, but by bringing to light the portion of the human soul hidden in them; he had thus revealed the sad and often tragic heart of the modern city.<sup>435</sup>

Such uncertainty about one's sense of self presented a number of creative opportunities when it came to the depiction of the modern individual. Many French artists working

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<sup>433</sup> Baron Haussmann, *Memoires*, Paris: Victor-Havard Éditeur, 1893 [online] <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k86063z.image.f4> [accessed 10 January 2014].

<sup>434</sup> For more on Gustave Caillebotte see: Broude, N., *Gustave Caillebotte and the Fashioning of Identity in Impressionist Paris*, Rutgers University Press, 2002.

<sup>435</sup> Paraphrased in *L'etandard*, 4 September 1867, cited in Berman, M., *All That is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*, Verso, 2010, p. 132.

during the era of Haussmanisation produced portraits in order to explore their own and other melancholic psyches, representing members of their intimate circles in paintings that often served as manifestos of modernity. As Baudelaire himself said,

The painter, the true painter for whom we are looking will be he who can snatch its epic quality from the life of today, and can make us see and understand, with brush or with pencil, how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots.<sup>436</sup>

In 'The Painter of Modern Life' Baudelaire described the movements and motivations of an aesthete and dandy who wandered the streets and arcades of Paris looking at the kaleidoscopic manifestations of life in the modern city.<sup>437</sup> We find a representation of this character – the *flâneur* – in Henri Fantin's *Portrait of MM*, 1867, which depicts Manet not as the infamous working artist, brush in hand, but as a curiously anonymous, albeit stylish figure (Figure 5.2). The portrait shows a heavily bearded gentleman standing against a muted background of dark yellow-brown, who stares sternly out of the canvas at the viewer with both hands firmly grasping a wooden cane topped a gold, curved handle. Impeccably dressed in a silk top hat, blue tie, and leather gloves, his fob watch chain can be seen glinting across his fastened black waistcoat. The only clue as to the identity of Manet is the inscription scrawled in the lower left corner of the canvas, '*A mon ami Manet, Fantin 1867*'.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Baudelaire's review of the 'Salon of 1845', quoted from Eisenman, S.F., *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>437</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life, and other essays*, London: Phaidon, 1964 ed., p. 9; c.f. Walter Benjamin's famous formulation: 'The street became a dwelling for the flâneur, he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls ... The walls are the desks against which he presses his notebooks; news stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done', *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans, H. Zohn, London, 1973, p. 37).

<sup>438</sup> For more on Fantin's portrait of Manet see: Brettell, R., *French Salon Artists: 1800-1900*, Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago and New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1987, p. 83.

Fantin paints Manet dressed for the boulevards of the city rather than its drawing rooms, as it was the public spaces of the city in which the *flâneur* operated. When his portrait was exhibited at the Salon of 1867, an anonymous critic reacted with a mixture of admiration for the painting and astonishment at the refined and well-dressed figure it depicted:

Monsieur Fantin-La Tour is showing a highly distinguished portrait of Monsieur M ... that is Monsieur Manet, for a dedication courageously inscribed on the canvas makes ineffective the modest shield lowered by the catalogue over the compromising yet uncompromised name of the creator of *Olympia*. So, there we have it! This correct, well gloved, well-dressed young man, whom one would take to be a member of the race-course set, is in fact the painter of the black cat, whose fame spread on a wave of laughter, and whom one would have imagined looking like a long-haired art student, wearing peaked russet-coloured hats and smoking death's head pipes. His rehabilitation could not have been undertaken more ingeniously without it looking like it had been touched up – now that the public has seen him in such a favourable light, it will be able to discover much greater talent in his work.<sup>439</sup>

The surprise of Fantin's portrait – also expressed by other critics – was that this inveterate shocker of the bourgeoisie should be shown to have 'such a *gentlemanly* appearance'.<sup>440</sup> As this response to Fantin's image of Manet reveals, portraits could make important interventions in the construction of an individual's identity. They reflected social change but they also, and very effectively, mediated it. Portraiture proved to be an important way for artists and writers living and working in Paris to respond to the unprecedented changes to the metropolitan environment that gave rise to such figures as the *flâneur*.

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<sup>439</sup> Druick, D. and Hoog, M., *Henri Fantin-Latour*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 199-200.

<sup>440</sup> A letter from Edwin Edwards in London to Fantin-Latour (July 1867) reported that the critic of the *Saturday Review* in England had been similarly 'astonished'. Quoted in Sturgis, A., *Rebels and Martyrs: The Image of the Artist in the Nineteenth Century*, London: National Gallery Publications, 2006, p. 120.

## Impressionism and Portraiture

From the late 1860s to the 1880s, the influence of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) gave way to two different types of portraits.<sup>441</sup> The first was that of the realist portrait, heir to the conventions of the past, which relied on a technique so flawless and meticulous that the illusion was almost photographic, as in the portraits of Léon Bonnat, Alexandre Cabanel and William Bouguereau.<sup>442</sup> This approach was founded on unfiltered mimesis and objective observation, and it found much favour with sitters. As Anthea Callen defines it, Realism in its “concern for the material and visible manifestations of personal authenticity, is thus identified with a notion of genius reformulated in line with a modern, Republican ideal of the individual – a concept central to capitalist society and specifically urban in origin.”<sup>443</sup> The second was that of portraits imbued with the Naturalist aesthetic, which gave primacy to the material world, to what could be seen, sensed and described. Stephen Eisenman gives a short definition of the nineteenth-century artistic and literary movement as being “influenced by contemporary ideas of society and science, which rejected the idealisation of experience and adopted an objective and often uncompromising realistic approach to art.”<sup>444</sup> In literature and the

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<sup>441</sup> Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2007.

<sup>442</sup> For more see Byerly, A., *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Hobbs, R., *Impressionism of French Modernity: Art and Literature in France, 1850-1900*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

<sup>443</sup> Callen, A., *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique and the Making of Modernity*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 50. Linda Nochlin also defines Realism as: “An historical movement in the figurative arts and in literature, attained its most coherent and consistent formulation in France, with the echoes, parallels and variants elsewhere on the Continent in England and in the United States. Preceded by Romanticism and followed by what is now generally termed Symbolism, it was the dominant movement from about 1840 until 1870-80. Its aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life.” See Nochlin, L., *Realism*, London: Pelican Books, 1971, p. 13.

<sup>444</sup> Eisenman, S.F., *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2011, p. 234.

visual arts, the naturalist approach favoured forms that described, that pushed aside the idealistic or the allusive in favour of the observable, as evinced in the individual and group portraits of Henri Gervex, James Tissot and Georges Clairin.<sup>445</sup> Whatever the palpable differences that existed between these two different approaches, artists in both camps nevertheless shared the same passionate striving for the mastery of line and technique that lay at the heart of academic teaching. Convinced that the spirit of a subject was expressed through form, they adopted a carefully considered and methodical approach inspired by canonical works of art. These provided inspiration not only for the structure of their compositions but also for the elegance of their draftsmanship and harmonious use of colour.<sup>446</sup>

From the early 1870s up to the beginning of World War 1, with the advent and development of Impressionism, new styles and approaches to portraiture began to emerge. When we think of Impressionism, images of painted landscapes and scenes of everyday life come to mind that were completed spontaneously, *en plein air*, rather than in a studio.<sup>447</sup> Therefore, it is not easy to account for the manner in which Impressionism, a movement that was so uncompromisingly radical, managed to embrace a genre that, after history and religious painting, was perhaps the most constrained by convention, but it did: portraits were a primary concern for artists such as Degas, Monet and Renoir. This perplexing aesthetic paradox may, however, go some way towards explaining why the Impressionist painters received so few commissions for society portraits, even though all

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<sup>445</sup> For more see Thomson, R., *Art of the Actual: Naturalism and Style in Early Third Republic France, 1880-1900*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012.

<sup>446</sup> Badea-Păun, G. and Ormond, R., 'Realism versus Impressionism,' in *The Society Portrait: Painting, Prestige and the Pursuit of Elegance*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2007, p. 125.

<sup>447</sup> Callen, A., 2000, p. 52.



of them painted portraits, often – as we see in the case of Fantin’s image of Manet – as tokens of friendship and esteem.<sup>448</sup>

The majority of critics joined in accusing the new movement of amateurism, abuse of *tâche claire* and a lack of theory. Impressionism was never going to appeal to patrons whose motive in commissioning portraits was to confirm their social or financial prestige, whether inherited or acquired, at least, not in the movement’s infancy.<sup>449</sup> Indeed, defined as it was by the play of light, atmospheric effects, complementary colours, and broken brush strokes, Impressionism did not obviously lend itself to the depiction of the solidity of human form.<sup>450</sup> In their desire to portray immediacy and modernity, Impressionist artists negotiated this difficulty by emphasising the primacy of perception and the pivotal role of character and personality, thus lending these attributes a new significance in portraiture. In his 1876 manifesto *La Nouvelle Peinture*, art critic Edmond Duranty recommended that a portrait should be,<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> For more on Impressionism and Portraiture see: Moffett, C.S., et al. *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, Exhib. Cat. San Francisco: Museum of San Francisco, 1986; Herbert, R., *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988; Callen, A., *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; Fried, M., *Manet’s Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

<sup>449</sup> There were, however, some society commissions, as despite the continuing criticism from the Salon juries, some of the Impressionists were making themselves known as much among art critics as the public. For example, Renoir, because of his fascination with the human figure, was distinctive among the other Impressionists, who were more interested in landscapes. Thus, he obtained several orders for portraits and was introduced, thanks to the publisher Georges Charpentier, to upper-middle-class society, from whom he obtained commissions for portraits, most notably of women and children. By the mid-1880s he had broken away from the Impressionist group to apply a more disciplined and formal technique to his portraits and figure paintings. For more see Nord, P., *Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, p.60; Salvi, F., *The Impressionists*, Minneapolis: The Oliver Press, 2008; Groom, G., *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity*, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art (New York), Musée d’Orsay (Paris), Art Institute of Chicago, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

<sup>450</sup> Tompkins Lewis, M., *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: An Anthology*, California: University of California Press, 2007.

<sup>451</sup> Duranty avoided the term ‘Impressionism’ due to its popularisation by the press and satirical associations at the time, preferring instead to term it ‘*La nouvelle peinture*’. He omitted the names of

The study of moral reflections on physical appearance and on dress, the observation of a man's intimacy with his home environment, of the special features that his profession imprints on him.<sup>452</sup>

Hailed by art historian Charles Moffett as writing “the first cogent attempt to deal with the salient characteristics of avant-garde painting as a whole during the 1870s,”<sup>453</sup>

Duranty promoted paintings that used pose, gesture and facial characterisations to tell the viewer more about the subject than initially met the eye, writing,

A back should reveal temperament, age, and social condition, a pair of hands should reveal the magistrate or the merchant, and a gesture should reveal an entire range of feelings. Physiognomy will tell us with certainty that one man is dry, orderly, and meticulous, while another is the epitome of carelessness and disorder.<sup>454</sup>

As such, the idea that a portrait should reveal the sitter's character first and foremost, before so much as hinting at their rank and status, is a concept owed to the Impressionists.

The 1870s saw the Impressionists concentrate primarily on images of Parisian life. Manet, Degas and Renoir often used likenesses to enliven paintings that would otherwise not be considered portraits, stressing facial features and distinctive postures – “familiar and typical attitudes,” as Degas said – for an increased portrait-like specificity in

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the Impressionists in the essay too. For more information on Duranty, see Jensen, R., *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, 1997, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 102-103

<sup>452</sup> Louis Emile Edmond Duranty, *La Nouvelle Peinture: A Propos du groupe d'artistes qui exposent dans les galeries Durand-Ruel*, Paris: 1876; reprinted and translated in Moffett, C.S., ed. *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1986, pp. 37-47, quotation from p. 38.

<sup>453</sup> Moffett, C. S., *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1886*, An Exhibition organised by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989, p. 38.

<sup>454</sup> Duranty, E., *La nouvelle peinture: à propos du groupe d'artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durand-Ruel*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1876, quoted in ‘The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at Durand-Ruel Galleries,’ *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1886*, An Exhibition organised by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989, pp. 38-49.

innovative scenes of everyday life.<sup>455</sup> For example, in *The Orchestra of the Opera*, c.1870, (Figure 5.3) Degas reorganised the traditional arrangement of the orchestra so that he might depict his friend, the bassoonist Désiré Dihau at the front of the composition. In a clear move away from the traditional, academic portrait, Degas paints a portrait of Dihau that subtly obscures the viewer's expectations of a visit to the theatre and instead presents a radical portrait of a known individual, given modern resonance by the narrative and setting. This is evidence of Edmond Duranty's belief that "by knocking down the partition separating the artist's studio from everyday life," the artist's creative imagination would be free to explore new ideas.<sup>456</sup>

In 1872 Manet took the modern portrait one step further than Degas when he painted the small, sketchy *Berthe Morisot with a Fan* (Figure 5.4). Morisot's face, where we might have looked to find some clue to the sitter's identity or character, is deliberately concealed and distorted by the fan she pinches at the end with her forefinger and thumb. With her face obscured, even obliterated, her right arm wraps around her seated waist and her eyes pierce through the gaps of the fan to stare directly out at the viewer. Her body is entirely clothed in black, and the spectator's attention is diverted to an apparently insignificant part – Morisot's outstretched foot, which occupies the lower right-hand corner of the canvas. Large expanses of the picture are given over to the modulated blacks of her dress and to the brown of the wall. This portrait seems to almost flaunt its own absence of detail, and to make a virtue of not allowing the viewer to piece the parts

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<sup>455</sup> Degas quoted in Shackelford, G., and Rey, X., *Faces of Impressionism: Portraits from the Musée d'Orsay*, ex. cat., Kimbell Art Museum, 2014, p. 40.

<sup>456</sup> Duranty, E., *La nouvelle peinture: à propos du groupe d'artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durand-Ruel*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1876, quoted in 'The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at Durand-Ruel Galleries,' *The New Painting, Impressionism, 1874-1866: An Exhibition* organised by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986, pp. 38-49.

together by hiding the traditional psychological centre of the painting, the face. Manet's portrait of *Berthe Morisot with a Veil*, 1872, (Figure 5.5) contrasts Morisot's waxen pallor dramatically with the black of her dress and veil. Manet departs from his usual painterly technique and uses the paint so freely, yet furiously, on the canvas so that the representation of her face is distorted once again. Yet this time Morisot resembles a skeleton, with her lower jaw painted black to create the impression of a skull-like portrait. Brown paint is applied vigorously and roughly across the background of the canvas, resulting in broad, sweeping brushstrokes. Manet focuses his attention on areas of dark and light, resulting in a flattening of the picture plane and Morisot is depicted in dark tones of brown and black, with the only colours a striking red necktie and the shocking white of her skin. The rapid execution makes no attempt to disguise the hand of the artist, and these intuitive gestures of Manet's brushstroke evoke a richly emotive style.

Working with archival letters, Morisot scholars Anne Higonnet, Nancy Locke and Marni Kessler, have shown another side to the feminine and motherly Morisot figure represented in the art historical literature. Recounting the depressed, anorexic stages she went through during her lifetime, and the reputation she had among the Parisian bourgeoisie and artistic community as a distinctly nervous figure – a familiar sight on the streets of Passy where she lived close to the exclusive clinic of Dr Blanche – the scholars reveal Morisot to be a far more complex and distinctly modern character than many have assumed.<sup>457</sup> Blanche visited Morisot in her studio in his youth. Recounting his experience, he wrote,

How she scared me . . . with her 'strange' dress, always in black or white, her dark and burning eyes, her angular, thin, pale face, the curt, abrupt, nervous words, and the way she laughed when I asked to see

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<sup>457</sup> Higonnet, A., *Berthe Morisot*, California: University of California Press, 1995, p.89.

what she hid in ‘her notebook’ ... she touched the canvas like the skin of a face, treated a haystack or a suburban poplar as she would a moth or a delicate tulle scarf.<sup>458</sup>

Both portraits by Manet present a more intimate and compelling psychological rendering of Morisot by exposing the model’s inner tensions through distorting her face. In these striking images of his sister-in-law, Manet not only conveys the deep personal connection he had with his sitter, but also, through his furious brushstrokes, the anxieties and tensions that Blanche so vividly remembered.

### **Overwrought Nerves**

We wander all over the Champ-de-Mars and the Gallery of Machines ... we stroll among those tamed monsters that, roaring, howling, hissing, and spitting, perform the most exact and precise tasks with methodical violence. It will hence surprise you that the age of machines has been inclined, above all others, to exalt the human personality, while it appeared to be diminishing it. Egotism has developed to unprecedented proportions in this century of the machine ... *In no other time has the self had so many pretensions, held so high a status, been so widespread, and yet everything blocks the free development of the individual, reduces that part of himself he puts into work, disappoints the yearnings he may have to shape himself according to his own way. The society in which we live aligns us in conformity, and it has never been more difficult to be somebody.*

Yet we love to make ourselves complex, to contort ourselves, to twist and straighten ourselves, to torment our language as well as our thoughts ... We are not solely complicated beings but agitated ones as well. All invites us to add to our being, to multiply ourselves, to vary our sensations ceaselessly. ... We are like ... neuropaths who cannot believe in the impossible but attempt adventures. ... We are [like] birds so light that the branch on which we land does not even flinch, and we leave quickly on a quest for something we cannot name and that we never find.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Blanche, J.É., *Dates*, p. 45.

<sup>459</sup> Valbert, G., ‘L’Age des machines’, *Revue des deux mondes*, 25 February 1889, pp. 692-697.

Writing for the *Revue des deux mondes*, Georges Valbert noted that a cult of the self had emerged to compensate for the challenges to individuality wrought by the modernisation of Paris through Haussmanisation, the torments suffered by Parisians during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the tragic events of the Commune. Valbert commented that at the very moment, new spatial forms and modes of social life threatened the individual with anonymity and insignificance: under such circumstances, self-cultivation and self-analysis were given new life and power. The continual search for new and varied sensations was believed to deny the ego “both contentment and stable boundaries”, transforming modern man into an “agitated and weary neuropath.”<sup>460</sup>

In wide-ranging cultural and political discussions of the time, Haussmann’s Paris was identified as an agent of neurasthenia, over-stimulating the urban population.<sup>461</sup> After the 1880s, many writers noted with alarm that nervous conditions were spreading out far beyond the narrow confines of aesthetic culture to the national body itself. As the typologies of the *maladies nerveuses* left the halls of the private clinics and permeated the public domain through dinner table discussions and newspaper articles, the arena of susceptibility expanded. Initially, politicians, journalists, critics and social theorists were faced with the startling revelation that nervous debility was not restricted to the hothouses of literary decadence but was incubating amongst them. As the century drew to a close, writers warned of it spreading further. Urban dwellers in general – who faced a relentless barrage of sensory excitation and lived at an accelerated pace – were also becoming victims and their susceptibility was read as an indication that France itself was poised to

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<sup>460</sup> Valbert, G., ‘L’Age des machines’, *Revue des deux mondes*, 25 February 1889, pp. 692-697. Restless neuropaths were themselves the object of clinical discussion at scientific congresses held during the 1889 Paris Exhibition. See Silverman, D. L, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 1992, pp. 70-76.

<sup>461</sup> Silverman, D. L, 1992, p. 70.

become a nation of physically exhausted and mentally hypersensitive Jean des Esseintes.<sup>462</sup>

The rapid social changes brought about by Haussmannisation were accompanied by radical shifts in the field of psychology, and developments in the science of psychology and new trends in the identification and treatment of nervous conditions amongst the urban *haute bourgeoisie* had an impact on French portrait painters. Inspired by the ailments inventoried in modern psychiatry, artists experimented with alternate ways of evoking the personality, status, or profession of their sitters. Blanche had full access to the very latest discourses in the field, which informed his portrait of the nervous French symbolist writer Francis Poictevin painted in 1887 before his mental collapse in 1894 which resulted in confinement in an institution until his death in 1904 (Figure 5.6).<sup>463</sup> A three-quarter-length portrait depicts Poictevin seated at a forty-five degree angle to the viewer against a muted, greying yellow background on which Blanche's dense, rapid paint strokes remain visible. Poictevin's sunken cheeks and tired eyes stare off to his right hand side, avoiding any encounter with the viewer. Utilising a technique Blanche learnt from Manet, he lights Poictevin's face vividly from the right, casting a strong shadow across the other side of his face, which exemplifies Poictevin's melancholic expression, drooping moustache and unkempt hair. With his hands shown carefully folded over one another in his lap, Poictevin is depicted in a black jacket and trousers; only the smallest hint of his off-white shirt can be seen peering out from

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<sup>462</sup> Jean des Esseintes is a sickly, neurotic, asocial and neurasthenic fictional character in Huysmans' 1884 novel *À Rebours*.

<sup>463</sup> Blanche made a lithograph after this portrait for the frontispiece of Poictevin's *Paysages et Nouveaux Songes*, published in 1888. For more on Poictevin's nervous breakdown see, Thomson, R., 'Seeing Visions, Painting Visions: On psychology and representation under the early Third Republic', in *Redefining European Symbolism 1880-1910*, 2012;

underneath the top of his collar and cuffs. Again, in a move reminiscent of Manet, the strong black mass of Poictevin's clothes flattens him against the background of the canvas.

The portrait by Blanche is the only painted portrait of Poictevin, as the other two known are drawings completed by Frédéric-Auguste Cazals, a French writer and illustrator in 1893 (Figure 5.7), and Félix Vallotton, a Swiss/French painter and printmaker, in 1898 for *Le Livre des masques de Remy Gourmont* (Figure 5.8). A close friend of Huysmans, Poictevin continued writing his manuscripts with perfect annual regularity between 1882 and 1894, but was forgotten by all except by few friends. His scripts have never been published or translated into English. In them Poictevin contrived to chronicle a psychological and spiritual journey by means of observations of the external world: they are perfect demonstrations of Symbolism. Degas owned the portrait of Poictevin for many years and it hung in his bedroom. It demonstrates that portraits were used to articulate artistic, intellectual and social ties between individuals; artists were willing to purchase, or hang, portraits of each other in their homes or studios in order to show how they were connected to a particular community. Interestingly, when Degas's friendship with Blanche came to an end in December 1903 it is likely the portrait was returned to Blanche as it did not remain in Degas's collection.<sup>464</sup>

### **Fashion, Neurasthenia and 'Psychological Impressionism'**

Blanche was a denizen of high society. Through his connections with well-known, fashionable members of Parisian society, it is possible to trace his maturity as a portrait painter. The status of a sought-after portrait painter was a highly enviable one, as it

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<sup>464</sup> Author meeting with Jane Roberts, Paris, January 2013.



brought with it not only financial ease but also a considerable social position. For artists and sitters alike, international recognition was key. The ideas, styles, and fashions diffused by the Salons and the great international exhibitions, and the scandals that surrounded a specific painting, had the power to make or break a career. Yet despite the thousands of portraits exhibited annually, few portrait painters succeeded in making a name for themselves, and of these, even fewer succeeded in imposing their aesthetic vision on their sitters. Blanche was one of the small numbers of painters who accomplished a fashionable prominence among Parisian *haute bourgeois* society.

One of the names capable of evoking the world of Parisian high society in the late nineteenth century is almost certainly that of comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fenzensac. Born into an illustrious, aristocratic family, Montesquiou was a man of dazzling intelligence and immense culture who published Symbolist poetry and fastidious expressions of his passion for beauty in volumes with titles of studied eccentricity. With ease and contemptuous elegance Montesquiou assumed a position in fashionable artistic and literary circles. He was closely linked with Huysmans and Proust, serving as a model for the neurasthenic character Jean des Esseintes in *À Rebours (Against Nature)* and Baron Charlus in *Remembrance of Things Past*.<sup>465</sup>

Neither Blanche nor Montesquiou could remember their first meeting; their friendship was immediate but tempestuous.<sup>466</sup> Making enemies for the simple pleasure of delivering an irresistible *bon mot* was one of Montesquiou's favourite amusements. In his memoirs, *Le Pas effaces (Faded Footprints)*, he described his society acquaintances with

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<sup>465</sup> Silverman, D., *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 1992, p. 234; Ryan, J., *Rilke, Modernism and Poetic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 62; Karaminas, V. and Geczy, A., *Queer Style*, London: A&C Black, 2013, pp. 13-18.

<sup>466</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 1949, pp. 169-170.

such merciless malice that he shocked his seasoned accomplice, Comtesse Greffülhe, yet confessed, “I would like admiration that verges on physical desire.”<sup>467</sup> Blanche painted Montesquiou’s full-length portrait in 1887, however, only a small fragment now remains that depicts Montesquiou’s head and shoulders (Figure 5.9). Jane Roberts believes Montesquiou cut the portrait down himself, for reasons that remain unknown.<sup>468</sup> It is possible to find hints of how the full-length portrait of Montesquiou was conceived by Blanche in his publication *Propos de peinture*. He writes,

His head, like that of a d’Artagan, a young Aurevilly or a French Brummell, he would support on a huge, white gloved fist, his elbow resting on the marble of the fireplace.<sup>469</sup>

Roberts has argued the cropped version leaves a “sloppy profile that fails in any way to evoke the extravagant personality of Montesquiou,”<sup>470</sup> yet it is possible to gain an insight into the character of the dandy on closer inspection. The portrait shows Montesquiou in profile against a muted background, with thick, dark, well groomed hair and a silky moustache sitting beneath his nose. His thin shoulders are dressed in a pristine black jacket and white dinner shirt that hint at the tall, slim, elegant figure recognisable from other portraits of the eccentric. However, Blanche’s portrait is often overlooked in comparison to Whistler’s 1891 *Arrangement in White and Gold: Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac* (Figure 5.10), and Giovanni Boldini’s 1897 *Portrait of Count Robert de Montesquiou* (Figure 5.11), and it is easy to see why when examining the two longer-length portraits with Blanche’s cropped version.

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<sup>467</sup> « Je voudrais admiration qui frise le désir physique » cited in Chaleyssin, P., *Robert de Montesquiou: mécène et dandy*, Paris: Somogy, 1992, p. 26.

<sup>468</sup> Author meeting with Jane Roberts, Paris. January 2013,

<sup>469</sup> Blanche, J.É., 1919, p. 57.

<sup>470</sup> Roberts, J., *Jacques-Émile Blanche*, 2012, p. 46.

Whistler's full-length portrait of Montesquiou was completed in 1892 following countless (rumoured to be over one hundred) sittings. It took another two years for Whistler to exhibit the work at the Salon of the Champ-de-Mars in 1894, where it provoked enthusiastic critical reviews.<sup>471</sup> Standing tall against a dark black and brown background, Montesquiou's black suit closely match that of the background; only the white of his shirt, bowtie and gloves provide the viewer with an idea of where his silhouette take shape. Whistler paints Montesquiou with the recognisable, distinctive attributes that came to be synonymous with the aristocratic, neurasthenic count: gloved hands, cane, carefully groomed moustache and a gaunt face. He carefully renders Montesquiou's facial features with bold, loose strokes that contrast with the more delicate modelling of the soft chinchilla cape shown hanging over his arm and believed to be a garment belonging to his cousin Comtesse Élisabeth Greffulhe. Whistler's desire to capture the soul of Montesquiou is suggested by his final words to the exhausted model, "Look at me for an instant longer, *and you will look forever!*"<sup>472</sup>

Boldini also found himself attracted to the personality of this eccentric, neurasthenic dandy, painting Montesquiou in 1897. Known to work quickly and with great certainty of touch, Boldini was distinguished by his brilliantly energetic brushwork.<sup>473</sup> In his portrait of Montesquiou, Boldini depicts a seated dandy, dressed in a grey three-piece suit with a black cravat tied loosely around the neck of Montesquiou's white shirt. The muted grey background matches that of Montesquiou's suit, and it is

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<sup>471</sup> For reviews of Whistler's Montesquiou see: Munhall, E., *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat*, New York and Paris: Flammarion, 1995; Charles, V., *James McNeill Whistler*, New York: Parkstone International, 2011; and Sutherland, D.E., *Whistler: A Life for Art's Sake*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

<sup>472</sup> Whistler quoted in Munhall, E., *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat*, New York and Paris: Flammarion, 1995, p. 64.

<sup>473</sup> Charles, V., *James McNeill Whistler*, New York: Parkstone International, 2011, p. 139.

often difficult to differentiate between the fine wisps of his suit jacket and the wall he is depicted against. One of his exceptionally long, white-gloved hands holds a blue-topped cane, while the other rests on the chair with his forefinger extended. His head, shown in profile, is pale and emaciated with the shiny blackness of his hair and moustache contrasting against an otherwise grey composition. Boldini exhibited Montesquiou at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1897 and at the same exhibition Blanche also exhibited five works, three of which were portraits, including his double portrait with Rapheal de Ochoa, which is discussed in more depth in the next section of this chapter.<sup>474</sup>

Boldini's portrait of Montesquiou not only reflects the complex relationship that existed between artist and model, but also the theories of the modern portrait, set out in an article written by Montesquiou on Boldini.<sup>475</sup> In it he states,

The art of portrait painting lies not in photographic verisimilitude, but in the ability to blend the personality of the painter with that of the model.<sup>476</sup>

Therefore, according to Montesquiou, Boldini is a “modern portraitist par excellence” as his artworks reveal the model's innermost character while at the same time expressing the artist's own opinion of them.<sup>477</sup>

When comparing both of these portraits of Montesquiou to that by Blanche it is possible to see that Blanche has given Montesquiou's face a flawless, wrinkle free

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<sup>474</sup> For further reference see *Catalogue des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, gravure et objets d'art, exposés au Champs-de-Mars, le 24 Mai, 1897*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>475</sup> Montesquiou, R., 'Painters of Women – Boldini', *Les Modes*, January 1901, pp. 5-9. For more on Boldini, and also his relationship with Montesquiou, see Lees, S. Kendal, R. and Guidi, B., *Boldini in Impressionist Paris*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2009; and Charles, V., *James McNeill Whistler*, Parkstone International, 2011, p. 139.

<sup>476</sup> Montesquiou, R., 'Painters of Women – Boldini', *Les Modes*, January 1901, pp. 5-9.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid*, [http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire\\_id/count-robert-de-montesquiou-17788.html?cHash=c8b96845ae](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/count-robert-de-montesquiou-17788.html?cHash=c8b96845ae) [accessed March 2015].

appearance. This may suggest idealisation, but Léon Daudet, a contemporary of Montesquiou's attested to his remarkably unblemished look, describing him as "ageless, as though varnished for eternity, every line of his brow cleverly ironed out."<sup>478</sup> Though depicting him in profile, Blanche paints Montesquiou turning his dark eyes to the side as he stares out of the canvas directly towards the viewer. In the lapel of his jacket, Blanche paints a blue hydrangea. This is not an insignificant addition to the portrait of Montesquiou as it not only hints at the popularity of the hydrangea in the 1880s, but also the psychological state of the sitter.<sup>479</sup>

Blue hydrangeas, also known as hortensias, became popular in Paris during the 1880s and quickly became the Symbolist flower *par excellence* because of their oriental design, unnatural colour and drained appearance.<sup>480</sup> Montesquiou or 'Hortensiou' as he was dubbed, adopted the flower as his personal emblem, along with the bat, and owned seven pastels and paintings of blue hydrangeas by Sargent's protégé, Paul Helleu.<sup>481</sup> He also published a volume of poems entitled *Les hortensias bleu*, and on 21 May 1897, Montesquiou threw a party to celebrate the publication of the verses. Dr Pozzi attended and remembered the occasion,

The room was entirely decorated on the theme of blue hortensias, tablecloth, silverware, plates ornamented with the chosen flower of the master of the house ... Inlaid furniture showed incrustations of hortensias

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<sup>478</sup> Léon Daudet on Montesquiou recounted by Cornelia Otis Skinner, 'Robert de Montesquiou: The Magnificent Dandy' in *Elegant Wits and Grand Horizontals: Paris la belle époque*, London: Michael Joseph, 1962, p. 45.

<sup>479</sup> Although he does not paint the flower itself, the same colour blue of the hydrangea is also in Boldini's portrait of Montesquiou in the handle of the cane.

<sup>480</sup> According to Edgar Munhall, this was the date they first appeared in Parisian markets. Munhall, E., *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat*, New York: Frick Collection, 1995, p. 36. Michelet recalls their introduction to France when he was forty (1838) in *Love*, p.332.

<sup>481</sup> Flament, *Le bal du Pré-Catelan*, p. 228. See also Munhall, E., *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat*, New York: Frick Collection, 1995; Syme, A., *A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-Siècle Art*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

... Vases, curtains had hortensia motifs.<sup>482</sup>

According to Montesquiou the “troubling clusters” of hortensia stood for melancholy, neurasthenia and alienation.<sup>483</sup> The hydrangea, with its multiple delicate blossoms held above coarse, strongly veined leaves, also suggested the physical fragility of the neurasthenic, with taut nerves clearly visible, as it were, beneath the skin.<sup>484</sup> The signification he invented for this symbol of the ‘unnatural’ took hold and other artists and writers, such as Proust, Sargent and Blanche used this symbol in their work of the 1880s and 1890s.

It is clear to see from Montesquiou’s portrait that Blanche was developing a distinctive body of portraiture that identified neurasthenic personalities and accentuated their psychological peculiarities or maladies. It could be argued that flowers in a lapel are too subtle to make this claim, however, Alison Syme in *A Touch of Blossom* argues the significance of nineteenth-century botany through the work of John Singer Sargent. Using evidence from diverse realms of visual culture (cartoons, greeting cards, costume designs) she lays claim to the hortensia’s sickly cultural resonances and states that artists “could not have been unaware of their cultural significance.”<sup>485</sup> Blanche devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to his practice and explored all possibilities in

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<sup>482</sup> « La salle est entièrement décorée sur le thème des Hortensias bleus, nappe, argenterie, assiettes s’ornent de la fleur choisie par le Maître de céans ... Les meubles de marqueterie montrent des incrustations d’hortensias ... Les vases, les rideaux sont à motifs d’hortensias. » Vanderpooten, *Samuel Pozzi*, p. 206.

<sup>483</sup> Montesquiou, R., *Les pas effacés*, 1907, pp. 103-105, cited and translated in Munhall, E., *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat*, New York: Frick Collection, 1995, p.332.

<sup>484</sup> For one of Montesquiou’s drawings of blue hortensias, see Munhall, E., *Whistler and Montesquiou, The Butterfly and the Bat*, New York: Frick Collection, 1995, p. 35. Gallé and Montesquiou co-designed a dresser and exhibited it at the 1892 Salon, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, pp. 233-34. Montesquiou had himself photographed a number of times with hortensias. One print from 1885, *Les Mains de Robert de Montesquiou*, is a close up of his ringed hands and one umbel; see Philippe Thiébaud, ed., *Robert de Montesquiou ou l’art de paraître*, exh. cat. Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999, pp. 54-56.

<sup>485</sup> Syme, A., *A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-Siècle Art*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 181.

style and technique, but with the sole aim of expanding his repertoire and finding a new means to capture the character or, as he described it, the ‘soul’ of his sitters. Financially independent and not reliant on money gained from commissions, Blanche was free to experiment stylistically at his own expense. In doing so, he tested the parameters of Realism, moving towards an altogether different style. This was described by one of his contemporaries, the critic Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, as “psychological impressionism.” He wrote,

For him, the portrait is not a highly dramatised biography inherent in everything, which is what Baudelaire says, but it results in a series of acute and penetrating observations; an intuition and technical mastery is put into play. An extreme professional security and rapid execution are dedicated to it in the service of some kind of psychological Impressionism.<sup>486</sup>

For Vaudoyer, Blanche was able to bring together observation and intuition in a way that was to prove highly distinctive. Combined with his advanced social skills – seen in how he put his sitters at ease and his impressive technical abilities, this made Blanche a formidable portraitist – a psychological impressionist. We might consider psychological impressionism as a technique developed by Blanche that allowed the viewer to experience the artist’s view of their sitter’s private, emotional world, deepening their awareness of both personalities. We should reconsider at this point McPherson’s discussion of Blanche’s *écriture*, a method involving “direct observation and physiognomic and psychological analysis with a modernist aesthetic”; ‘psychological impressionism’ is what she might have had in mind when she reflected on Blanche’s

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<sup>486</sup> « Pour lui, le portrait n’est pas la ‘biographie dramatisée inhérente à tout être’ dont parle Baudelaire, mais résultat d’une suite d’inspections aigues, pénétrantes; la mise en jeu d’une intuition très consciente, très dirigée. Une extrême sûreté de métier, une étonnante promptitude d’exécution sont vouées par lui au service d’une sorte d’impressionnisme psychologique. » Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintures, pastels et lithographs*, Paris: Hotel de Jean Charpentier, 1924.

painterly technique. More recently, François Bergot, curator at the musées de Rouen, has also insisted upon the psychological complexity of Blanche's portraits, which he argues give a "fugitive impression while at the same time attempting to capture the essence of the sitter."<sup>487</sup>

Blanche represented his sitters with quick, yet considered, strokes of the brush, marrying a direct, authoritative technique with splashes of vivid colour as can be seen in his portraits of *Autopotrait à la casquette*, 1890, *Auguste Rodin*, 1904, and *Percy Grainger*, 1906 (Figures 5.12 and 1.1). Every brushstroke went straight to the heart of the matter, and reprises were done with confidence (qualities lacking in his very early works). Using his brush as a drawing tool, he sketched the outlines with a supple, dashing touch and added the highlights with one deft movement, as seen in his *Portrait of Thomas Hardy*, 1906, and *Anna comtesse de Noailles*, 1912 (Figures 5.13 and 5.14). Utilising a rapid brushstroke, Blanche depicts Anna de Noailles seated against a barely suggested grey and brown background, dressed head to toe in black. Her right hand reaches up to rest on her cheek, her fingers distorted and bent at unnatural angles with the hint of a blue ring on her finger. Blanche has focused his attention on detailing her face; with her dark, heavy eyes glancing off to her left she avoids the gaze of the viewer. A bold, quickly realised portrait, Blanche's observations of his sitter and fast execution embody modernity. As art historian Anthea Callen argues in *The Art of Impressionism*, modernity laid in the painters' material practices, and when combined with the artists' subject matter, "bold brushwork, unpolished, sketchy surfaces" established the modern as

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<sup>487</sup> « Impression fugitive en meme temps à essayer de capturer l'essence du modèle » François Bergot, « Mes modèles », exhibition catalogue *Jacques-Émile Blanche, peintre*, Rouen: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 15 October 1997-15 February 1998, pp. 169-186 and 188-197. And « Tout un monde ... », « Portraits-souvenirs », unpublished texts by J.-É. Blanche, presented and annotated by François Bergot, pp. 203-218.



visual.<sup>488</sup> Blanche's brushstrokes serve as a vehicle for depicting perception and emotion. His spontaneous flicks of paint and agility provide highlights and shadows to his sitters, while at the same time creating intimate and even profound images that we might term psychological portraits.

### **Men in Black: Individual and Collective Identity**

By 1890 Blanche had further expanded his interest in portraiture and was also involved in exhibition changes; he had become a major proponent of and contributor to a new Salon system which, under the name of the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, advocated newer tendencies and a move away from realism and academic classicism.<sup>489</sup>

Perhaps no other portrait better conveys the new sense of character analysis combined with the quality of tonal painting to create an aesthetic mood than Blanche's portrait of himself and Rafael de Ochoa, a Spanish gentleman painter who had become a close friend of Blanche's in the 1880s. In this work (Figure 5.15), Blanche has depicted himself as a dandy, dressed in his finest suit, holding a palette and brushes in one hand as he sets out to complete a painting. Blanche's air of aloofness, even haughtiness, is conveyed by the way he holds his head and by the expression on his face. He seems to suggest that he has established his place within the art world and Parisian society. The tightly constricted space, which forces the viewer to look up at the painter, as well as the sense of airlessness to the room decorated with other framed works, exudes the atmosphere of the artist

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<sup>488</sup> Callen, A., *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique and the Making of Modernity*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>489</sup> Blanche exhibited at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts from 1890. For more on French Salons see Jensen, R., *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Princeton University Press, 1994; Brauers, F., *Rivals and Conspirators: The Paris Salons and the Modern Art Centre*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014,

aesthete, inseparable from his studio. This constructed world of a painter within his own environment is further reinforced by the presence of Rafael de Ochoa, who leans against Blanche's back grasping his shoulder with his long, extended fingers, while holding a cigar at the same time.

Culturally, cigarettes and cigars tended to be pleasures shared only by men as they were considered unsuitable for ladies.<sup>490</sup> Blanche wrote of Ochoa as the man who “had the same tendencies” as himself – a position difficult to document given the scant amount on information that can be found on their friendship.<sup>491</sup> The presence of a cigar in between Ochoa's fingers recalls the pastel portrait by Sargent of *Paul Helleu*, 1880, who holds a cigarette delicately between his thumb and forefinger in a cloud of blue smoke (Figure 5.16). Sargent often depicted his artist friends holding cigarettes or cigars in paintings and drawings, and art historian Alison Syme takes her analysis of the cigarette further by noting that the cigarette was slang for penis and for those like Sargent who “partook of fags, cigarettes and cigars were a signifier of invert desire via their floral associations.”<sup>492</sup> When Blanche exhibited his portrait with Ochoa at the Société Nationale

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<sup>490</sup> This is not to say that women did not smoke, of course. Sargent's 1885 painting *The Candelabrum* plays on the suggestion of female impropriety: a wisp of smoke rises from an empty candelabrum wreathed with white roses; behind these a woman is holding something, presumably but not definitely a cigarette.

<sup>491</sup> « De mêmes tendances que les miennes » Blanche, 1949, p. 166. A search of the archives and Blanche's ties with the Madrazo family has yielded very little information on the specific relationship between the men, in particular a homosexual relationship. Ochoa seems to have also been a close friend of Marcel Proust, but again little information has been found to substantiate this relationship either. Ochoa was mentioned as having exhibited in ‘Exposition des 33’ by Ernest Hoschede in *L'Événement*, January 2, 1888. Hoschede noted: « Je retrouve de M. Ochoa ‘Le Pont Solférino’ qui m’avait arrêté au dernier Salon. C’est un artiste doué, dont un pastel, ‘Portrait de Femme’, en costume bleu et fourrure grise, est tout à fait charmant. » Blanche mentions Ochoa in *La Pêche aux Souvenirs* on a few occasions. One notation is important, « En 1884, Rafael de Ochoa allait à Madrid chez son oncle Madrazo, conservateur au Prado. Après une attente due à ce que l’occasion m’avait manqué de faire encore un voyage avec un ami, et de memes tendances que les miennes, je vis Velasquez, Goya, El Greco dans une lumière natale... » p. 166.

<sup>492</sup> Syme, A., *A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-Siècle Art*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 42. See also, Delvau, *Dictionnaire érotique moderne*, Bale, 1850, pp. 97-98; Guiraud, *Dictionnaire historique*, Payot, 1978, p. 227. Homosexuality was associated with neurasthenia in medical terms during the nineteenth century through its

des Beaux-Arts in 1897 he was recognised as one of the most cultivated young portraitists of his generation.<sup>493</sup> Blanche was seen as a painter capable of extracting from reality in order to create an image according to his own tastes and inclinations in a manner that still honoured artistic tradition.

Blanche's portrait of Walter Sickert, 1898, also epitomises some of these new concepts (Figure 5.17). Positioned close to the frontal plane of the canvas, the space in which the sitter is situated is severely restricted and flattened. Blanche has emphasised the dark clothing, which blends almost completely into the dark background of the canvas. The lack of three-dimensional form and the adherence to a muted colour range, largely conveyed in tones of black, grey, brown and white, is typical of Blanche's portraiture at this time and suggests comparisons to Whistler and Degas, who were emerging as a major stimulus to the type of portraiture he wanted to create.<sup>494</sup> It is clear in these canvases that Blanche, while still preoccupied with formal aesthetic changes and abbreviations in composition, gave his sitters a psychological presence. Through the presentation of the composition, the body language of the sitter and his application of paint, Blanche was able to successfully depict the emotional and mental state of the person whose portrait he was painting, as well as portraying a physical likeness. It was as

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representation of "regression to a primitive state and 'nervous collapse' in the face of the feverish activity of modern life." The hereditary and congenital understandings of homosexuality in sexology aligned it with space and the physical environment. This is because the homosexual was placed in opposition to the heterosexual in terms of the evolution process and the civilising march into the future. Krafft-Ebing, Forel and Féré all suggested homosexuals should not reproduce. In addition, the degenerative, neurasthenic and contagious associations that tied homosexuality and sexual pathology to the urban developments of the city in the last thirty years of the century, brought with them heightened concerns about excessive consumption and fears that the chaotic centre of the imperial city was symbolizing anything but thrift, productivity and order. See Cook, M., *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 80-83.

<sup>493</sup> François Bergot, « Mes modèles », exhibition catalogue *Jacques-Émile Blanche, peintre*, Rouen: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 15 October 1997-15 February 1998, pp. 189.

<sup>494</sup> The influence of Whistler in painting and printmaking at the end of the nineteenth-century was extensive. For further reference see, Caldwell, J. Oswaldo Rodriguez, R. and Luhrs, K., (eds.) *From Realism to Symbolism, Whistler and His World*, ex.cat., New York: Columbia University, 1971.

if he had come of age as a portraitist, no longer hesitant to reveal the unique personalities, feelings, moods and emotions of the people he depicted, while also posing them aesthetically.

With his career well established and his portrait style in sharper focus, Blanche often completed studies and portraits of his own inner circle of friends or figures he found interesting; the best portraits by Blanche show acute penetration of character. In the mid 1890s Blanche completed his *Portrait of Arthur Symons*, 1895, a poet and one of the main recorders of changes in literature and Symbolism at the time (Figure 5.18).<sup>495</sup> During the *fin-de-siècle* Symons built up an impressive intellectual and social network that was comprised of the most prominent figures of the age on both sides of the Channel, including but not limited to Aubrey Beardsley, George Moore, Walter Pater, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and Joris-Karl Huysmans. If Blanche's portrait conveys some of the intensity of the dandy, it also captures a sense of personality that one would associate with the best portraits of Manet and Degas. By bringing the figure closer to the frontal plane, and by cutting the pose and hat at the edge of the canvas, Blanche caught the sullen, brooding, melancholic expression of the poet. Sitting hunched forward in a dirty yellow chair that is pushed up against a dark red wooden panel, Symons has placed his right hand under his chin and holds his hat in the other hand. Appearing tired with dark lines under his eyes, his weary stare directly confronts the viewer. His pale face, skin and dark red hair stand out against an otherwise non-descript background and his dark clothing appear once again flattened by Blanche against the canvas. Symons drooping bow tie matches that of his moustache and expression. Blanche's carefully considered and perceptive brush strokes used on Symon's face serve as a vehicle for depicting the

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<sup>495</sup> Symons, A., *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, London, 1899.

melancholic poet's sunken eyes and hollow cheeks. The flecks of purple and red under his eyes and chin using tiny streaks of paint are contrasted against the larger sweeping brushstrokes Blanche used on Symon's clothing and hair. Finally Blanche used quicker, lighter brushstrokes and took up less paint on the brush in order to create the washed out and faded painted background Blanche places Symons in. By combining these three different techniques, Blanche is effectively able to convey the inner feelings of his sitter and in turn creates a powerful, modern, psychological portrait.

At the same time Blanche was painting Symons' portrait, Symons was working on his 1896 edition of *Silhouettes* which includes the sonnet 'Nerves',<sup>496</sup>

The modern malady of love is nerves.  
Love, once a simple madness, now observes  
The stages of his passionate disease,  
And is twice sorrowful because he sees,  
Inch by inch entering, the fatal knife.  
O health of simple minds, give me your life,  
And let me, for one midnight, cease to hear  
The clock for ever ticking in my ear,  
The clock that tells the minutes in my brain.  
It is not love, nor love's despair, this pain  
That shoots a witless, keener pang across  
The simple agony of love and loss.  
Nerves, nerves! O folly of a child who dreams  
Of heaven, and, walking in the darkness, screams.<sup>497</sup>

Symons' emphasis on the nervous system and, more particularly, neurasthenia, illuminates the poem's context of modernity and nods to the unremitting demands of urban life. The images of disease, madness and nerves in his work also reveal the nature

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<sup>496</sup> *Silhouettes* was first published in 1892 and then revised publication produced in 1896 which included revisions and previously omitted poems. *Silhouettes* largely features impressionistic lyrics depicting quotidian or sleazy urban scenes inspired by the Impressionist movement in the visual arts. For more on Symons see, Shiralian, S., *Arthur Symons and Decadent Lyric: Art in the Age of Urban Modernity*, UCLA Departmental Honors Thesis, 2013.

<sup>497</sup> Symons, A., 'Nerves', *Silhouettes*, 2 ed., 1896.

of Symons' own psychological health; it was his restless excitement, seemingly 'overstimulated nerves' and feelings of disharmony that led to his own mental breakdown in 1908.<sup>498</sup> Blanche's portrait brings his style as a psychological impressionist into sharp focus: Symons' had an intensity and a passion for the 'new' in literature and the visual arts that had to be conveyed through the production of an image that others would recognise as a psychological portrait – an image that could only be realised as a painting.

### **Industrial Madness: Invasion of Photography**

The late nineteenth century saw the coming of age of photography, which developed rapidly and by mid-century was regarded as posing a serious threat to artists, in particular professional portrait painters. As Baudelaire mentioned in his 1859 Salon review,

The photographic industry was the refuge of every would-be painter, every painter too ill-endowed or too lazy to complete his studies, this universal infatuation bore not only the mark of a blindness, an imbecility, but also had the air of a vengeance.<sup>499</sup>

During the following decade, the majority believed that the essentially mechanical nature of the medium restricted the intellectual, creative qualities essential to the formulation of works of art. While the general public in the 1840s refused to accept photography as art, there were individual voices of opposition. In his 1844 manual, the Lyonnais daguerreotypist J. Thierry laid the foundation for future defences of the photographic medium as art,

[Photography] is not, as it is generally believed by the public, simply an easy, coarse, mechanical process that anyone, with a little practice can do as well as well as anyone else; it is a veritable art. No matter what is done,

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<sup>498</sup> Beckson, K., *The memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s*, University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978.

<sup>499</sup> 'The Salon of 1859, The Modern Public and Photography', p. 270; also cited in Frascina, F., Harrison, C., and Paul, D., (eds.), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Harper & Row: The Open University, 1982, p.19.

one can always recognise the author's touch in a daguerreotype, as at the sight of a painting a slightly educated eye can recognise the brush that produced it.<sup>500</sup>

With the advent of photography, the portrait was effectively democratized, and portrait photography became a flourishing industry. By the late 1850s inexpensive photographic portraits had become widely available in the form of *cartes-de-visite*. Moreover, photography purportedly introduced a new, objective form of vision that was able to record the visible world with an unprecedented degree of detail. Indeed, hostile critics routinely faulted realist artists and writers for following nature too closely and for creating works that resembled daguerreotypes. The standing of photography in the realm of the arts was a familiar discussion for both the lay public and the artistic community in Paris. In the 1860s, there were those who believed unequivocally in photography's right to join the ranks alongside painting, sculpture and architecture. Disdéri, a studio operator of the boulevard and inventor of the *carte-de-visite*, remarked in his *L'Art de la photographie*,

We think that the time has come to attempt a step forward and to march toward definitively and finally making photography enter the paths of pure art. No one ever thought photography in its principles and goals was condemned to stay eternally in the limited domain of mechanical processes. It has higher ambitions; it feels itself called to a nobler role.<sup>501</sup>

At mid-century, photography was considered both a transformative technology and a multifaceted sociocultural discourse embodying the contradictions of modernity.

Associated with scientific and technological progress by its proponents, it was denounced by its enemies as a mechanical form of reproduction whose excessive verisimilitude

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<sup>500</sup> Thierry, J., *Instruction photographique*, Paris 1844 quoted in Thomas, R., 'Review: Cezanne: The Early Years 1859-1872', *Art History*, 12, no. 1, 1989, pp. 129-35.

<sup>501</sup> *L'art de la photographie*, 1862 quoted in McCauley, 1985.

threatened to corrupt public taste. Photography's perceived truth to optical reality allied it, for better and or worse, with positivism and the naturalist school in painting and literature. Although its educational value and technological applications were widely acknowledged from the outset, it was perceived by hostile critics, such as Baudelaire, as a sort of anti-art that threatened to destroy the artistic imagination.

Since photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire (they really believe, the mad fools!), then photography and Art are the same thing. From that moment our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal. A madness, an extraordinary fanaticism took possession of all these new sun-worshippers. Strange abominations took form. [...] I know very well that some people will retort, 'The disease which you have just been diagnosing is a disease of imbeciles. What man worthy of the name of artist, and what true connoisseur, has ever confused art with industry?'<sup>502</sup>

Despite criticising photography and denouncing its artistic pretensions in his 'Salon of 1859', Baudelaire was friends with two of its leading practitioners, Nadar and Carjat, and posed repeatedly for the camera in the 1850s and 1860s. The photographs of Baudelaire, which document his public persona as a dandy and poseur, offer striking variations in mood and expression that attest to the difficulty of recording Baudelaire's physiognomy. In fact, they could be characterised as "opaque disclosures" in which the sitter remains unknowable despite the pretext of an interactive regard.<sup>503</sup> They show how portrait photographers faced many of the same challenges as portrait painters in attempting to record the character and social status of the sitter in a single, condensed image. The photographic portrait did not lead to the demise of portrait painting or its material

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<sup>502</sup> 'The Salon of 1859, The Modern Public and Photography', p. 270; also cited in Frascina, F., Harrison, C., and Paul, D., (eds), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Harper & Row: The Open University, 1982, p.19

<sup>503</sup> Shawcross, N., 'Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), French poet and art critic' in Hannavy, J. (ed). *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, Routledge, 2013, pp. 119-120.



enslavement, as critics had initially feared; rather, it incited artists to explore photographic directions, in particular Degas who experimented with the medium with Blanche and other friends.

In 1895, during Degas' most intense exploration of photography, a friend of the artist wrote, "these days, Degas abandons himself entirely to his new passion for photography."<sup>504</sup> Degas' photographic figure studies, portraits of friends and family, and self-portraits – especially those in which lamp-lit figures emerge from darkness – are imbued with a nature more evocative of the psychological than physical.<sup>505</sup> Most were made in the evenings, when Degas transformed dinner parties into photographic soirees, requisitioning the living rooms of his friend, arranging oil lamps, and directing the poses of dinner guests enlisted as models. "He went back and forth [...] running from one end of the room to the other with an expression of infinite happiness," wrote Daniel Halévy, describing another evening as:

At half-past eleven everybody left; Degas, surrounded by three laughing girls, carried his camera as proudly as a child carrying a rifle.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Degas's major surviving photographs are little known even among devotees of the artist's paintings and pastels, despite the insightful volume by Malcolm Daniel, *Edgar Degas: Photographer*, 1998 which accompanied an exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>505</sup> By the time he began making photographs in 1895, Degas was 61 years old and in a burst of creative energy that lasted less than five years, he made a body of photographs of which fewer than 50 survive. For more see Malcolm Daniel, with essays from Eugenia Parry and Theodore Reff, *Edgar Degas: Photographer*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998.

<sup>506</sup> Daniel, M., *Edgar Degas: Photographer*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998. Lively eyewitness accounts of Degas's photographic activity from the journals of Daniel Halévy and Julie Manet, as well as from Degas's own letters, are included in Malcolm Daniel's essay, "The Atmosphere of Lamps or Moonlight" which presents a fascinating account of Degas's brief but passionate embrace of photography. Daniel explores the psychological connection between events in the aging artist's life and his decision to take up the camera and demonstrates the aesthetic connections between Degas's photographs and his work in other media. Eugenia Parry's essay, "Edgar Degas's Photographic Theater," illuminates the fertile interplay between painting, posing, theatrical direction, and photography in Degas's work, and Theodore Reff, in "Degas Chez Tasset," sheds light on the hitherto barely known Guillaume Tasset and his daughter Delphine, from whom Degas sought photographic supplies, advice, and services. Finally, this volume includes a scholarly catalogue raisonné and census of prints, an essential tool for further study of Degas's photographs.

Four such photographs representing close friends were made after a dinner party in December 1895. Among those pictured are Auguste Renoir; the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, his wife, Marie, and daughter, Geneviève; Julie Manet (daughter of Manet's brother and the painter Berthe Morisot); and her cousins Paule and Jeannie Gobillard. In one interior Degas captures Mallarmé leaning against a wall, his eyes directed downward at Renoir. The painter, tilting his head back and fixing his gaze toward the viewer, is seated cross-legged with arms gently folded. Demonstrating the photographers' complex orchestration, Degas also places himself, his camera, and the flare of his lamp within the composition. They are reflected in the mirror behind Renoir, along with Mallarmé's wife and daughter. In another photograph titled, *Self-Portrait with Zoé Closier* (Figure 5.19), most likely taken in autumn of 1895, at the artist's Paris apartment, his housekeeper stands behind Degas looking directly at the camera with an expression of indulgent concern.

Degas often illuminated his subjects with a single bright light source. The figures seem to emerge from darkness. In a series of individual portraits he made of Daniel and Louise Halévy in the autumn of 1895, each sitter is pictured in the same armchair in their home, under this Rembrandtesque light. They are seen in original contact prints (about 3 x 4 inches) and in enlargements. Altogether, these images show the artist's picture-making process and reveal Degas manipulations of space, scale, focus, and emotional effect. In *Louise Halévy Reading to Degas* (Figure 5.20), another enlargement from a contact print done about the same time, Degas conveys unusual intimacy. It shows a vulnerable man's dependence upon a friend in reading the newspaper at a time when his eyesight was failing.

Tamar Garb states in *The Painted Face* that photography could amply achieve and mechanically reproduce reality without the exercising of imagination or aesthetic control.<sup>507</sup> From the standpoint of artistic practice, this could be characterised as the difference between imitation and (re)presentation. Of course, the protocols of portrait photography, in particular the idea of dynamic pose captured at a glance, had already infiltrated some portraits in the 1870s, to their detriment as some thought, but few believed that it could usurp painting's elevated mission of imbricating the specific with the generic. Painted portraiture, they maintained, was uniquely able to animate the figure, capturing a credible likeness (which encompassed more than just physical appearance) at the same time situating the model appropriately so that setting, costume and demeanour revealed both the identity of the person portrayed and the milieu from which he or she hailed.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have placed Blanche's work in its artistic and cultural context. In doing so, my hope is that I have revealed him to be a portraitist of considerable creative facility,

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<sup>507</sup> Garb, *The Painted Face*, pp. 60-61. For comments on the relationship between painted portraiture and photography, see Baignères, 'L'Exposition officielle de 1870', p. 507. The worst that a portrait could do was to convey 'the vulgar appearance of a painted photograph.' See H. Fouquier, 'Salon de 1870', *Le Français*, no. 124, 5 May 1870, n.p. Marius Chaumelin drew on the writing of Thoré in his repudiation of photography's capacity to capture 'nature' in all its dynamism and energy. Artists, he wrote, had to guard against confusing servile imitation of positive reality, which is the province of industry and craft, with the free interpretation of truth, which is the province of art. « L'artiste ... n'est pas seulement un oeil comme le daguerreotype, un miroir fatal et passif, qui reproduit physiquement l'image, qu'on lui présente; c'est une forme mouvante et créatrice qui féconde à son tour la créatrice extérieure. La nature est la mere voluptueuse qui provoque la passion de son amant, et l'art est la fruite de cette union. » M. Chaumelin in 'Salon de 1870', *La Presse*, 13 May 1870, n.p. For a recent discussions on the relationship between painting and photography in nineteenth-century portraiture, see McPherson, H., *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; John Gage, "Photographic Likeness" in Joanna Woodall, ed. *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997; Shearer West, "Portraiture and Modernism" in *Portraiture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

attuned to the anxieties of his sitters and their ‘nervous’ age. As art critic George Waldemar stated,

The human being for Blanche is not a model, a subject, a motif; it is the vehicle of his thought as a painter, it is the medium through which he expresses himself, it is the vocabulary, the alphabet of his art.<sup>508</sup>

Blanche built upon the innovations of avant-garde artists from the 1860s and 1870s whilst always remaining sympathetic to the traditions of the Old Masters, just as other artists such as Manet and Degas did.<sup>509</sup> He never tried to disguise his indebtedness to such masters as Velázquez through his teachings from Manet, but what he learnt from them and his contemporaries was how to gain the authority and mastery of the brush he needed to follow his painterly and psychological intuitions. Far from trying to copy, Blanche merely wished to perfect the artistic qualities with which he was endowed. He was no slave to tradition; rather, his portraits of men and women have an unexpected sense of modernity and psychology that makes them thoroughly worth studying. In his *Salon du 1859* Baudelaire declared the French artist must consider a number of aspects when painting the portrait, including the painterly technique and the texture applied to the surface of the artwork, as it was a means of the artist providing the viewers with a window into the sitter’s inner world. In the words of Baudelaire, ‘A portrait! What could be simpler and more complicated, more obvious and more profound?’<sup>510</sup> Having introduced Blanche’s neurasthenic portraiture, I will now turn to examine in depth two case studies on particularly interesting, neurasthenic individuals who both had their portraits painted by Blanche: Marcel Proust and the comtesse de Castiglione.

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<sup>508</sup> Waldemar, G., ‘Jacques-Émile Blanche et Helleu’, *ADA*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1933, pp. 58-59.

<sup>509</sup> Manet never tried to hide his indebtedness to such masters as Velázquez and Hals, while Degas admired Ingres and Velázquez. See Rewald, J., *The Impressionist Brush*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974.

<sup>510</sup> Baudelaire, C., ‘Portraiture’ in *Salon of 1859*, p. 273.

## Chapter 6

### Case Study: Marcel Proust

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Disease and medicine assumed a critical place in the life and work of the famed French novelist Marcel Proust. Born to middle-class parents in Paris on 10 July 1871, his mother Jeanne Weil came from a rich, cultured Jewish family, and his father, Dr Achille-Adrien Proust, was a distinguished epidemiologist, director of service at the Ministry of Public Health, and professor.<sup>511</sup> Proust's younger brother Robert followed in their father's footsteps and also trained to become a doctor.<sup>512</sup> Consequently, Proust was immersed in a medical atmosphere at home; his contemporaries often observed his identification with doctors. As his housekeeper Céleste Albaret recalled, Proust was frequently inspired to write medical prescriptions for friends. He once declared, "I am more of a doctor than the doctors."<sup>513</sup>

Proust was a weak child and his first manifestation of neurasthenia occurred in 1881 at the age of nine, when he suffered a violent asthma attack during a walk with his parents in the Bois de Boulogne.<sup>514</sup> Subsequent attacks of intense breathlessness followed, causing his worried parents to sit by his bedside throughout the night propping up his

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<sup>511</sup> Strauss, B., 'Achille-Adrien Proust, M.D.: Doctor to River Basins', *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 50, 1974, pp. 833-836.

<sup>512</sup> Dr Robert Proust specialized in gynecology and titled his dissertation 'Female Genital Surgery'. From 1904 to 1914 he worked as Dr Samuel Pozzi's assistant at the Hôpital Broca during which time he studied 'andrologie' (the physiology and pathology of male genitalia) and gynecology. Dr Pozzi was one of the models for Proust's fictional Dr Cottard and had his image painted by John Singer Sargent in a remarkable full-length portrait.

<sup>513</sup> Albaret, C., *Monsieur Proust*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973 cited in Julien Bogousslavsky, 'Marcel Proust's Lifelong Tour of the Parisian Neurological Intelligentsia: From Brissaud and Dejerine to Sollier and Babinski', *European Neurology*, 57, 2007, p. 129.

<sup>514</sup> Maurois, A., *Portrait of a Genius*, Carroll & Graf Pub, 1996, p. 17.

pillows with large medical dictionaries.<sup>515</sup> Proust likened his first experience of breathlessness as a child to a feeling of panic and loss; he wrote,

A child who has been breathing since birth, without being aware of it, does not realise how essential to life is the air that swells his chest so gently... But what happens, if, during a high fever or a convulsion, he starts to suffocate? His entire being will struggle desperately to stay alive, to recapture his lost tranquillity that will return only with the air from which, unbeknownst to him, it was inseparable.<sup>516</sup>

Partly as a result of his eldest son's sensitive disposition, Adrien Proust held strong views on the way children should be brought up. In the two books he published on hygiene in 1881 and 1883, he maintained that people – especially children – were harmed by impure air, noise and contact with crowds.<sup>517</sup> Consequently he moved his family away from the centre of Paris to the *haute bourgeoisie* suburb of Auteuil.

Proust began his studies at the Lycée Condorcet in 1882. However, his early schooling was sporadic, down to a combination of inattention, *manque de volonté* – a lack of willpower related to anxiety – and prolonged absences due to ill health.<sup>518</sup> His asthma also gradually worsened during his adolescence, before slightly remitting, to worsen again from the age of 23 onwards when it started to have more of an influence on his lifestyle.<sup>519</sup> In spite of his medical conditions, Proust completed a year of compulsory military service at Orléans aged 19, yet just five years later he was placed on medical

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<sup>515</sup> Hayman, R., *Proust, A Biography*, London: Heinemann, 1990, p. 18.

<sup>516</sup> « Un enfant qui depuis sa naissance respire sans y avoir jamais pris garde, ne sait pas combine l'air qui gonfle si doucement sa poitrine ... est essential à sa vie. Vient-il, pendant un accès de fièvre, dans une convulsion, à étouffer? Dans l'effort désespéré de son être, c'est Presque pour sa vie, qu'il lute, c'est pour sa tranquillité perdue qu'il ne retrouvera qu'avec l'air duquel il ne la savait pas inséparable. » Kolb, P., *L'Indifférent*, Paris: Gallimard, 1978, pp. 42-3.

<sup>517</sup> Proust, A., *Traité d'hygiene*, Paris, 1881; *Éléments d'hygiène*, Paris, 1883.

<sup>518</sup> This well-known school located in the rue de Caumartin changed its name in January 1883 from Lycée Fontanes to Lycée Condorcet just 3 months after Proust began there.

<sup>519</sup> For more information of Proust's asthmatic complaints see Straus, B., *The Maladies of Marcel Proust: Doctors and Diseases in His Life and Work*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980, pp. 8-12.

leave from his job at the Bibliothèque Mazarine.<sup>520</sup> He published his first works, *Portraits de Peintres* and *Plaisirs et les Jours* in 1896, while his unpublished work from this period, *Jean Santeuil* (an autobiographical sketch which was never completed), remained unknown until the 1950s.<sup>521</sup> Proust lived the life of a dandy, attended Parisian salons and took an active role in the Dreyfus affair, like many other artists and intellectuals. It was only upon the death of his father in 1903 and then his mother in 1905 that Proust gradually withdrew from society. Locking himself away in his famous cork-lined bedroom in an apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann, Proust spent much of his time dedicated to writing, introspection and seeking out a range of medical treatments for his ill health and asthma attacks.

Proust's asthma has been the subject of detailed discussions in the secondary scholarship, however while it was, and still is today, associated with allergies and hay fever – and there is no doubt that it was a common, yet severe form of organic bronchial asthma – asthma was considered to be a manifestation of neurasthenia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>522</sup> Asthma was, in effect, Proust's first neurasthenic symptom, but it was not the only one as his list of further neurasthenic complaints was long: bad digestion, insomnia, cardiac spasms, headaches, back pain, dizziness, gait imbalance, physical awkwardness, slurred speech, memory loss, thermal

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<sup>520</sup> Carter, W. C., *Proust: A Life*, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 586. The French congress passed a law regarding military service that ended one year of voluntary enlistment and established obligatory service of three years. The new law provided a short grace period during which young men could still sign up for one year. Proust was among the many who rushed to sign up.

<sup>521</sup> Under the patronage of Mme Arman, a friend of Anatole France, Proust published his first book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, a collection of short stories, essays and poems. It was not very successful. In the autumn 1895 Proust began writing a novel he abandoned in 1899, however, despite remaining unfinished *Jean Santeuil* was published in 1952 as it contains many of the themes Proust later explored in his most successful and profound work, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, 1913-1927.

<sup>522</sup> See work by Falliers, C.J., 'The literary genius and the many maladies of Marcel Proust' *J Asthma*, 23, 1986, pp. 157-164; Sharma, O.P., 'Marcel Proust (1871-1922): reassessment of his asthma and other maladies', *European Respiratory Journal*, 15, 2000, pp. 958-960; Straus, B., *The Maladies of Marcel Proust: Doctors and Diseases in His Life and Work*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980.

dysregulation and ‘general weakness’, which often kept him bedridden for several days at a time.<sup>523</sup> Proust’s neurasthenia also explains why he sought the medical advice of so many famous neurologists and neuropsychiatrists of his time, including Dr Dieulafoy, Dr Vaquez and Dr Brissaud.<sup>524</sup> He also met Cotard; a fellow student of his father, and through his friend, Jacques-Émile Blanche, Proust also sought medical assistance from Dr Emile Blanche.<sup>525</sup>

Following his premature death in 1922, Proust became famous for his literary accomplishments, in particular his novel *In Search of Lost Time*. A consideration of Proust’s neurasthenic condition, rather than just asthma, is interesting because this illness of the body and mind influenced Proust’s emotions, lifestyle, attitudes to doctors and choice of friends. In this case-study chapter I will bring together biography, medical and social history, art-historical analysis and critical interpretation in order to paint a richer, more intricate picture of Proust and his obsession with his health through the portrait Blanche painted of him in 1892. In turn, this chapter will not only provide an understanding of Proust’s life and the complexities of his ailments, but also an exploration of his friendship with Blanche. I will visually analyse Blanche’s portrait of Proust, paying attention to its technique and its critical reception. Ultimately, I will consider how it

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<sup>523</sup> Bogousslavsky, J., *Neurological Disorders in Famous Artists*, Karger Medical and Scientific Publishers, 2007, pp. 95-98. See also: Béhar, S., *Cahiers Marcel Proust: L’univers médical de Marcel Proust*, Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1970; Painter, G.D., *Marcel Proust*, Paris: Mecure de France, 1979. In 1904, Dr Merklen, a chest specialist at Hôpital Laennec, stated to Proust that his asthma had become a ‘nervous habit’, and recommended that he consult with Dr Paul Dubois in Berne. At the same period, Proust asked Dr Léon Faisans, the physician in whom he had the highest degree of confidence, whether he should consult with Jules Dejerine, since his asthma was ‘nervous’. See Tadié J.-Y., *Marcel Proust. Biographies*, Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1996.

<sup>524</sup> Tadié, J.-Y., *Marcel Proust, Biographies*, Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1996, p. 663.

<sup>525</sup> Dr Cotard, his name is still associated with the ‘syndrome of negations’ and to which Proust later added a ‘t’, modifying it into Cottard, the most important medical character of his novel.



reflects the complexities and ambiguities of the French modern portrait discussed in the previous chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, I will explore Proust's neurasthenic diagnosis and the work carried out on this nervous condition by his physician father, Dr Adrien Proust; I will also touch on the impact Parisian salons had on neurasthenics according to Dr Proust. I will then consider to what extent Proust engaged with treatment and the important question of whether he found any agency in his illness. In the second section of the chapter, I will look at Proust's friendship with Blanche, their network and the salons they visited. I will also examine the first pencil drawing Blanche sketched of Proust in 1891. In the third section I will analyse Blanche's 1892 *Portrait of Proust* before moving onto the final section on the radical cutting of the Proust portrait and the reception of the work.

### **Neurasthenia and Dr Adrien Proust**

Proust's letters constitute a case history of illness, in particular the correspondence he exchanged with his mother. Even when they were living in the same apartment, he wrote to her frequently because often they did not see each other, as one or the other was dining out or in seclusion.<sup>526</sup> Madame Proust was herself overanxious;<sup>527</sup> she was, therefore, overprotective and overinvolved with her son and his health. She had established a pattern of excessive concern for his physical well-being and when he neglected to mention his

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<sup>526</sup> Another important portrait sitter was Dr Proust's sister, Élizabéth Amiot, who is Aunt Léonie in *In Search of Lost Time*. Élizabéth became an imaginary invalid and, like her nephew Marcel, was a voluntary prisoner. She took to her bed, where she remained for many years, and allegedly subsisted largely on Vichy water, pepsin, lime tea, and Madeleines, the famous cakes that inspired her nephew's explorations of involuntary memory. Of interest too is description of a mother who lavishes excessive affection on her child in the mistaken hope of giving him security. This parallels Mme Proust's relations with her young son.

<sup>527</sup> Bloch-Dano, E., *Madame Proust: a biography*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

state of health in his letters, she would complain of the omission.<sup>528</sup> As such, Proust's references to his health in his letters are obsessive and numerous; his absorption in his every symptom became repetitive and he continually talked about his nervousness, his exhaustion and medication,

I slept so little that as I'd hardly slept the night before either and consequently had a fit of nervous laughing in front of the Princesse de Brancovan, which annoyed me extremely. I took a little trional this morning, to avoid having to fumigate so often. This was followed by a refreshing sleep and did me a great deal of good, which doesn't always happen. Need I tell you that this was exceptional, and that we have no thought of falling back on drugs.<sup>529</sup>

In their 1897 monograph *L'Hygiène du neurasthénique*, Drs Adrien Proust and Gilbert Ballet describe neurasthenia as being characterised by insomnia, dyspepsia, headache, irritability, and weakness of nerve elements.<sup>530</sup> They wrote the usual causes of nervous exhaustion were vexation, anxiety, disillusionment, remorse, thwarted affection, and other forms of sorrow and disquiet. The doctors also believed, in line with other French physicians of the 1880s, that neurasthenia primarily afflicted members of the upper classes, in particular those who used their brains more than their muscles. Although there is no specific reference to his son in the book, this manual reads like a case study of Proust, as the symptoms identified and discussed are strongly reminiscent of those experienced and documented by Proust and his doctors. It is particularly interesting to

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<sup>528</sup> It must not be assumed that Proust's letters to his mother only dealt with his health. He also frequently asked for money and described his needs and expenditures, though these are often for medicines and other medical purposes.

<sup>529</sup> Proust, M., '12 Sept 1899', *Letters to His Mother*, trans. Painter, G.D., Citadel Press, 1957, p. 78; Trional is a sedative or hypnotic (sleep-inducer), a central-nervous-system depressant which was mildly effective in producing sleep. Proust used Trional (along with Amyl and Valerian), all his life but there is no firm evidence he was seriously addicted to them.

<sup>530</sup> Proust, A., and Ballet, G., *L'Hygiène du neurasthénique*, Paris: Masson, 1897. Gilbert Ballet (1853-1916) was a French psychiatrist, neurologist and historian. He studied medicine in Limoges and Paris, where he became *Chef de Clinique* under Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière.

consider that Proust's neurasthenic manifestations lay precisely in his father's field of professional interests. Was neurasthenia a subject of discussion during family meals, thus influencing Marcel's symptoms, or did his father become interested in neurasthenia when he realised that Marcel was developing its symptoms? Both factors probably contributed to this particular link between father and son, which was to have a major influence on Proust's creative, literary output. In his medical study of Proust, Dr Bernard Straus explains how Proust considered himself to be a psychologist, and all his life he endeavoured to "dissect and interpret human motivation."<sup>531</sup> Proust's consideration of himself as a psychiatrist can be linked to Blanche's feelings that he too felt like a psychologist through listening to, and observing, the models who sat for his portraits. Like Blanche's portraits, interwoven in Proust's work are revealing observations of people – their emotions and their physical and psychological aberrations.<sup>532</sup> The fabric of decay and degeneracy with which he cloaked the high society of his time, did not, however, stop Proust from frequenting numerous salons and taking an active role in fashionable Parisian society of the 1880s and 1890s, when his health permitted it.

Neurasthenia was also considered in part to be the result of an excessive social life. Proust began frequenting the city's high society haunts when he was as young as 15. On one of the first occasions he was taken out to dinner, Dr Pozzi, a friend of the family but also a fashion-conscious doctor and the lover of the famous *salonnière* Madame Straus, took him to the Ritz.<sup>533</sup> The evening at the Ritz aroused Proust's appetite for more contact

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<sup>531</sup> Proust, M., *Letters to his Mother*, trans. Painter, G.D., Citadel Press, 1957 p. 146.

<sup>532</sup> On Proust as psychologist, see Bowie, M., *Proust, Freud and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Jordan, J., 'The Unconscious', in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, ed. by Richard Bales, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 100-16.

<sup>533</sup> Francis, C. and Gontier, F., *Proust et les siens*, Paris: Plon, 1981, p.114. Dr Samuel-Jean Pozzi dazzled the women of Paris in the late nineteenth century and earned himself the nickname 'the love doctor'. He was also a well respected surgeon and gynecologist who had his portrait painted by John Singer Sargent

with well-connected, rich and fashionable people in elegant surroundings. However, the salon visits, dinners, balls and soirées that typified the social calendar of privileged Parisians were thought by Dr Proust to have a detrimental effect on the nervous system by causing fatigue resulting from meals that were too long and heavy, from staying up late and losing sleep, or sleeping at irregular hours. Proust and Ballet wrote,

No man is busier, it has been said, than the one who does nothing ... More than anyone, men about town and society women are absorbed throughout the day by exigencies imposed on them by conventions and vain concern for their reputation.<sup>534</sup>

Proust was regularly attending salons by the time he was 18 and Dr Proust despaired of his son's continuous socialising, speaking repeatedly of his lack of *volonté*. He wondered about his son's popularity in society and asked a hostess of the *haute monde*, "Is he really so charming? Why is he invited out so often?"<sup>535</sup>

Dr Proust disapproved of the lifestyle his son chose to live, on medical and moral grounds, as he believed it would only enhance the neurasthenic symptoms Proust already suffered from, especially his insomnia. In his biography of Proust, Ronald Hayman notes how he would frequently arrive late to salons and soirées, often after many guests had already left, as his tensions and various anxieties contributed to his difficulty in obtaining a good night's sleep.<sup>536</sup> Proust referred to his insomnia in letters to his mother, in addition to descriptions or updates of his other ailments, while she was away from Paris staying at health resorts in the Basses-Pyrénées,

I don't know if it's the change of weather, but I've slept very little. I hope my nights are going to improve, because it prevents me from

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in 1881. Sargent's engaging portrait shows a dark, handsome man attired in a scarlet dressing gown and frilled nightshirt, standing against a background of crimson drapes.

<sup>534</sup> Proust and Ballet cited in Hayman, R., *Proust: A Biography*, Harper Collins, 1990, p. 65.

<sup>535</sup> Tadié, J-Y., *Marcel Proust, Biographies*, Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1996, p. 660.

<sup>536</sup> Hayman, R., 1900, p. 49.

cutting down my fumigations as I should like. I don't think it's the congestion that wakes me so much as the waking that gives me congestion, which comes to the same thing however, as I have to fumigate in order to get some rest. Still I'm very well in spite of that, and in particular my stomach is in perfect condition. I eat less than when you were here, and could eat ten times as much.<sup>537</sup>

His insomnia, which finally led to a complete reversal of his sleep-wake cycle, was also greatly worsened by his erratic self-medication.<sup>538</sup> Proust was an enthusiastic self-medicator, which led to him consulting a vast number of doctors for remedies to help his neurasthenia. As a patient Proust was famous for his lack of discipline as well as his constant self-administration of stimulants and sedatives, including caffeine, chloral and morphine. Anti-asthma cigarettes and pectoral powder fumigations also played a central role in his treatment plan. As Proust noted,

Our doctor, braving the disapproval of my grandmother, who could already see me dying a drunkard's death, had recommended me to take, as well as caffeine which had been prescribed to me to breathe, beer, champagne or brandy.<sup>539</sup>

Shortly before he died, Proust was literally living on coffee, iced beer or champagne, which he would often send his family, friends, lovers, secretaries, and housekeepers to the Ritz hotel to collect. These mixtures, of course, had side effects, which Proust well recognised, for instance, when he said that chloral was 'making holes' in his brain.<sup>540</sup>

Proust frequently used his neurasthenia to avoid replying to letters and to get rid of visitors, especially at the end of his life, when he had become more famous. His

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<sup>537</sup> Proust, M., '13 Sept 1899', *Letters to His Mother*, trans. Painter, G.D., Citadel Press, 1957, p. 81.

<sup>538</sup> Proust would wake up at 8-9pm and asked his mother to bring his breakfast for 11pm. Bogousslavsky, J., 'Marcel Proust's Lifelong Tour of the Parisian Neurological Intelligentsia: From Brissaud and Dejerine to Sollier and Babinski', *European Neurology*, 57, 2007, pp. 127-136.

<sup>539</sup> Albaret, C., *Monsieur Proust*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973. See also Proust, M., *Remembrance of Times Past Volume I*, Wordsworth Editions, 2006, p. 379.

<sup>540</sup> Tadié, J-Y., *Marcel Proust*. Biographies NRF, Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

nervous illness provided him with an escape not only from the demands of fashionable society, but also from anything onerous that did not suit him. The noted Proust scholar William Carter recounts Proust being summoned from time to time for periods of further training in the French army. Carter notes Proust would usually evade these on the grounds of ill health, writing to his mother in 1896, “If any questions are asked, I’m supposed to be suffering from a slight attack of asthma this morning.”<sup>541</sup> Proust lived with his nervous illness as a companion, which markedly influenced his work and his sense of himself as an author; he even signed one of his books to Céline Cottin as the work of “the perpetual sick.”<sup>542</sup>

Proust was unlike other neurasthenic patients of the Parisian high society, in that he did not choose to keep his diagnosis within his intimate circle, or to head off on travels to various curative resorts. Rather he voiced in great detail and at an interminable length his every discomfort in a heightened and exacerbated way. Proust was as concerned with a sick society as he was with sickness in himself. He exposed its trivial values, snobbishness, and meretricious interests in his literary output, particularly in articles and letters. Such ‘sickness’ was brought home to him acutely at the time of the Dreyfus affair with its racism, corruption, and forthright dishonesty, and thereafter it remained a principal interest of his. Dr Proust was an anti-Dreyfusard and this was a source of dissension for him with his sons.<sup>543</sup> Proust was increasingly affronted by the ills of society and chose to retire from public life.

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<sup>541</sup> Carter, W.C., ‘Private Proust’, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, p. 15; Proust, M., *Letters to His Mother*, trans. Painter, G.D., Citadel Press, 1957, p. 85.

<sup>542</sup> Girard, R., (ed) *Proust: A collection of critical essays*, Prentice Hall, 1962, p. 65.

<sup>543</sup> The “Dreyfus Affair” polarised French society into “Dreyfusards” and “Anti-Dreyfusards”; along with Anatole France and Emile Zola, Proust and his brother, Robert, were found to be among the Dreyfusards. The Proust brothers attended the trials and participated in the campaign to pressurize the government to correct this injustice (Dreyfus was eventually pardoned). For more on the Dreyfus Affair

Following the death of his mother in 1905, Proust moved to an apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann. This room was lined with cork to keep out noise and its windows were closed to keep out the fragrance from the trees and street outside. Proust lit the room with a single lamp and would spend as much as six and a half days a week in bed, claiming that sunlight made him suffer terribly,

A few upsets in the evening. A long night's sleep, but on the whole rather disagreeable. Besides, up until then my eyes were never quite dry. ... I think that my feeling so unwell, of which I spoke to you this morning on the telephone, comes partly from my stomach, I mean from the accumulation of the iodine I've been taking, and perhaps also from eating inattentively. I'm going to be careful about it... I'm worn out with remorse, racked with conscience, crushed with dejection. I'm going to bed.<sup>544</sup>

### **Blanche and Proust**

Ten years Proust's senior, Blanche had been a fixture on the Parisian social scene long before Proust joined him in the most fashionable salon rooms of the 1890s. They lived around the corner from one another in Auteuil and both attended the Lycée Condorcet, although not at the same time. However, despite the ten-year age gap, Proust and Blanche soon began to move in the same circles, and many of Proust's classmates at the Lycée Condorcet, including Robert Dreyfus, Jacques Bizet, and Daniel Halévy were also among Blanche's intimate friends. Like Proust, these men suffered with, or grew up in families whose relatives suffered with neurasthenia or other nervous conditions, and Blanche painted portraits of Jacques Bizet, Daniel Halévy and three members of the Halévy

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see Bloom, H., (ed) *Marcel Proust*, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009, p.27; Forth, C.E., *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006; Read, P. P., *The Dreyfus Affair*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012.

<sup>544</sup> Proust, M., '5 September 1888', *Marcel Proust: Letters to His Mother*, trans. Painter, G.D., Citadel Press, 1957, pp. 51, 71.

family during the 1890s and early 1900s (Figure 6.1).<sup>545</sup> The Halévys were a liberal, bourgeois Parisian family with a distinguished literary and musical pedigree. They were known as regular visitors to the *maison Blanche*, where they were treated by Dr Blanche for their nervous ailments, and where they dined at the famed *dîners*.<sup>546</sup> Jacques Bizet was Daniel Halévy's younger cousin. He was the son of the distinguished composer Georges Bizet and the famous neurasthenic *salonnière* Madame Straus, whose salon Blanche and Proust both frequently attended.<sup>547</sup> Blanche was already a part of this dense network of artists, writers, musicians and intellectuals living in Paris, many of whom were also sitters for his portraits. Proust, however, did not fit into the salon scene as seamlessly as Blanche, and initially the age difference between Proust and the other salon guests was noticeable. The cousin of Blanche's wife and writer Colette remembered meeting the polite, but young, Proust at the popular salon of Madame Arman de Caillavet,

He looked singularly young, younger than any of the men or any of the women. Large, melancholy, blackish-brown eye sockets, a complexion sometimes rosy and sometimes pale, anxious eyes, the mouth, when it was silent, tight and puckered, as if for a kiss, formal clothes and one intransigent lock of hair.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Jacques Bizet was believed to have inherited the 'family curse' of mental illness and on 3 November 1922 he committed suicide, just fifteen days before Proust's death.

<sup>546</sup> Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d'un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, p. 25.

<sup>547</sup> Madame Straus suffered from neurasthenia and was a patient of Dr. Henry Auguste Widmer (1853–1939), who had just opened the Clinique Valmont in Glion-sur-Montreux, overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Dr. Widmer was a contemporary of Brissaud, who had also studied with Charcot in Paris before specializing in digestive disorders, diet and nervous dysfunction. The Clinique Valmont thus became the first sanatorium in Switzerland to deal with conditions other than tuberculosis and mental illness. Madame Straus went to Valmont several times and she also advised Proust to consult Dr. Widmer. See Bogousslavsky, p. 129 for more information on Madame Straus's neurasthenia.

<sup>548</sup> Colette, pp. 84-85. For more information on the relationship and interactions of Blanche and Colette see Southworth, H., *The Intersecting Realities and Fictions of Virginia Woolf and Colette*, Ohio State University, 2004.



As Proust and Blanche were both frequenting a number of salons, it is not surprising that neither could remember where they first met; Blanche believed they met around the dinner table of Dr Blanche, however Proust remembers differently and writes they met in other salon rooms of Paris,

I cannot quite recall if it was in the unrivalled salon of Madame Straus, in that of the Princess Mathilde or of Madame Baignères that I first met Jacques Blanche, at the time of my military service, that is to say when I was about twenty.<sup>549</sup>

Regardless of where they met, their meeting was the beginning of a long, yet sometimes strained, friendship. Tall, well dressed, and somewhat effeminate, Blanche was, according to Proust, a great conversationalist but a difficult friend.<sup>550</sup> In his memoirs, Blanche recalled Proust's personality and his normal attire when out in society,

Marcel had been a great prankster at Condorcet, he wore butterfly wing collars and a fading orchid as a boutonniere, and later on he wore sea-green ties tied any old how, crumpled trousers, a baggy frock coat. [...] He carried a Malacca cane which he had a way of twirling whenever he stooped to pick up a dropped glove (his gloves were pearl grey with black stitching, and were always crumpled and dirty), or was engaged to putting on or taking off its fellow. [...] His top hats very soon took on the appearance of hedgehogs or rough haired terriers, as a result from being brushed the wrong way or simply rubbed against ladies' dresses and furs in landaus, which he wore with his three-quarter-length coat from Binder.<sup>551</sup>

On 1 October 1891, in the Baignères's property Les Frémonts at Trouville, Blanche drew his first portrait of Proust from life just before they sat down to dinner (Figure 6.2). The pencil sketch depicts Proust leaning forward on the table in front of him,

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<sup>549</sup> Marcel Proust in Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1919, p. iv.

<sup>550</sup> Clarac, P. and Sandre, Y. (ed) 'Préface', *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1971, p. 571.

<sup>551</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Mes Modèles*, Paris: Stock, 1928, p. 98, translation provided in Carter, W. C., *Proust: A Life*, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 58.

using his forearms to hold himself up. The focus of the drawing is Proust's deep-set, black-ringed eyes, accentuated by Blanche in the careful detail and concentrated pencil shading. The result is an intense, if not slightly disconcerting image that is dominated by the writer's mesmerizing gaze. The remainder of Proust's face is lightly, yet meticulously sketched, with his hair carefully parted just off centre and his groomed moustache casting a slight shadow over his closed lips. A single pencil line provides the outline of Proust's shoulders and quick, dark scribbling gives the viewer an idea of Proust's clothing, in particular his cravat and shirt collar. Yet it is the detail gathered from Proust's face in this pencil drawing that is astonishing, and it is clear to see Blanche's passion and skill for producing not only an accurate likeness of the sitter, but a portrait which also reveals a more serious and introspective, neurasthenic Proust. Blanche's drawing brings to mind the artist's record of his thoughts on first meeting Proust. In his memoirs Blanche wrote,

There was a great deal more of the schoolboy that he had scarcely ceased to be, than of the dandy he had aspired to become, his sartorial dandyism was already beginning to date, his was the Batignolles style of Manet's model in the *Père Lathuile*, the studied scruffiness of George Moore combined with the affection of the schoolboy who keeps his white gloves on in order to hide his ink-stained fingers and chewed nails.<sup>552</sup>

When comparing Blanche's drawing of Proust to Manet's model in the painting *At Père Lathuile* (Figure 6.3) is clear to see the physical similarities between the two men: dark, floppy hair, wide brown eyes, a thin moustache. The glass of champagne in the hand of the dark haired man could be a signifier of neurasthenia, as the drink formed part of the

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<sup>552</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Mes Modèles*, Paris: Stock, 1928, p. 99.

popular diet to help treat the nervous condition.<sup>553</sup> Blanche's drawing of Proust is not interested in the detail of his clothing or the fashionable setting of the salon, but rather, like Manet, Blanche is attempting to translate Parisian modern life onto paper. As in such a detailed representation of Proust's large melancholy eyes and anxious face, Blanche is using his artistic ability to express the modern world through the face of a neurasthenic, presenting him without exaggeration, just as he is before dinner.

Fellow artists and Blanche's models have attested to his virtuosity and the rapidity and sureness of his execution. The pencil drawing is annotated in the bottom right with Blanche's signature along with '1 October 1891, Trouville', and would later served as the inspiration for the full-length portrait Blanche painted of Proust.

### **The Neurasthenic Portrait**

In July 1892, Proust began to visit Blanche's studio-salon every Saturday morning at his home in Auteuil in order to sit for his portrait.<sup>554</sup> The Blanche studio and family home were surrounded by a large garden with thick-branched trees, and the neurasthenic Proust felt the pollen was sure to trigger an attack of his asthma. As such, he asked Blanche to close the windows overlooking the garden.<sup>555</sup> In the studio, the mingling light from the lush garden outside reflected in the pistachio-coloured door and the green water closet giving the studio an aquarium-like atmosphere.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> For a detailed discussion and critical reception of Manet's *At Père Lathuile* see Zachrel, K.A., *Modern Consumption: Restaurant and Café Culture in the Art of Manet and Degas*, Kansas: University of Missouri, 2008, pp. 15-18.

<sup>554</sup> Proust posed in early summer, between his exams. See Blanche, J.É., *Propos de peintre: de David à Degas*, Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, 1919, p. 173.

<sup>555</sup> Carter, W. C., *Proust: A Life*, London: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 68.

<sup>556</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Mes Modèles*, Paris: Stock, 1928, pp. 188-89.

Despite the summer weather, Proust would arrive at Blanche's studio wrapped up in a fur coat and scarf to keep from catching a cold. In his memoir, *The Night Visitor*, Proust's friend Paul Morand described him as,

A very pale man, encased in an old fur-lined coat; thick black hair cut at the nape of the neck sticking out from under his gray bowler hat; his hands in slate colored gloves holding on to a cane.<sup>557</sup>

During the portrait sessions Blanche and Proust exchanged many stories about the salons they frequented. At idle moments Proust noted the furnishings that reflected Blanche's taste for the latest British fashions: an English straw-bottomed chair, a mirror-wardrobe, Liberty curtains, and a reproduction of Whistler's portrait of *Pablo Sarasate*.

After each sitting, the painter and model would have lunch with Blanche's father, Dr Blanche, who would come home from his nearby *maison de santé* where his patients at that time included Guy de Maupassant, Madame Straus and some of her relatives. As Proust recalled, lunch included spontaneous psychological counselling from the doctor, who out of professional habit would from time to time urge Proust to remain calm and moderate. Proust wrote,

If I expressed an opinion Jacques contradicted too vehemently, the doctor, admirable for his knowledge and goodness but accustomed to dealing with insane people, would sharply remind his son: 'come, come, Jacques, don't torment him, don't perturb him.' [Then, turning to Proust,] 'Pull yourself together, my child, try to remain calm; he doesn't believe one word of what he said; drink some cool water, in little sips, while you count to a hundred.'<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Foschini, L. *Proust's Overcoat: The True Story of One Man's Passion for All Things Proust*, trans. Karpeles, E., New York: Ecco Press, 2010, pp. 96-97.

<sup>558</sup> Préface, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, edited by Pierre Clarac with the collaboration of Yves Sandre, Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1971, p. 572.

Proust later wrote that Blanche had found fame as a painter, whereas he had only found neurasthenia.<sup>559</sup>

In the oil portrait, Blanche depicts Proust as a slightly different, older, man to the one he had drawn in pencil the autumn before. Proust is far removed from the literary sense of the scruffy bohemian with crumpled trousers and gloves (Figure 6.4). He stares out at the world with the air of a rising young man about town whose most serious thoughts are his illness and his appearance. The neurasthenic is presented in a hieratic pose underscoring Proust's dandified elegance and aestheticism. Presented as a sickly, pale and ethereal figure Proust is impeccably dressed in a black suit and an off-white shirt with a white orchid *boutonnière* emerging dramatically from the dark cloth. The irregular shaped petals of the orchid splay open across the lapel of his jacket, revealing the fleshy centre of the flower. This delicate white flower is sensitive, beautiful and complex. The contrast between the dark tones of his suit and the background and the pale flesh of his face and collar, toning with the white orchid in his buttonhole is particularly striking. The sharp outlines, the fluid paint, and the delicate strokes bring out a sense of inner feeling. Proust's dark, heavy lidded, hypnotic eyes and his slightly pursed dark red lips below a narrow moustache capture Proust eternally as a neurasthenic and socialite, as he looms enigmatically out of a dark background. The *Portrait of Proust* has remained Blanche's best-known work and is considered to be the most accurate representation of the man poised to become the famous author of *In Search of Lost Time*. This painting captures Proust eternally as a twenty-one-year-old, ironically perhaps for one whose novels shows

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<sup>559</sup> Clarac, P., 1971, p. 570.

him to be so exceptionally alert to the mutability of the human body and the effects of the passing of time.<sup>560</sup>

Few are aware of the fact that the portrait of Proust was conceived and completed as a full-length painting.<sup>561</sup> The full-length format, traditionally reserved for portraits of rulers and the nobility, is the most formal mode of presentation and conformed stylistically and thematically to the traditional *portrait mondain* (adapted from the *portrait d'apparat*), in which the subject is portrayed as an elegant figure of fashion.<sup>562</sup> However, the full-length format for portraits was completely reinvigorated by modernist artists such as Manet and Whistler from the 1860s onwards.

Keeping in mind the full-length version of the *Portrait of Proust* by Blanche, it is possible to draw comparisons to Whistler's *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate* (1884) a portrait which Blanche owned a reproduction of and kept in his studio (Figure 6.5). An acquaintance of Blanche in Dieppe, Whistler was instrumental in redefining the aesthetic orders of his age becoming one of the most important innovators of the nineteenth century. He rejected French Realism and developed the notion that paintings should be arrangements of form and colour, evoking a mood. In his later life, Whistler came to favour a portrait format in which the male subject, dressed in dark clothing, stood full length against a black background. Eleven portraits took the title *Arrangement in Black*, however *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de*

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<sup>560</sup> Watt, A., *The Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, p.9.

<sup>561</sup> Rosenblum, R., *Paintings in the Musée d'Orsay*, New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989, p. 66.

<sup>562</sup> See Emeric David, "Tableaux d'apparat," *Revue universelle des arts* 3, 1856, pp. 289-98; Marianna Jenkins, *The State Portrait: Its Origin and Evolution*, New York: College Art Association, 1947. The full-length standing figure became canonical for the state portrait, which was a political and social as well as a stylistic phenomenon (p. 46). The *portrait mondain* derives from the state portrait, which was linked to manners and decorum in the Renaissance. *Portrait d'apparat*: portraying a portrait subject with objects associated with his/her daily life.

*Sarasate* is Whistler's most distinguished male in his series. The Spanish musician was Europe's violin virtuoso at the time the portrait was painted, and although a physically small man, he had caught the attention of the wider European public. Depicted standing full face towards the viewer, Sarasate is dressed entirely in black with the bright white of his shirt and cuffs almost shining out of the canvas. His dark hair, eyes – so reminiscent of Proust – and large moustache allow the darkness to partially swallow his face, albeit for his flushed pink cheeks and red bottom lip. Encased in darkness, three quarters of the portrait is black gently fading to a brown floor which appears to make Sarasate's body float before the viewer. In his hands, Sarasate holds a violin across the front of his body, with the long bow reflecting a silver line of light across the front of the canvas. The critics did not miss the overwhelming darkness of the portrait, and when the painting was exhibited Whistler said,

They talk about my painting Sarasate standing in a coal cellar, and stupidities like that. I only know that he looked just as he does in my picture when I saw him play in St James's Hall.<sup>563</sup>

As in Whistler's portrait, the darkness is most definitely present in Proust's portrait, and is just as overwhelming for the viewer. Most striking about Blanche's portrait however is Proust's pale, drawn face left to stand out from the gloom of the darkened canvas as a reminder to the viewing Parisian public of the neurasthenia identified with the Parisian *haute bourgeoisie*. It is clear to see in Proust's portrait that Blanche has chosen to depict some of the physical symptoms of his friend's neurasthenia, for example, the painting of

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<sup>563</sup> MacDonal, M.F., Petri, G., Hausberg, M., and Meacock, J., *James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings, a catalogue raisonné*, University of Glasgow, 2012, [online] at <http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk> [accessed Jan 2014]

Proust's face is a textbook example for that of a neurasthenic patient, as Gilbert Ballet wrote in 1911, the neurasthenic patient "shows a pale face with drawn features."<sup>564</sup>

The *Portrait of Louis Metman*, 1888, by Blanche may provide an idea of how Blanche first conceived and painted the full-length portrait of Proust (Figure 6.6).<sup>565</sup> A scholar, collector of Japanese art and passionate follower of Wagner's music, Louis Metman met Blanche in 1886 and accompanied him on a trip to Bayreuth in July 1888. Choosing a Whistler-like palette, this portrait is rather stiffly executed in comparison to the portrait of Proust in shades of grey and black. Metman is depicted in top hat and black overcoat, with a monocle and cane. One gloved hand is tucked into his pocket whilst the other grasps the top of his cane. A black poodle is shown sitting patiently on the pavement at his feet. This portrait of Metman shows how Blanche achieved a full-length composition, while also demonstrating Blanche's emphasis on fashionable dress and nonchalant elegance. This is especially evident in the *Portrait of Proust* that brings to mind contemporary aristocratic images painted by artists such as Boldini and Whistler.

Blanche's *Portrait of Maurice Barrès* (1890) is strikingly similar in form and style to that of Proust (Figure 6.7). Blanche met Barrès at the Bonnières's salon in 1885 and soon became good friends with the writer and politician. Blanche's mother feared the influence this "anarchist in patent leather pumps" might have on her son. Blanche recalled,

He seemed coldly unapproachable, with the bearing of a modern dictator ... Many women thought of Bonaparte when I painted him at twenty-five, thinning greasy hair, olive skin, thin, in a grey jacket, a carnation in his buttonhole, with his arms crossed.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Ballet, G., *Neurasthenia*, 1911, p.64

<sup>565</sup> See Dagen, P. *Jacques-Émile Blanche, peintre*, exhibition catalogue Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 15 October 1997 – 15 February 1998, Édition de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1997, pp. 84-85.

<sup>566</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Mes Modèles*, Paris: Stock, 1928, p. 12.



Standing straight against a jet-black background, Blanche paints a pallid-faced Barrès with dark brown eyes, staring emptily out of the canvas. With his lips slightly parted and his thin hair swept over in a side parting, the expressionless Barrès appears sickly and gaunt. With his arms folded across his large grey jacket, the white of his shirt and carnation in his buttonhole are strikingly bright. Nationalists like Barrès considered intellectuals, like him, to be neurasthenic, but at the time of writing this thesis I had not found any medical records for Barrès to confirm a diagnosis of this sort.<sup>567</sup> It was common, however, for intellectuals at the turn of the century to identify with neurasthenics even if they were not themselves, and Blanche is making that connection here in his portrait of Barrès, in depicting some of the physical traits of a neurasthenic, such as a pale, gaunt face with dark eyes.

Following the exhibition of the *Portrait of Barrès*, critics agreed with Blanche's depiction of Barrès and *Le Journal amusant* took this 'sickly' depiction of the sitter in Blanche's portrait one step further and drew a caricature of Barrès, with the addition of a nightcap and the caption '*On voit sur ce visage-là; Les suites de l'influenza*' (Figure 6.8). I am not claiming here that all types of illness were seen as, or considered to be, neurasthenia, however, this was exactly the kind of reception Blanche expected for his portrait of the neurasthenic Proust, to which I will now turn.

### **Exhibiting and Cutting the Portrait**

On 8 May 1893 the Champs-de-Mars Salon opened its annual painting exhibition.

Blanche showed eleven portraits in total, including the image of Proust in its original

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<sup>567</sup> Roberts, M.L., *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, p.113.

full-length.<sup>568</sup> Visitors to the exhibition saw the portrait of Proust as anything but flattering; Maurois described it as “a mixture of the dandified and the limp which reminded one, for a brief moment, of Oscar Wilde.”<sup>569</sup> Of the very few visitors who commented on the portrait, they were rather perplexed as to who this foppish young man was, demonstrating that Proust was still not a familiar name or face in Parisian society in the early 1890s. Young Proust, with his great dark eyes and sensual mouth is considered little more than a dandy. But Blanche’s efforts to represent him as a neurasthenic did not go completely unnoticed with one viewer picking up on the spiritual suffering of the sitter, noting the “perfect oval of his face and the pallor of his complexion give him a grave, almost Christ-like look.”<sup>570</sup>

Possibly disappointed with the lack of commentary on his *Portrait of Proust*, Blanche felt a connection was lost upon the audience at the Champs-de-Mars salon. Before Blanche returned the full-length portrait to Proust after the exhibition, he cut the portrait in half reducing it to 73.5cm in height.<sup>571</sup> Although the circumstances around the cutting of the portrait remain obscure, Proust confirms this series of events when he told Céleste Albaret that Blanche had borrowed the full-length portrait for an exhibition and

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<sup>568</sup> See the *Catalogue illustré des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure exposés au Champs-de-Mars*, Paris: Société des Imprimeries Lemercier, 1892, no. 124; Larroumet, G., *Le Salon de 1892*, Paris: Boussod, Valadon, 1892 which mentions Blanche (but not the *Portrait of Proust*). I know of no other contemporary critical responses to the Proust portrait. Blanche also exhibited a religious subject, *L'Hôte*, and a *Portrait of M.J. Saint-Cère*. The 1892 Champ-de-Mars exhibition included Sargent’s *Carmencita*, Whistler’s *Lady Meux*, and portraits by Carolus-Duran, Besnard, and Boldini. *The Portrait of Proust*, which remained in the family, was donated to the Musée d’Orsay in 1989.

<sup>569</sup> Maurois, A., *Proust: Portrait of a Genius*, Carroll & Graf, 1996, p. 34.

<sup>570</sup> Musée d’Orsay [online] [http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting.html?no\\_cache=1&zoom=1&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=2465](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting.html?no_cache=1&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=2465) [accessed November 2012].

<sup>571</sup> It is not known exactly when the portrait was cut down. Letters examined in the Institute de France archives also do not make the circumstances around the cutting clear.

had cut off the legs when he returned it.<sup>572</sup> Blanche himself recounts the canvas was cut down to a half-length portrait, which occasioned an exchange of letters and the intervention of intermediaries including a well-known demimondaine and a Jewish baroness.<sup>573</sup> The mutilation of the portrait by Blanche also has psychological overtones; by cutting the portrait to the waist, Blanche physically cropped the portrait in order to create a deeper, more intense psychological engagement and connection with Proust. He forces the viewer to engage much more directly with Proust at eye level and the penetrating stare and pale face of Proust cannot be avoided. Following its exhibition in 1893 the portrait remained with Proust until his death in 1922, but was not exhibited again until 1943 at the first retrospective of Blanche's work.

Blanche's portrait seems to have exerted a sort of fascination for Proust as it encapsulated the past, commemorating his younger self, whilst also capturing his nervous condition. Blanche asserted that his 'execrable study' was an excellent likeness and this was corroborated by Proust's high regard for it.<sup>574</sup> Proust later wrote a self-parodying description of the portrait in *Jean Santeuil*, where a similar likeness of Jean is attributed to one of Blanche's rivals, the society painter La Gandara,<sup>575</sup> Proust wrote,

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<sup>572</sup> See Céleste Albaret, *Monsieur Proust*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973, pp. 186-87. Proust quipped that Blanche « devait penser que j'aurais plus d'esprit ainsi! » Mme Albaret asserted that Blanche's portrait was a better likeness than many photographs of Proust.

<sup>573</sup> See Blanche, J.É., 'Quelques instantanés de Marcel Proust,' in *Hommage à Marcel Proust, 1871-1922*, Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1923, p. 57. Blanche's essay evokes the young Proust in the portrait.

<sup>574</sup> Blanche, J.É., 'Quelques instantanés de Marcel Proust,' in *Hommage à Marcel Proust, 1871-1922*, Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1923, p. 57

<sup>575</sup> Antonio de La Gándara (1861 – 1917), a French painter, pastellist and draughtsman. La Gándara was born in Paris, his father was of Spanish ancestry, born in Mexico, and his mother from England. He was strongly influenced by both cultures. A talented artist, he was recognised by the jury of the 1883 Salon des Champs-Élysées, who singled out the first work he had ever exhibited: a portrait of Saint Sebastian. Less than ten years later, La Gándara had become one of the favourite artists of the Parisian elite. His models included Comtesse Greffulhe, Princesse Chimay, the Prince de Polignac, Sarah Bernhardt, and Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau (more famously portrayed as *Madame X* in Sargent's work). Influenced by Chardin, his unique skill is demonstrated in his portraits, in a simplicity and serenity with the finest detail.

The radiant young man self-consciously posing before all Paris, with neither shyness nor bravado in his looks, gazing out from light-coloured elongated eyes with an air about them of fresh almonds, eyes less expressive of actual thought than seemingly capable of thought ... beauty not perhaps thoughtful so much as pensive, the very visual sign of a delicate life.<sup>576</sup>

In their respective artistic and literary spheres, Blanche and Proust were uncommonly gifted at capturing the likenesses of their contemporaries, and of representing an urban society in transition. Blanche admired above all Proust's uncanny ability to register and permanently fix fugitive perceptions and sensations – a response that shows how important such an ability was to his sense of himself as an artist. With the passage of time, Blanche's *Portrait of Proust* has become the definitive image of the young writer, bedazzled by the brilliance of the *fin-de-siècle* Parisian society that he so skilfully negotiated and expertly dissected in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

There are no masterpieces, the styles hospital is the equal of the glorious portal ... things are no more or less precious, the ordinary dress and the sail pretty in itself are two mirrors of the same reflection. All value is in the eyes of the painter. – Marcel Proust.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Proust, M., *Jean Santeuil*, Penguin Books, 1994, p. 715. Philip Kolb speculates that Proust's attributing the painting to Blanche's rival is because he and Blanche had fallen out over the Dreyfus Affair; see Kolb, P., (ed) *Correspondance de Marcel Proust Volume I.*, Paris: Plon, 1970, p. 174. Proust typically created composite characters based on more than one model. This is true of the painter Elstir, the writer Bergotte, the musician Vinteuil, and the actress La Berma.

<sup>577</sup> "Il n'y a pas de chef-d'œuvre, l'hôpital sans style vaut le glorieux portail ... il n'y a pas de choses plus ou moins précieuses, la robe commune et la voile en elle-même jolie sont deux miroirs du même reflet. Tout le prix est dans les regards du peintre." Proust, M., quoted and cited in Bergson, H., *Matière et mémoire* 1896; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985, p. 76.

## Chapter 7

### Case Study: Comtesse de Castiglione

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The comtesse de Castiglione's neurasthenia was considered primarily to be a combination of her depression, phobias and obsessions, coupled with the excesses of a social life spent in salons across Europe.<sup>578</sup> Born into an ancient aristocratic family on 22 March 1837 in Florence, Virginia Oldoini's father was a diplomat and her mother was the daughter of an eminent jurist who belonged to the Florentine nobility. Virginia was seventeen when she married Francesco Verasis, count di Castiglione in 1854; Giorgio, their only son, was born a year later on 9 March 1855. Her success and popularity in the Italian court saw her enlisted to help in the grand plans to unify Italy under the reign of Vittorio Emanuele; she was sent to Paris with her young family in 1855 for the Congress convened to re-establish peace on the Continent following the Crimean War.<sup>579</sup> However, a boundless disillusionment crept over her following the scandal of the assassination attempt against Napoléon III in front of her town house on 6 April 1857 which resulted in her being officially disgraced and banished from court.<sup>580</sup> She was forced to retire from the centre stage of Parisian society at the height of her youth and beauty, and mournfully wrote in a letter to comte Henry d'Ideville, "my life has barely begun and already my role

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<sup>578</sup> Apraxine, P., *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2000, p.8.

<sup>579</sup> This offered Cavour an opportunity to raise the issue of Italy's future. Italy at that time was still a mosaic of states variously under the control of the Hapsburgs of Austria, the Bourbons of Naples, and the Pope. Castiglione was sent to Paris in 1856 to plead the cause of Italian unity with Napoleon III.

<sup>580</sup> Castel, V., *Mémoires*, 4, pp. 43-44; pp. 130-131, [online] <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75039n.image.r=mémoires+Viel-Castel.f2.langFR> [accessed March 2013]. According to Viel Castel, an attempt was made on the Emperor's life upon his leaving the Castiglione residence at 28, avenue Montaigne at 3 a.m. Napoléon III was set upon by Italian *carbonari* and although Castiglione was not named at the trial she remained under police surveillance.

is over.”<sup>581</sup> Castiglione decided to leave Paris and travelled to London, before withdrawing to Italy where she lived for three years in self-imposed exile with her son, separated from her bankrupt husband.

Castiglione’s health began to slowly deteriorate at the beginning of the 1860s when she started to cultivate an air of melancholy and nervous exhaustion she would retain for the rest of her life.<sup>582</sup> In 1861 she returned to Paris determined to salvage her reputation at court and in public. She moved to a modest house in the fashionable suburb of Passy, where her neighbours included photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson and Dr Emile Blanche, who became her physician and lifelong friend. She was personally cared for by Dr Blanche at his clinic and from her own home until the doctor’s own death in 1893.<sup>583</sup>

Since the death of the comtesse de Castiglione in 1899, only four writers have studied her life and work in any depth. The first was the comte Robert de Montesquiou who spent thirteen years writing her biography *La divine Comtesse, a fin-de-siècle* tribute to “une dame de beauté” published in 1913.<sup>584</sup> Montesquiou identified personally with Castiglione and claimed that she baptised him ‘*l’hortensia bleu*’, a symbol of the neurasthenic.<sup>585</sup> He recorded his thoughts of the woman he had become obsessed with as he saw her lying in her coffin,

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<sup>581</sup> « A peine ai-je traverse la vie, et déjà mon role est fini. » D’Ideville, *Journal d’un diplomate en Italie: notes intimes pour servir a l’histoire du second empire Turin 1859-1862*, Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1872, p.88.

<sup>582</sup> See D’Ideville, H., *Journal d’un diplomate en Italie: notes intimes pour servir a l’histoire du second empire Turin 1859-1862*, Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1872 pp. 83-94. Castiglione’s dreary existence is documented in this romanesque account by comte Henry d’Ideville, a young French diplomat who visited Castiglione at the somber Villa Gloria. D’Ideville was struck by her strange beauty and original character, and made a note of her superiority and how alienated she was from society. Unlike other commentators, he extolled her exceptional intelligence.

<sup>583</sup> See Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d’un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001.

<sup>584</sup> Montesquiou, R., *La divine Comtesse*, Paris: Goupil, 1913, p.50.

<sup>585</sup> Ryan, J., *Rilke, Modernism and Poetic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 62.

A countenance of sculptural quality, with imposing proportions, bold lines, and rigid planes, in which the brow, magnificent and broad, attracted my eye and held it, as a focus of light.<sup>586</sup>

Montesquiou made Castiglione the object of an aesthetic cult and collected a huge amount of her “relics”, including casts of her arm and feet and 433 of the extraordinary portrait-photographs she spent years creating, which he arranged in an album.<sup>587</sup>

In 1986 the American art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau subjected a number of these photographic portraits of the bare legged, petticoat lifting, wry-eyed Castiglione to the close scrutiny of contemporary feminist theory. In a brilliant interpretation, Solomon-Godeau exposes Castiglione’s appropriation of the male gaze, arguing that any reading of the photographs needs to be,

both symptomatic and dialectical: symptomatic in that they are the personal expression of an individual woman’s investment in her image – in herself *as* image; dialectical in that this individual act of expression is underwritten by conventions that make her less author than a scribe.<sup>588</sup>

Solomon-Godeau provides a space for thinking about Castiglione as the “architect of her own representations” – commissioning and collaborating in the production of hundreds of portrait-photographs. However, by placing these images within the wider context of gender and sexuality in the Second Empire, with its wholly patriarchal constructions of femininity, Solomon-Godeau alerts us to the fact that ultimately the Comtesse’s photographic self-creations show her collusion in her objectification: “the logic of these images is not only that of a unique expression of the countess’s obsessions, but that of a talisman of the culture that produced her.”<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> Montesquiou, R., *La divine Comtesse*, Paris: Goupil, 1913, p. 51.

<sup>587</sup> Montesquiou, R., *La divine Comtesse*, Paris: Goupil, 1913, p. 49.

<sup>588</sup> Solomon-Godeau, A., ‘The Legs of the Countess’, *October* 39 (Winter) MIT Press, 1986 pp. 65-108.

<sup>589</sup> Solomon-Godeau, A., ‘The Legs of the Countess’, *October* 39 (Winter) MIT Press, 1986, p. 67.

Pierre Apraxine, in his exhibition catalogue essay in *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione* (2000), examines the same series of portraits of Castiglione made between 1856 and 1895, commissioned by the Comtesse and executed by the photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson. Perhaps unaware of Solomon-Godeau's article, Apraxine wrote that for the art historian, the intentions of Castiglione and her photographer appear from the outset "too eccentric and too ambiguous" for serious study. Apraxine states that this serves to explain why an oeuvre of more than four hundred pictures – original prints and negatives – produced in a forty-year collaboration by one of the most prestigious Parisian studios of the nineteenth century has been relegated to the margins of the history of photography. He continued that anyone who explores the work realises "its power lies less in the novelty of the formal solutions than in its disturbing psychological content, a slippery terrain where one hesitates to tread."<sup>590</sup> It is this "slippery terrain" of Castiglione's psychology that I am interested in exploring in this chapter.

Heather McPherson also ignored Apraxine's warnings to the art historian in her 2001 book *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*. In her essay on Castiglione's portraits she explores the narrative potential of photography as an expressive tool for self-fashioning and fictionalised autobiography. She celebrates the Countess as the subject of a unique record that testifies to the use of photographs as well as paintings as potent means of exploring and commemorating identity. As she claims, "in their variety and multiplicity, the hundreds of photographs of the comtesse register

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<sup>590</sup> Apraxine, P., *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2000, p.12.



her strange beauty and her pathological narcissism.”<sup>591</sup> She interprets Castiglione’s mask-like images as signifiers of paranoia and depression, indebted to images of Charcot’s patients at la Salpêtrière, though she does not provide any specific parallels with the photographs published in *L’Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*.<sup>592</sup> In contrast to McPherson, I am not interested here in making any references to hysteria (a condition which Castiglione was never diagnosed as having); rather I am concerned with her neurasthenia. Castiglione set herself apart through the extraordinary pictorial archive she amassed to feed her “pathological narcissism”, yet rather than focus on these images, this case study chapter will instead provide an in-depth analysis of two portraits painted by Blanche of Castiglione in 1893 and after her death in 1914.

The portraits by Blanche are highly unusual as the Countess rarely subjected herself to the production of the painted image. Another portrait of Castiglione is by George Frederic Watts, which was painted in July 1857 while she was staying at Holland House in London (Figure 7.1). This portrait was not very well received, with Blanche commenting that the character of Castiglione did not strike through – it lacked expression, particularly in her eyes. He wrote Watts had stylised the portrait in “his fashion”, but stated it was a “belle esquisse.”<sup>593</sup> Montesquiou also dismissed it as conventional and such a generalised image in the *bella donna* tradition that he doubted whether Castiglione had posed for it at all, although he did find the shoulders to be beautiful.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> McPherson, H., *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 69.

<sup>592</sup> McPherson, H., 2001, p. 69.

<sup>593</sup> Blanche, J.-É., ‘La Belle Florentine’ *Le Gaulois*, 27 January 1914.

<sup>594</sup> Montesquiou, R., 1913, pp. 50-51.

In order to understand the autobiographical and psychological significance of the portraits Blanche painted of Castiglione, it is necessary to consider her life and the legend that surrounded her. The first section of this chapter, ‘Neurasthenia and *La belle recluse*’, offers a glimpse into Castiglione’s private world from 1863, a reading of her retreat from Parisian society, and an account of her transformation to a paranoid and lonely neurasthenic. When examining Castiglione’s life through the existing scholarship, it is often difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction, history and legend. There is not an extensive amount of primary material to draw upon, and this explains in part authors’ tendencies to lose sight of their subject, turning to unsupported gossip and stories to extend their often repetitive writing about her life. But the Countess’s exceptional ability to mythologise herself is a more compelling reason for why authors have so easily strayed into the realm of fiction – as a subject she is elusive and this, it seems, was her intention. Interestingly, for some writers, Castiglione serves as a mirror, offering a way in to thinking about their own image and identity. This was particularly the case for her contemporaries and those who knew her personally, including Blanche, as he observed on reading Robert de Montesquiou’s *La divine Comtesse*:

I had hoped that this new book would enlighten me, but I find more anecdotes and details about the author than about the woman to whom the volume is dedicated.<sup>595</sup>

Although biographers have recounted her life, gaps still remain, and such uncertainties are only exacerbated by contradictory testimonies. As such, for the purpose of the first section of this chapter, I have, wherever possible, used my own archival research and primary source material as the basis of biographical sketches of Castiglione. The second

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<sup>595</sup> « J’espérais que ce livre nouveau me renseignerait, mais j’y trouve plus d’anecdotes et de détails sur l’auteur, ... que sur la dame à qui le volume est consacré; d’ailleurs, cet auteur ne la vit que morte. » Blanche, J.-É., ‘La Belle Florentine’ *Le Gaulois*, 27 January 1914.

section of the chapter examines the relationship between Castiglione and Dr Blanche. The third section analyses the two portraits painted by Blanche of Castiglione in 1893 and 1914, before moving onto the final section which discusses Castiglione's re-engagement with image-making following the death of Dr Blanche. By bringing together biography, medical and social history, art-historical analysis and critical interpretation I hope to provide a richer, more intricate picture of Castiglione and her nervous ailments.

### **Neurasthenia and 'la belle recluse'**

Neurasthenia, paranoia, pathological narcissism and isolation consumed Castiglione's life during a period of disillusionment and rupture beginning in 1863. During the same year she ended her long absence from court and caused a sensation in the Parisian press by attending a fancy-dress ball at the Tuileries dressed as *La Reine d'Etrurie*.<sup>596</sup> Pierre-Louis Pierson, who had begun an intense period of collaboration with Castiglione, photographed her wearing the *Reine d'Etrurie* costume and shows her chastely clad in loosely draped classical costume, her sandals barely seen underneath the swathes of fabric gathered around her feet. She stands assertively with her right hand on her hip and her left arm fully and thrillingly exposed (for artistic reasons, according to Pierson), gazing haughtily past the viewer off to the right (Figure 7.2).

Enraptured by her own image, Castiglione also commissioned a terra-cotta statuette of herself in the same costume from Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse whose

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<sup>596</sup>Decaux, A., *La Castiglione*, Éditeur: Perrin, 2001, p. 220-21. In her journal Castiglione reports that Napoléon III appreciated the costume, but was too embarrassed to talk to her. Hargrove cites an amusing, but undocumented anecdote. When the comtesse arrived, one of the empress's friends remarked, "Look, Madame, at the magnificent costume of the dethroned queen!" (Hargrove, J.E., *Life and Work of Carrier-Belleuse*, New York: New York University Press, 1976, p.125).

idealised, feminine portraits appealed to fashionable society (Figure 7.3).<sup>597</sup> Carrier-Belleuse's statuette is more attenuated and classical than the photographs by Pierson: her hairstyle and costume are simplified and the facial features have been refined and generalised.<sup>598</sup> Yet despite its modest scale, the full-length statue-portrait is imposing and recalls the effigies of rulers that circulated throughout Europe at the time. Intensely protective of her image and reputation, Castiglione sent photographs of the statuette to several European rulers and also her estranged husband.<sup>599</sup> This commission is significant not only in illustrating the lengths to which Castiglione was willing to go to vindicate herself publicly, but also in demonstrating her knowledge of the power of the image. It also demonstrates her creative flair in directing the production of images for her own gains. Her attempt to regain her position in *haute bourgeoisie* society paid off, albeit briefly.

Castiglione's final public appearance was a little more than a month later on 16 April 1863 at a benefit for the Roman Catholics of Germany as the 'Hermit of Passy'. This second, highly choreographed viewing of the Comtesse was a fiasco. The hostess, Countess Stéphanie Tascher de la Pagerie, was known for organising the most successful society events and had obtained Baroness von Meyendorff's permission to use her private residence as the venue. However, Countess Tascher had great difficulty in putting

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<sup>597</sup> Hargrove, J., *The Life and Work of Albert Carrier-Belleuse*, New York; New York University Press, 1976, p. 120. He sculpted acquaintances and celebrities, and produces fantasy busts. There are several copies in French collections, including the Château de Compiègne, which also owns a hand-coloured photograph by Pierson of the *Reine d'Etrurie* costume.

<sup>598</sup> Hargrove, J., 1976, pp. 124-125.

<sup>599</sup> See Decaux, A., 2001, pp. 220-23.

together a cast and persuading some of her fashionable friends to set foot on stage.<sup>600</sup>

She writes in an unpublished section of her diary how Castiglione arrived and,

This saved my life because the countess was seldom seen in public, and having gained the reputation of a great beauty her appearance would be the focal point of the whole evening and would give a great boost to ticket sales.<sup>601</sup>

An appointment was made to visit Castiglione in Passy to discuss her appearance. The

description from Tascher de la Pageries's visit deserves quoting in full,

After a few minutes waiting in an exceedingly modest drawing room on the ground floor, I was shown up to the first floor. I passed through a sparsely furnished reception room, where a magnificent writing box reminded me that I was in the home of an elegant woman. I went into the bedroom, decorated in white lawn with blue bows. There I saw the goddess of this modest temple stretched out on a chaise longue arrayed in a costume that suited her perfectly but which also looked slightly ridiculous: on her head, a cap in the Mary Stuart style adorned with a white jet. She told me she was sick, very sick ... [With the Meyendorff evening in mind] I had asked her to put on her Salammbô<sup>602</sup> costume, to prove to her detractors that they had misrepresented her when they described it as indecent. She seemed to think this was an excellent idea.<sup>603</sup>

However, Castiglione did nothing of the sort. She had her own ideas, agreeing to appear

only on the third day of the event but refusing to disclose what her costume would be.

The press was full of anticipation for Castiglione's attendance,

Mme de Castiglione had promised to make appearance. People spoke of nothing else for a fortnight before and a fortnight after. Twenty years ago one did not live at such a pace as at present and one did not forget so

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<sup>600</sup> "The society beauties we had recruited had all abandoned us, Mesdames Walewska, de Pourtalès, Magnan, Girardin, Brook-Graville, her sister Mme Cailler, Milles Haussmann, Bourgoïn, Dolfus, Erazu." Tascher de la Pagerie, *department des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Naf 13371*.

<sup>601</sup> Tascher de la Pagerie, *département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Naf 13371*.

<sup>602</sup> Her *Reine d'Etrurie* costume was confused with the risqué Salammbô costume worn by Mme Rimsky-Korsakov. See Mme Rimsky-Korsakov, *Une saison à Paris*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1863, p. 161. Mme Baroche and Princesse de Metternich confused the two costumes. In *Notes et souvenirs*, Mme Baroche described the comtesse's near nudity as Salammbô and her bare feet (p.225). Press accounts of her near nudity reached Italy and angered her husband.

<sup>603</sup> Tascher de la Pagerie, *département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Naf 13371 pp. 183-84*.

quickly. Mme de Castiglione, the star, the key performer, had stated as a condition of participating that she would not come to a rehearsal. And nobody but herself was to know in what *tableau* she would participate. – Well!! Attraction and mystery!!<sup>604</sup>

The guests paid as much as 300 francs to attend. It was rumoured that Castiglione would be appearing as Ingres *Source*. In fact, she arrived an hour and a half late, enshrouded head to foot in the habit of a Carmelite nun, standing in front of a cave whose walls bore a sign saying ‘*Ermitage de Passy*’ (Figure 7.4). Castiglione “knelt in front of a crucifix and next to a skull while a violinist played Chopin’s funeral march” while the audience murmured disapprovingly and began whistling in annoyance.<sup>605</sup> Castiglione commented it was difficult to maintain a serious expression and to “resist tossing Sister Elize’s cord to this uncouth public so they could hang themselves.”<sup>606</sup> However, with the audience’s frustration and anger building up Castiglione fled, ripping off her robe and disappeared into a waiting coach. The public at the Meyendorff event would never have guessed they had just witnessed a woman, with all her hopes and aspirations gone, retreat from the public eye to become a recluse.

In June 1878 Castiglione moved to Place Vendôme, with a private entrance located on the right side of the building which was equipped with a special mechanism activated from inside. Literary critic Frédéric Loliée recounts the experience of gaining access to Castiglione’s apartments,

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<sup>604</sup> See Parisian Bloc-Notes, *Le Gaulois*, Saturday 10 May 1884; *La Gazette des étrangers*, 18 April 1863, p. 78.

<sup>605</sup> Decaux, A., *La Castiglione, dame de cœur de l’Europe*, Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1964, pp. 264-68. The public had hoped to see Castiglione nude and so booed her off stage (annotation by Castiglione, recopied by Montesquiou on the back of the photograph, *Sœur Elize*, 1975, pp. 548-99). See also a draft of Montesquiou’s book in Fonds Montesquiou, département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Naf 15172.

<sup>606</sup> Fonds Montesquiou, département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Naf 15172. Montesquiou copied Castiglione’s notes.

Before reaching the goal, one had to halt thrice. From the street the visitor had to announce himself by the sign agreed upon (preferably a whistle), which Mme. de Castiglione quickly caught through her closed shutters. The street-door gaped open, but you had scarcely advanced two paces when you stumbled against a second door, forbidding and iron-plated, that guarded the approach to the staircase. After one announced the indispensable password, the door turned on its hinges. After that the visitor had still to mount the few steps leading to the landing of the entresol, which had no bell. The interior mechanism of the lock worked noiselessly, and at last one crossed the threshold of this so severely barricaded flat, while the shrill yelps of two little dogs welcomed the visitor as a well-known guest.<sup>607</sup>

Her salon decorated in black, with all mirrors covered, served as a museum dedicated to her former self, where photographs, portraits, lace, fans and other relics were displayed in glass cases.<sup>608</sup> In addition, it was reported Castiglione only emerged after dark, heavily veiled, in order to walk her dogs under the cover of the night.<sup>609</sup>

Completely alienated from society, Castiglione was now ravaged by ill health, which undermined her daily life and would eventually compromise her beauty. French physicians treating neurasthenia during the nineteenth century believed nothing was more exhausting to a nervous system than the continual pursuit of pleasure. However, physicians noted what finally caused the collapse of one's nervous system was the "vexations of pride resulting from the inability to realise the fantasies of vanity, and moral overwork, caused by sorrows, disappointments, remorse, anxiety and 'depressive

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<sup>607</sup> Loliée, F., *The Romance of a Favourite: Comtesse de Castiglione*, Paris: Émile-Paul, 1912 translated by William Morton Fullerton, Kessinger Publishing, 2010, p. 70.

<sup>608</sup> Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Still Life*, n.d. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1975. This photograph memorialises one of her beloved dogs and an array of still-life objects, including a flowered fan, a parasol, and the dog's lead, carefully arranged around the corpse of her dog. See Decaux, A., 2001, pp. 352-53; Fonds Montesquiou, département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Naf 15171. According to Montesquiou, Castiglione also preserved the eyes and tongues of her dogs in crystal jars.

<sup>609</sup> Pringué, G.B., *Portraits et fantômes*, Cannes: Impr. de Robaudy, 1951.

passions.’’<sup>610</sup> Castiglione was indeed embittered by financial troubles and suffered with a sense of incompleteness, melancholy, anxiety and depression. She remained especially preoccupied in attempting to realise the fantasies of her own vanity, and continued to provide glimpses into her private world by systematically posing in front of the camera. In her attempts to “author” her own image (attempts that were ultimately thwarted, as Solomon-Godeau has argued), she produced a series of images posing on a chaise longue when sick and convalescing (Figure 7.5). In displaying her health problems in this way, which was absolutely without precedent in photography outside a medical institution during the nineteenth century, Castiglione acknowledged the new language of nerves emerging in Paris and the expanding medical culture of nerve management during the mid-century. But this went beyond an acknowledgement: the Comtesse also directly identified with this culture, becoming one of the growing number of *haute bourgeois* men and women who consulted specialists in nervous diseases. Castiglione sought treatment from the physician leading the field of psychiatry in Paris through his work for a select clientele and voluntarily secluded herself away behind the doors of the maison Blanche.<sup>611</sup>

### **Dr Blanche: *éminence grise* (guardian angel)**

Castiglione and Dr Blanche met for the first time at the Delesserts in the rue Raynouard in 1863. Dr Blanche often dined with the Delesserts and was a guest the night Castiglione decided to visit the Countess de Nadaillac, née Delesserts, to show off her costume before

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<sup>610</sup> Zeldin, T., *France, 1848-1945: Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 841.

<sup>611</sup> See Gijswijt-Hofstra, M. and Porter, R., *Cultures of Neurasthenia: From Beard to the First World War*, Clio Medica/Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, 2001.



heading to the infamous ball at the Tuileries.<sup>612</sup> Frédéric Loliée provides a far stranger account of their first meeting, one imbued with symbolism. On the night Castiglione was returning from the ball at the Tuileries her carriage was stopped by prowlers, who untied the horse, chased off the coachman and left her stranded in the night. Castiglione made straight for Passy, bareheaded and bare-shouldered and took shelter with Dr Blanche.<sup>613</sup> As neither Blanche nor his father make any mention of this version of events in their memoirs or letters, the story appears to be fictional. However, both Laure Murat and Pierre Apraxine state if such event did occur, it is likely to have been a cover for an attack of her nerves, which would indeed have required a visit to the clinic in the middle of the night.<sup>614</sup>

Castiglione has often been confused with another woman who lived in Paris at the same time, Albine Ney de la Moskowa.<sup>615</sup> Charles Bocher described in his memoirs how Mme Ney was found wandering at night half-crazed in the streets in an evening dress, and later accompanied home by a passer-by.<sup>616</sup> It was Madame Carette, reader to the Empress Eugénie, who caused the confusion between the two women when she described the first appearance in society of Castiglione in her *Souvenirs* as that of Mme Ney wandering crazed through the streets. As a result, this confusion about the identity of these two women, and others who were afflicted with psychological disorders, was

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<sup>612</sup> Blanche, J.É., ‘Countess Castiglione at Passy’, *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

<sup>613</sup> Loliée, F., *Les femmes du second empire: papiers intimes*, Paris: Tallandier, 1906.

<sup>614</sup> Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d’un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, p. 210; Apraxine, P., *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2000, p.12.

<sup>615</sup> Invited to tea by the Empress, Castiglione had to face the ladies-in-waiting, who ignored her and did not offer tea, “but I got *la Moskowa* to offer me some” (note inscribed in the margin of the memoirs of Mme Carette, 1889-1891). Albine, Princesse Ney de la Moskowa, née Laffitte (1803-1881), was mother of the celebrated eccentric, Duchess Eglé de Persigny. See Apraxine, P., *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2000, p.18.

<sup>616</sup> Boucher, C., *Mémoires: précédés des Souvenirs de famille (1816-1907)*, 1906, Nabu Press, 2010.

perpetuated in various memoirs. This illustrates how, at mid-century, there remained anxieties about what was publically admissible in terms of psychological illnesses, and the symptoms of nervous illness were barely differentiated from feminine whims for the middle and upper classes.<sup>617</sup>

The exact dates and durations of Castiglione's stay(s) at maison Blanche are not known, as her residence was often concealed from other patients.<sup>618</sup> Even a young Blanche remembered, "Though I knew she was there, I was not allowed to see her."<sup>619</sup> It has been established through archival research and the scholarship by Laure Murat and Pierre Apraxine that Dr Blanche treated Castiglione for her neurasthenia and that they established an intimate relationship based on trust.<sup>620</sup> She confided in him and asked him to protect her, which he did until his death. Blanche wrote,

An intimate relationship was established between her and my father which can be explained by the confidence which that excellent man inspired in anyone who approached him. His charm and kindness were irresistible.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> There are a number of high society women in Paris during the nineteenth century, associated when Castiglione, who have caught my attention over the course of my research: Mme Fenwick who gave plaster casts of her legs as gifts when she was sixty, died in a sanatorium; Mme Michel, another *merveilleuse* of the Directoire, starved herself to death when she realised she was getting old; Isabeau de Beauvau-Craon, granddaughter of Zoé du Cayla, the favourite of Louis XVIII, lost herself to spiritualism and barricaded herself in Courbevoie, armed and surrounded by dogs, suckling pigs and a monkey; finally, Mme Musard, whose receptions caused a sensation in Paris during the Second Empire, went mad and died in *La maison du Dr Blanche* in 1879.

<sup>618</sup> Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d'un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, p. 160.

<sup>619</sup> Blanche, J.É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

<sup>620</sup> He also treated her for other medical conditions, see Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d'un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, pp. 159-181; Apraxine, P., *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2000.

<sup>621</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

The Blanche family struck up a close relationship with Castiglione and her son, Georges de Castiglione.<sup>622</sup> George became friends with Jacques' elder brother, Joseph and they spent whole days playing together in the garden before Joseph's premature death aged twelve. However, Castiglione's son suffered from the effects of his mother's irritability, paranoia and nervous exhaustion.<sup>623</sup> Blanche went with his housekeeper to the Castiglione's house to collect his brother and remembers the experience well. He writes,

I have quite a clear vision of myself climbing a gloomy staircase; better still, I recall the strong smell of Parma violets, growing ever stronger the closer one got to the landing onto which opened the bedroom. ... I entered the mysterious bedroom, which was also the dining room, for the countess refused ever to leave it. It must have been summer, the venetian blinds were closed and one could hear children's cries through the open window. I can still see, near to that window and in a dark corner of the room, a large, low bed with a fur cover from which emerged a pair of shoulders and a head of Mme de Castiglione. I still seem to hear the hoarse sound of a commanding voice. The countess shouted through the window to her son: "Run, Georges, run faster! Are you sweating? I want you to sweat." The voice was husky, harsh and imperious, ordering the puny child to run round the lawn in full sun, in accordance with some strange hygiene system. Poor Georges inspired pity from everyone because of the extraordinary treatment he was subjected to by his mother.<sup>624</sup>

When staying at her home residence, rather than at the maison Blanche, Castiglione would allow only Dr Blanche, his housekeeper Isabelle, and her photographer Pierre Louis Pierson to visit. Castiglione believed she had been persecuted and became fearful of being poisoned, to such an extent she requested to continue having her food delivered

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<sup>622</sup> Murat, L., *La Maison du docteur Blanche : Histoire d'un asile et de ses pensionnaires, de Nerval a Maupassant*, Editions: J C Lattes, 2001, p 160.

<sup>623</sup> He appears dressed as a girl, coiffed in long curls, in a series of photographs from the Montesquiou album. George de Castiglione died aged 24 from smallpox. A loss Castiglione found devastating despite their arguments over inheritance a few years before his death (1873-75).

<sup>624</sup> Blanche later writes in his memoirs of Georges weeping as he told his elder brother Joseph "Minna is so naughty. She never lets me kiss her on the cheek." Castiglione believed the maternal smile upset the lines of the face by making them more rounded. Blanche, J.-É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913; Blanche, J.É., 'Encore la Belle Florentine', *Le Gaulois*, 21 January 1914.

by Dr Blanche every night to her own residence. When the doctor was not available he would send his housekeeper, Isabelle, and his son to deliver her food. As Blanche recalls,

She was driven crazy by the thought that someone might poison her food and she only ever ate the same food as us. That was the contents of the basket that faithful Isabelle David, the wife of a local policeman, regularly carried to rue Nicolo with a pass from my father. Isabelle was one of the last people to approach Mme de Castiglione when, 25 years later, she became more invisible and more secretive than ever.<sup>625</sup>

Castiglione considered Dr Blanche to be her *éminence grise* and they remained in close contact until his death in 1893. Dr Blanche bought the statuette of Castiglione by Carrier-Belleuse and it formed part of his vast art collection. Although no record of the statuette could be found in the Blanche estate, a letter written by Blanche notes the moment Castiglione visited his dying father at their family home and mentions the statuette as standing opposite the bedroom. Blanche wrote,

Towards evening, a little lady, swathed in black veils, crossed our garden, entered the house and passed part of the night in the funeral bedroom opposite a statue of the Queen of Etruria with a golden diadem by Carrier-Belleuse.<sup>626</sup>

Castiglione also handed Blanche an ebony casket full of letters written by her at his father's bedside. She explained the script to him as they were written in a code agreed between her and the doctor. Blanche, however, noted he found no use for the lengthy, mysterious documents and returned them to Castiglione,

It was only after several months that I realised the pointlessness of these supposedly historical documents and of which I had become the guardian. I gave them back to the countess. The real interest of her correspondence was in other bundles of which I possessed a prodigious quantity.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

<sup>626</sup> Letter from Jacques-Émile Blanche to Mme Blanche, August 1893, ms 7036, Fonds Blanche, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris.

<sup>627</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

At the funeral of Dr Blanche, Castiglione threw down an armful of flowers onto the coffin of her *éminence grise* and asked his son to paint her portrait. She said to Blanche,

I believe I can still, under certain conditions, give some idea of my former beauty. I shall come towards the end of the day. You will have closed the venetian blinds. I shall arrange the curtains, your seat and mine. Tomorrow, when the sun will be low and opposite the house, wait for me. I want you to know what your father's friend was really like.<sup>628</sup>

An appointment was made at nightfall in the artist's studio. She arrived at the agreed time.<sup>629</sup>

### **The Neurasthenic Portrait**

I was terrified; my hand, would it obey me? It happened in a room draped in blue and white cotton. The windows were blue and the atmosphere was blue like cigarette smoke. My impressive model entered noiselessly, gliding over the carpet like a ghost coming on stage. She sat in profile, her bust held high. Despite her tall coiffure in the form of a diadem, she was a little person, all pink and small. One by one the veils slipped to the ground and suddenly I knew that famous face, all made up, ruined, distressing. All that was left was like a barley sugar, sucked by a child and held in its hand.<sup>630</sup>

Blanche's encounter with Castiglione in 1893 came more than two decades after his last sighting of her. Although nervous at the prospect, the opportunity to produce a portrait of his father's patient tempted Blanche's artistic and personal curiosity. He wondered

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I have part-translated one of Castiglione's letters to Dr Blanche, owned by Blanche, from the Institut de France archives. Written in long, fine script in pencil I have not been able to translate the full letter, however, as Blanche notes, her letters were 'lengthy, mysterious in phraseology and quickly lapse into muddle and craziness'. See Figure 7.6.

<sup>628</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

<sup>629</sup> Letter from Jacques-Émile Blanche, ms 7036, Fonds Blanche, Bibliothèque Institut de France, Paris.

<sup>630</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'Countess Castiglione at Passy', *Le Gaulois*, 17 January 1913.

about the sittings with Castiglione in his memoirs, “But how could it be done? Where could she pose? What would I discover once the veils had fallen?”<sup>631</sup>

Castiglione was fifty-six years old, had lost her teeth and hair, and had only visited her photographer’s studio once since 1867.<sup>632</sup> Despite withdrawing from society, Castiglione had carefully followed all Blanche’s career and exhibitions through his father, and it appears the death of her trusted physician reawakened Castiglione’s desire to look to her own image once again with the assistance of his son.

Utilising a vertical format Blanche paints a sombre, haunting image of the neurasthenic Castiglione in his full-length portrait (Figure 7.7). He places her in the foreground of the painting where she stands straight-backed and still, whilst her darkened eyes are staring, emotionless, out at the viewer. Her face is pale and emaciated, appearing to pull her skin down towards her chin, while at the same time accentuating her tiny, tight-lipped mouth. Her troubled face is delicately covered with a black, spotted veil and her headpiece perfectly carefully arranged on top of her head. She is dressed from head to foot in full mourning wear, a black floor-length dress with a black cloak wrapped around her and pulled tightly closed with no sign of her arms wrapped around her or her feet. She seems to be floating above the ground, as if an apparition. A few white pearls cascade out from underneath the layers of black fabric she is swathed in, resembling hanging teeth more than pearls. Blanche carefully defines her silhouette using light projected from the outdoor background, a garden setting, quite likely in the grounds of the maison Blanche where she received treatment and where Blanche remembered seeing her. The setting for the portrait also nods to the circumstances under

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<sup>631</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Passy*, Paris : Lafitte, 1928, p.39.

<sup>632</sup> Decaux, A., *La Castiglione, dame de cœur de l’Europe*, Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1964, p. 46.

which Castiglione requested it, to commemorate her good friend and physician Doctor Blanche at the time of his death, while dressed in her full mourning dress. Blanche wrote of Castiglione following his study for the portrait, “there was something dry about her, and she had the harshest, most unfeminine voice I have ever heard.”<sup>633</sup> Taking care to ensure the portrait was a recognisable representation of Castiglione, Blanche ensures that his thick, short dashes of flesh-toned paint with grey undertones, which he uses on her face, can be seen through her veil in order to create the drawn, sickly expression. Blanche applies impenetrable and layered brushstrokes to create the dense black of Castiglione’s clothing, which emphasises her flattened figure against the grey flecks of the background sky.

In the second portrait, dated 1914, Blanche depicts Castiglione seated in profile, close enough to provide a detailed portrait, while still exuding a sense of mystery and melancholy (Figure 7.8). She remains dressed in the same black clothing as the first portrait, however her cloak has fallen open to reveal the number of pearl necklaces she wore around her neck. Her solemn, tired-looking face remains fully veiled and she rests the weight of her head on her hand, appearing lost in her thoughts, while her fixed stare avoids the gaze of the viewer. Blanche described elements of his portrait in *Le Gaulois*,

The mouth is a simple line inflected to the left, from which seems to flow bitterness in two channels...poor countess. She was perhaps only beautiful and so beautiful as to lose her reason. There can be no doubt about this.”<sup>634</sup>

Blanche places her against a muted background of grey and blue, with flecks of green and yellow, reminiscent of the cigarette smoke atmosphere Blanche describes of their first portrait sitting in his studio. Inscribed in the bottom left is of the portrait is,

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<sup>633</sup> Blanche, J.-É., ‘La Belle Florentine’, *Le Gaulois*, 24 January 1914.

<sup>634</sup> Blanche, J.-É., ‘La Belle Florentine’, *Le Gaulois*, 24 January 1914.

*Comtesse Castiglione 1893*. Etched on the back is the following note: *J.E. Blanche d'après l'étude faite en août 1893 à Auteuil dans ma chambre quand la comtesse de Castiglione vint à mort de mon père.*

Blanche paints two intimate and compelling psychological portraits of Castiglione, yet it is the full-length portrait that demonstrates best his model's inner tensions and torments. In this painting Castiglione's fixed stare and static pose, combined with her black clothing, pale face, dark eyes and downturned mouth effectively represent the Comtesse as a neurasthenic, an identity she wholly embraced. Blanche was familiar with Castiglione's medical history through his father, as he wrote,

My father revealed to me that the "Divine" was a pathological case. To Doctor Blanche, in letters which were often incomprehensible, she revealed all her emotions. She only had confidence in him and claimed many times that there were those who wished to poison her and that her imaginary enemies were pursuing her. Megalomania and persecution complex, that is the truth of the matter and it is banal.<sup>635</sup>

Although in many quarters neurasthenia and nervousness continued to be prized as a sign of refined artistic sensibility, it also produced, according to the Goncourt brothers, "a kind of skinned and chafed moral and sensitive being, wounded by the minutest impressions, defenceless, without a casing, all bloody and raw."<sup>636</sup> The visual vocabulary of the Castiglione portraits by Blanche are complex and layered, emblematic of the ideological, aesthetic and psychological complexities of French modern portraiture. The portraits demonstrate the expressive possibilities of portraiture during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Castiglione's individual, neurasthenic identity is not only revealed by Blanche as complex and unstable, but also as a culturally

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<sup>635</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'La Belle Florentine', *Le Gaulois*, 24 January 1914.

<sup>636</sup> Edmond and Jules Goncourt, quoted in Silverman, D., *Art Nouveau in fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 37-38.



coded and artistically framed construct re-enacted specifically for, or by, the artist or physician.

### **Blanche, Castiglione and Photography**

Heather McPherson argues that Blanche “did not have the courage to begin” his portraits of Castiglione and believes the narrative of the events surrounding Castiglione’s sitting is “suspect.”<sup>637</sup> Instead she proposes that Blanche copied the images from old photographs of the Comtesse. This is an interesting theory as there is no indication from Blanche or his sitters that he ever worked from photographs when completing his portraits, rather it is well documented in his letters that he preferred long sittings with his subject. Through extensive archival research I discovered Blanche refers in his letters and memoirs to sketching Castiglione for his portraits both standing and in profile, however he mentions she was also photographed in his studio at the same time she posed for her portrait with him.<sup>638</sup> It is not known from Blanche’s records which photographer came to his home to photograph Castiglione, however further archival research noted that Castiglione made a visit to a photographic studio less than two weeks after the death of Dr Blanche on 1 September 1893, where Pierre-Louis Pierson was still in charge, however the name of the studio had changed to Braun, Clément et Cie.<sup>639</sup> Therefore, given the timing of Castiglione’s visit to Pierson following the death of Blanche’s father, and the similarities of the two test series of photographs that she later entitled *Saint Cecilia* and *Rachel* (Figures 7.11 and 7.12) to those of the finished portraits by Blanche,

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<sup>637</sup> See Apraxine, P., *La Divine Comtesse: Photographs of the Countess de Castiglione*, Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2000; and McPherson, H., *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. McPherson writes that Blanche cryptically refers to a pastel he made at that first sitting, however never mentions the full-length oil portrait that remained in his studio or its obvious photographic derivation.

<sup>638</sup> Blanche, J.-É., ‘La Belle Florentine’, *Le Gaulois*, 24 January 1914.

<sup>639</sup> Given the timing it is very unlikely any other studio was responsible for these photographic prints.

it is very likely that these are the photographs Castiglione posed for at Blanche's home and at the photographic studio.

Castiglione wrote in her letter to Blanche that the photographs were to aid him in painting her portrait, circumventing the need for the lengthy, multiple sittings Blanche was renowned for. As such, McPherson is correct in stating that Blanche worked from photographs, albeit alongside the actual model. Blanche did not like the photographs of Castiglione and he described them as follows, quoted here in full,

These images are haunting, like some primitive Egyptian princess discarding her mummy's bands and leaving her sarcophagus. The countess was so small and she topped her coiffure with a sort of gigantic tiara, a black hat with storeys of crepe. It was in the shape of a pyramid and rather comical. Viewed full on, with her hands crossed and her arms hanging down, wearing a voluminous cape with jet black arabesques and a thick veil covering a face so melancholy, so worn, still so exquisite, all this makes one want to kneel and worship this image.<sup>640</sup>

The scientific and artistic applications of photography as an agent for observation and as a diagnostic tool developed rapidly after the mid-century.<sup>641</sup> Albert Londe,

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<sup>640</sup> Blanche, J.-É., 'La Belle Florentine', *Le Gaulois*, 24 January 1914. Suggesting lifelessness, 'Melancholia' had been associated from antiquity to early modern times with an excess of the bodily fluid of black bile and was suggestive of earth, autumn and aging. Tamar Garb argues that the brooding figure of Melancholia provided a figural prototype for the depiction of mature femininity (especially of a woman dressed in mourning costume), even if its allegorical function, as the embodiment of profound thought, both exceeded the specific dictates of Realist portraiture and represented a state of mind that was traditionally associated with the masculine. Melancholia is traditionally accompanied by attributes referring to geometry, measurement and cerebral activity; her distractedness has been associated with 'genius' and attributed to a contemplative attitude, her withdrawn features shielding a mind struggling with some insoluble intellectual problem. Garb, T., *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France 1814-1914*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 101-102. For an interesting discussion of Realist painting and melancholy see M. Iversen, 'Hopper's Melancholic Gaze' in S. Wagstaff, *Edward Hopper*, London: Tate, 2004, pp. 52-67.

<sup>641</sup> The physiologist Duchenne de Boulogne, who sought to demonstrate the grammar and orthography of facial expression by applying localized electric shocks to specific muscles, used the camera to record his experiments. See Duchenne de Boulogne, G.B., *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine ou analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions*, Paris: Ve Jules Renouard, 1862; Jammes, A., "Duchenne de Boulogne, la grimace provoquée et Nadar", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 92, December, 1978, pp. 215-20. On a more artistic note, Nadar and his brother, Adrien, created a dazzling series of "têtes d'expression" of the celebrated mime Charles Deburau that were acclaimed at the Exposition Universelle of 1855. See Hambourg, M.M., et al., *Nadar*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art,

director of the photographic services at la Salpêtrière in the 1880s, hailed photography as “the true retina of the scholar.”<sup>642</sup> He contended that photography could reveal things that the eye could not perceive, thus ascribing a prognostic value to it.

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, photography expanded the field of portraiture both literally and figuratively, but there was little consensus about what a photographic portrait should look like. The desire to record the features of the sitter as accurately as possible was countered by more artistic, subjective approaches to portrait photography that deployed dramatic chiaroscuro and variations in focus as expressive devices. A split developed between proponents of the artistic Rembrandtesque portrayal and advocates of the materialistic, sharp-focus, accessory-laden social effigy.<sup>643</sup> The dichotomy between surface and depth, physical resemblance and moral likeness, posed, if anything, a more complicated dilemma for the portrait photographer than the painter because of the tendency to equate photography with denotation (rather than connotation) and visual truth. Although photography provided a more direct, more intimate medium for recording the human face, its excessive verisimilitude was initially considered a liability.<sup>644</sup>

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1995, pp. 224-227, plates 6-20. The art photographer O.G. Rejlander likewise utilized the camera to record a wide range of expressions and emotions in his allegorical and genre subjects. Dr. Hugh Welsh Diamond was one of the first to advocate the use of photography in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. He began photographing inmates at the Surrey County Asylum, Wandsworth, in the early 1850s. See *Hugh Welsh Diamond, 1808-1886: Doctor, Antiquarian, Photographer*, London: Orleans House Gallery, 1980; Rosenblum, N., *A World History of Photography*, New York: Abbeville, 1984, p. 76; In a paper read to the Royal Society in 1856, Diamond outlined the relationship of photography to psychiatry.

<sup>642</sup> Didi-Huberman, G., *Invention de l'Hystérie: Charcot et l'Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, Paris: Macula, 1982, translated into English by Alisa Hartz, *Invention of Hysteria*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, p. 35.

<sup>643</sup> McCauley, E.A., *Likenesses: Portrait Photography in Europe 1850-70*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Art Museum, 1980, pp. 2-3.

<sup>644</sup> In his celebrated portraits of Parisian intellectuals from 1850s and 1860s, Nadar invented an individualistic style of portraiture, utilising dramatic Rembrandtesque lighting and studio props and costumes, which elevated the photographic portrait to a new level of artistry. Even amateur

Beginning in the 1850s, Castiglione looked to the camera to immortalise her features, creating a fictive autobiography and memory theatre dedicated to perpetuating her matchless beauty and anticipated fin-de-siècle aestheticism. The photographic portraits of Castiglione and the painted portraits by Blanche are symptomatic of the subjective range and expressive possibilities of the modern portrait, whether photographed or painted, which developed in the wake of and in contradistinction to the purported objectivity of the camera. In these multifaceted, contradictory images, individual identity is revealed as complex and unstable, as culturally coded and artistically framed construct reenacted for the camera, the artist or the clinician. The portraits of Castiglione are also emblematic of the ideological, aesthetic, and psychological complexity of the act of portrayal, which frequently entails a mysterious collaboration between artist and model and the enduring commemorative function of portraits. The photographs of Castiglione are emblematic of the expressive and mythologising capacity of the photographic medium that transformed the conceptual and temporal parameters of portraiture as a visual archive and museum of memory. Although their private nature and the level of directorial control Castiglione exerted distinguish them from standardised commercial photographic portraits, they utilise similar formats and poses, and alternatively espouse and transgress conventions of feminine representation. If the images of Castiglione are in many ways symptomatic of the overlapping aesthetic concerns of portrait photographers and painters, they also illustrate

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photographers developed a more intimate style of portraiture that contrasted with the more conventionalised photographic portraits produced by the leading commercial studios. For more see McCauley, E.A., *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris 1848-1871*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, pp.125-129.

the rapid inroads made by photography and its tendency to supplant the traditional functions of the painted portrait, even for aristocratic clients like Castiglione.

In the context of late nineteenth-century culture, Castiglione was unusual but not rare. Following the death of Dr Blanche, she felt compelled to re-engage with image making and she did this in two ways: by re-entering the photographic studio with Louis Pierson and the artist's studio with Blanche. As narcissistic and self-absorbed as they may seem, Castiglione's portraits with Louis Pierson and Blanche are exceptional in that Castiglione was able to construct multiple selves, which can be read as manifestations of the same woman.<sup>645</sup> Taking an active role in the production of her image, Castiglione demonstrates a degree of agency in her representation as she often gazes assertively out at the viewer, her face and posture indicating a degree of confidence. Solomon-Godeau, however, draws our attention to the question: how much agency did the Countess actually have? How far were these images of her own making? Interestingly, Castiglione appears to relinquish her control over her image when she first instructs Blanche to paint her, placing the role of director into his hands. This chimes with Solomon-Godeau's conclusion, albeit in relation to the photographs, that as "a living artefact, the countess has so fully assimilated the desire of others that there is no space, language or means of representation for any desire that might be termed her own."<sup>646</sup> However, having said this, Blanche appears to follow his instructions from Castiglione and although it was not his usual practice, he did use the photographs she provided in order to complete the portraits of her. Castiglione articulated and dictated her physical representation through refusing more than one sitting and providing photographs; ultimately, however, she

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<sup>645</sup> Smith, S.M., *American Archives: Gender, Race and Class in Visual Culture*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999 p. 104.

<sup>646</sup> Solomon-Godeau, A., 'The Legs of the Countess', *October* 39 (Winter) MIT Press, p. 108.

could not control Blanche's realisation of her image. As such, Blanche conveys the personal connection, anxiety and tension he had with Castiglione as a patient of his father, but also, in applying his unique painterly technique, he creates a more compelling psychological portrait of the neurasthenic. Using his technique to undermine convention, Blanche is able to represent the uncertainties and difficulties of Castiglione's image through multiple strokes, reiterations and dense brushwork.

## Conclusion

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In his introduction to *Les arts plastiques*, Blanche grappled with difficult, seemingly insoluble questions about portraiture.<sup>647</sup> How much and what sort of information should a portrait convey about the sitter and the artist? Is a portrait supposed to be primarily a record of physical likeness, or rather a probing exposé of the sitter's psyche? Or is it, rather more simply, a formal arrangement, a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order in which the artist and his individual *écriture* are foregrounded?

Blanche was certainly not alone in debating these issues; such questions surrounding the representative function of the modern portrait were part of a broader interrogation of the relationship between body and psyche, exteriority and interiority that came to the fore over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in art and literature. As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty stated,

The goal of modern painting has not so much consisted in choosing between line and colour, or even between the figuration of things, and the creation of signs, but rather of multiplying the systems of equivalences, of breaking their adherence to the exteriority of things, which can require that one create new materials or new means of expression, which sometimes happens through reexamination and reinvestment in those that already existed.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> Blanche, J.-É., *Les arts plastiques*, Paris: Édition, 1931. One of Blanche's most important critical works, *Les arts plastiques* is an ambitious attempt to trace the trajectory of French art and the role of artistic generations and institutions during the Third Republic, however it has been totally ignored by scholars. On the critical and historical value of *Les arts plastiques* see Sutton, D., 'Jacques-Émile Blanche', pp. 168-169.

<sup>648</sup> « L'effort de la peinture moderne n'a pas tant consisté à choisir entre la ligne et la couleur, ou même entre la figuration des choses et la création des signes, qu'à multiplier les systèmes d'équivalences, à rompre leur adhérence à l'enveloppe des choses, ce qui peut exiger qu'on crée de nouveaux matériaux ou de nouveaux moyens d'expression, mais se fait quelquefois par réexamen et réinvestissement de ceux qui existaient déjà. » Merleau-Ponty, M., *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, pp. 71-72.

From the early 1870s to the beginning of the 1900s, with the advent and development of photography and Impressionism, such new materials and means of expression began to emerge, which led to a re-evaluation of portraiture. In Impressionist portraiture, the dispersal of visual interest, manipulation of the figure-ground relationship, and emphasis upon technique upset the traditional hierarchy of portraiture in which the sitter, as opposed to the artist, predominated.<sup>649</sup> As Farr observes, “the complex backgrounds define the sitter both socially and psychologically”, arguing that the context the sitter is placed within – be it a landscape or interior – becomes charged with their (ie. the *sitter*’s) presence.<sup>650</sup>

Another way of reading Impressionist portraits is as painted surfaces that convey the movement of the artist’s hand so fully, so completely, that the identity of the sitter is obliterated. The Impressionist work of art foregrounds the painter not only as a physical presence (that hand, manipulating that brush, that paint), but also as a psychic presence.

Such modern portraits said as much if not more about painters – their styles, sympathies, tastes and experiences – as about the represented figures. As the distinguished English author and critic Philip Hensher remarked in response to an exhibition of Manet’s portraits at London’s Royal Academy in 2013,

Manet’s portraiture is devoted to the image that is controlled not by the conventions of the form, still less of the acceptable conventions of emerging photography portraiture, but by the gaze of the artist... an unrelenting and ceaselessly inventive eye, with a perfect visual memory, apparently in need of little mechanical help.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> See Farr, M., *Impressionist Portraiture: A Study in Context and Meaning*, University of North Carolina, 1992, pp. 36-37, 71.

<sup>650</sup> Farr, M., *Impressionist Portraiture: A Study in Context and Meaning*, University of North Carolina, 1992, pp. 36.

<sup>651</sup> Hensher, P., ‘Manet’s Portraits: the artist on the knife-edge of photography’ [Online] <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jan/12/manet-portraits-artist-photography-royal-academy> [accessed June 2015] Hensher states that the uniqueness of Manet’s vision means that if we



Blanche, like other artists of his generation, was influenced and liberated by the example set by Manet and other avant-gardists working in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the mid-1880s to the early-1900s Blanche dedicated himself to the project of portraiture, while he remained dedicated to working with oil, pastels and other standard graphic media, he did experiment with new ways of seeing. As art critic George Waldemar stated,

The human being for Blanche is not a model, a subject, a motif; it is the vehicle of his thought as a painter, it is the medium through which he expresses himself, it is the vocabulary, the alphabet of his art.<sup>652</sup>

Waldemar argues here that Blanche is expressing himself through the medium of paint, irrespective of the genre – portraiture – which we might think would require another approach, just in the same way that Hensher wrote about Manet’s portraiture and the “gaze of the artist”.

Blanche devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to his practice and explored many possibilities in style and technique. It is significant that he searched for new teachers and inspiration among the avant-garde – seeking out Manet and Degas in particular – rather than aligning himself with more traditional portrait painters. Though Blanche did remain committed to somewhat conservative notions regarding likeness and status, he demonstrated a preoccupation with tactile surfaces and the application of paint that I would identify as modernist. As he was financially independent Blanche was free to experiment at his own expense. In doing so, he moved towards an altogether different

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want to find ‘meaning’ in a work of art, we have to turn to the artist, who is ‘exceptional’, ‘original’, ‘a genius’. This is how modernist art history works.

<sup>652</sup> Waldemar, G., ‘Jacques-Émile Blanche et Helleu’, *ADA*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1933, pp. 58-59.

style described by the critic Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, as “psychological impressionism.”<sup>653</sup> This highly intuitive and skilled mode of painting was identified as “a series of acute and penetrating observations” committed to the canvas with speed and agility.<sup>654</sup> Vaudoyer, a contemporary of Blanche’s, did not bring to this concept a discussion of Blanche’s interest in neurology, or of his predominantly ‘nervous’ patient-sitters. If he had, Blanche’s identity as a ‘psychological impressionist’ would have been even more compelling – this was an identity that, I would argue, was unique to this artist.

At the beginning of this thesis, I set up the history of neurasthenia and the role played by the maison Blanche in it. I did this not only to establish the absolute distinctiveness of the environment Blanche grew up and worked within, but also to show how it facilitated Blanche’s career, enabling privileged access to his father’s extensive network of patients, friends, colleagues and intellectuals – this was a world he had always inhabited. It is not my intention in setting up the thesis in this way to separate the history of medicine from Blanche’s portraits, but rather to provide the context to Blanche’s unique upbringing and the influence his father’s progressive practice in neurology had on the young artist and his practice. It is important that the discussion foregrounds Blanche’s family history and connections with the field of neurology in order to provide context for and enable our understanding of his portraits. Blanche’s diaries, memoirs and correspondence, which this thesis has drawn upon considerably, added to his impressive portfolio of portraits, revealing how substantial his artistic network was. Blanche was an incredibly well-connected individual who took an active interest in other painters and

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<sup>653</sup> Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintures, pastels et lithographs*, Paris: Hotel de Jean Charpentier, 1924.

<sup>654</sup> Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, *Jacques-Émile Blanche: Peintures, pastels et lithographs*, Paris: Hotel de Jean Charpentier, 1924.

writers, as well as stage performers, connoisseurs of art, musicians, salonnières, and other members of fashionable society. It was as a result of these connections, established in his father's *maison de santé*, that Blanche was able to move so effortlessly across middle and upper class Parisian society. Vaudoier remarked on Blanche's "professional security" and this was as much a matter of confidence in his social abilities – to attract sitters, to put them at ease, to apprehend their anxieties – as in his artistic abilities. One of Blanche's assets as a portraitist was his in-depth knowledge of those who sat for their portraits. Influenced by his father's progressive practice in neurology, which emphasised the importance of the reciprocal relationship between doctor and patient, Blanche approached his sitters with interest and intuition. As a result, his portraits provide us with informed insights into the personalities of his neurasthenic sitters, from Marcel Proust and the comtesse de Castiglione to Robert de Montesquiou and Aubrey Beardsley. His contribution, however, extends beyond this: in focusing his efforts on the representation of such sitters, Blanche provides us with a window on to neurasthenic culture at the turn of the century.

Blanche represents one of the last artists of the late nineteenth century for whom the study of the human figure in such a particular milieu remained the highest artistic calling. As the twentieth century advanced portraiture became increasingly disenfranchised as concepts of identity and representation were continually redefined by the artistic and literary vanguard. Blanche had a long career; the technical innovations of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, which appeared progressive and novel at the end of the nineteenth century, seemed hopelessly *retardataire* a decade later with the advent of Cubism and Abstraction. By attempting to maintain the status of the portrait as both

social chronicle and psychological document, Blanche was ultimately swimming against the stream and this has contributed to his critical neglect. As Gabriel Weisberg pointed out, by focusing on the portrait Blanche unknowingly placed himself on the side of tradition as opposed to innovation, and this has forestalled any serious assessment of his role in the burgeoning of portraiture that took place in the Third Republic.<sup>655</sup>

A further reason for Blanche's critical neglect lies in his privileged family background and personal wealth, which like his dual artistic and literary vocation, encouraged his contemporaries to view him as an amateur who received no formal artistic training. In dividing his time between portraiture and writing, Paris and London, Blanche gained the reputation of a 'jack of all trades, master of none', albeit later in his life. Though he was equally talented and prolific as a writer, Blanche's writings, like his portraits, have also slipped into oblivion. This is despite the fact that *Aymeris*, his fictionalised biography, provides an invaluable record of artistic and literary life in Paris and London at the turn of the century, with insightful descriptions of people and places that occupy central positions in art history today. Still more inexplicable is the neglect of Blanche's critical writings, which also contain penetrating, original insights about *fin-de-siècle* art, culture and debates concerning the emergence of modern art. His fascinating first-hand observations about Manet and his art practices are but one example among many of this unjustified disregard.<sup>656</sup>

As I hope to have demonstrated in this thesis, Blanche's most important contribution to art history are his portraits, which chronicle a highly particular, distinctly 'nervous' social and intellectual stratum. In his perceptive, 'psychological portraits'

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<sup>655</sup> Weisberg, G. 'J.É. Blanche and the Stylish Portrait, 1880-1905', *Arts Magazine*, LIX/10, Summer 1985, p. 97.

<sup>656</sup> See Blanche, J.-É., *Propos de peintre, de David à Degas*, Paris: Émile-Paul, 1919, pp. 133-52.

Blanche sought to preserve the traditional social and commemorative mandate of portraiture whilst, at the same time, modernising it, infusing it with the language of ‘nerves’. It can therefore be argued that like many of turn-of-the-century artists, Blanche effectively straddled academic and avant-garde art, belonging to neither camp, and this intermediary position is what makes him and his work so very interesting: it demonstrates his flexibility as an artist, but it also shows how supple artistic style itself was during the modern period.

In histories of modern art, scholars frequently position their academicians on one side and their avant-gardists on the other. Connected to this, art historians tend to characterise academicians as conservatives, steeped in the past, and avant-gardists as liberals, looking to the future. In many ways, such a polarised approach over-simplifies artistic contexts that were far richer, more interesting and diverse than this. Modernists did not simply reject what went before them: Degas and Cézanne both tried to succeed within the Beaux-Arts system, while Manet totally immersed himself for six years in the academic methods of his teacher Thomas Couture (1815-1879). Rather they borrowed freely from tradition those components that best answered their aesthetic and ideological needs. Equally, using Blanche as an example, an artist who exhibited primarily through the Salon and the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts could nevertheless be actively engaged in the modernist project of representing a ‘nervous’ sector of Parisian society, producing work that was identified by a contemporary as “psychological impressionism.”<sup>657</sup> With this in mind, we should, I feel, question the usefulness of such

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<sup>657</sup> In the 1880s Blanche also participated in a series of exhibitions held at the Galerie Georges Petit from 1883 under the heading of the *Trente Trois* (33). While these exhibitions of 33 artists and sculptors, most of whom were younger than the leading painters of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, had no particular focal point, they did give emerging artists who were not identified as radical an opportunity to exhibit

categories. In particular, what does an artist like Blanche, who moved with such ease between groups we might consider as being somewhat antagonistic, tell us about the subtleties and complexities of the Parisian art world? How might the study of such artists challenge the stereotypes of the past, both academic and modernist? Scholars agree that modernity itself was both complex and contested; it follows that modern art had the same characteristics and an artist like Blanche truly exemplifies this. As this account of his distinctive upbringing and approach to the image of the individual has demonstrated, he was far more than a ‘society portraitist’. As Blanche himself claimed,

To extract the secrets of the soul, whatever they may be, while observing and listening to the model, is it not the intoxication felt by the psychologist, the moralist and of course the painter of portraits?<sup>658</sup>

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their work in the 1880s. For reference to the organisation of the *Trente Trois* see: Blanche, J.-É., *La Pêche*, pp. 178-179. Members of the group included Eugène Carrière, Georges Desvallières, Marie Cazin (the wife of the painter Jean Charles Cazin), Laurent Desrousseaux (a painter of large scale genre scenes), Walter Gay, Rafael de Ochoa, Mme. Albert Besnard, Odilon Redon and many others. The group stayed largely intact throughout the 1880s and was frequently reported on in the daily press. For further reference see André Michel, “Les Trente-Trois,” *Journal des Débats*, January 7, 1888, and January 11, 1889; André Michel, *Journal des Débats*, January 11, 1889.

<sup>658</sup> « Arracher le secret d’une âme, quelle qu’elle soit, en observant, en écoutant le modèle, n’est-ce pas l’enivrement du psychologue, du moraliste comme du peintre de portraits ? » *Jacques-Émile Blanche 1861-1942*, Exhib. Cat., (eds) Daniel Halévy, Lucien Corpechot et Félicien Cacan, Paris : Musée de l’Orangerie, 1943, pp. 11-12.

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### **Some of Blanche's artworks can be found at**

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