

Diana or Christ?: Seeing and Feeling Doubt in Late-Victorian Visual Culture

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This is not fine art, for the simple reason, if there were no other, that fine art does not take a subject of great tragic interest and level it to the temperature of a curate's tea party. There is no real feeling in the work at all.¹

Using Edwin Long's painting *Diana or Christ?* (1881) as a micro-historical case study, this article aims to foreground the role that the visual might play in the history of religious emotions and, in turn, to reflect on how attention to religious feeling might offer new perspectives on Victorian art. Exemplified by the quotation from *The Times* printed above, Victorian art critics deemed Long's painting not to be art, and to contain 'no feeling'; it had failed to imbue the serious subject matter of Christian martyrdom with appropriately emotional content.² Yet a wide range of Anglo-American Protestant responses suggested quite the opposite. These regarded *Diana or Christ?* as an accomplished artwork in terms of its facture and style but also brimming with — as the *Monthly Packet* put it — 'the most exquisite feeling and touching grace and purity'.³ In this article I explore the relationship between *Diana or Christ?* and the faith-related feelings that emerged through encounters with it, offering an alternative to the view of *The Times's* art critic that Long's painting was entirely devoid of feeling. It is in this clash of opinion about what is (or is not) appropriate feeling that, as June Howard points out, 'the social construction of emotion becomes visible.'⁴ The varied responses to the presence/absence of religious feeling in *Diana or Christ?* indicate how socially mediated and sanctioned these feelings were, and show the painting to be a point of interesting contestation.

¹'The Royal Academy', *The Times*, 6 June 1881, p. 4.

² See Walter Armstrong, *Celebrated Pictures Exhibited at the Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition* (London: Virtue, 1888), p. 45; Edmund W. Gosse, 'The Royal Academy in 1881', *Fortnightly Review*, June 1881, pp. 689–703 (p. 698).

³'Spider Subjects', *Monthly Packet*, 1 November 1881, pp. 513–17 (p. 513). See also 'Mr Edwin Long, A.R.A.', *Bow Bells*, 1 June 1881, p. 540; A. M. J. (Leicester, aged 16), 'The Royal Academy', *Girl's Own Paper*, 3 September 1881, p. 780.

⁴June Howard, 'What Is Sentimentality?', *American Literary History*, 11 (1999), 63–81 (p. 69).

The combination of faith, feeling, and the visual arts brings *Diana or Christ?* into dialogue with a variety of fields of inquiry. Art historians have long been concerned with emotions, expression, and gesture.⁵ But they have — with some exceptions — been slower to engage with the burgeoning field of the history of emotions.⁶ If emotions are socially and historically constituted in complex ways, then, as Helen Hills and Penelope Gouk emphasize, the ways in which emotions are represented are crucial to their formation.⁷ But paintings are more than just documents from which to attempt to glean past emotional states and statements. They are engaged in intricate aesthetic dialogues with art objects past and present, and in interactions with their viewers, also past and present. In this article I explore how some nineteenth-century understandings of expression were mediated by art-historical examples, and how painting as a medium might contribute towards the visualization of doubt. I use the term *doubt* here cautiously as a shorthand for a process of religious struggle, uncertainty, vacillation, which, as I explore below, is not necessarily the opposite of faith.

The study of religion, emotion, and the visual also offers the opportunity to show the embedded nature of religion in many aspects of daily life, rather than looking to an ahistorical religious/secular binary.⁸ While historians like Colleen McDannell have emphasized the importance of religious objects in daily use, the potential that Victorian fine art on public

⁵ Foundational works include Aby Warburg's 1905 'Dürer and Italian Antiquity', in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. by David Britt, ed. by Kurt W. Forster (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), pp. 553–58. For a survey of art-historical approaches to gesture, see Moshe Barasch, 'Gesture', *Grove Art Online*, Oxford University Press <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T031819>> [accessed 29 October 2016].

⁶ See Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns', *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 237–65.

⁷ Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, 'Towards Histories of Emotions', in *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine*, ed. by Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 15–34. In thinking through my approach here I have particularly drawn on Jacqueline E. Jung's engaging study of viewer response and the performativity of emotions: 'Dynamic Bodies and the Beholder's Share: The Wise and Foolish Virgins of Magdeburg Cathedral', in *Bild und Körper im Mittelalter*, ed. by Kristin Marek and others (Munich: Fink, 2006), pp. 135–59.

⁸ See John Corrigan, 'Introduction: The Study of Religion and Emotion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. by John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–13. For a survey of the religious and the secular in nineteenth-century Britain, see Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 3–37. On the nineteenth-century relations between the religious and the secular in the development of the category of 'the emotions', see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

display might offer for religious engagement seems to have slipped out of view.⁹ The new Victorian institutions of art museums, exhibitions, and galleries are often characterized as secular replacements for churchgoing, their contents as objects for detached aesthetic contemplation.¹⁰ This article asks how belief functioned in these new contexts. What role did fine art play in Victorian Protestant feeling?

I have perhaps set up a rather misleading binary between art critics and religious viewers. The two are not necessarily separate categories, and I do not wish to claim that aesthetic contemplation and religious viewing are two entirely distinct ways of approaching artworks. Art viewers can be simultaneously part of several of what Barbara Rosenwein calls ‘emotional communities’, responding in different sites (e.g. the gallery or the chapel) in different emotional registers.¹¹ These communities are complex affiliations, not rigidly distinct, and in this context also offer a means of moving beyond the secular/religious binary, allowing, for example, viewers to be part of religious, scientific, and art viewing communities. The glimpses of the transatlantic reception of *Diana or Christ?* foregrounded here suggest that emotional communities can be transnational as well as local, and, as I explore in the final section, the painting’s reach into the early Christian past suggests that the emotional communities created through encounters with visual objects might be conceived as transhistorical as well.

My concentration on Protestant responses does not rule out the possibility of recovering broader, non-sectarian religious communities of artistic feeling in relation to the painting. The Protestant focus arises primarily from a paucity of engagements with this image in the Catholic periodical press.¹² Further, *Diana or Christ?* offers a visual recreation of (some) Protestant attempts to forge connections with early Christianity by identifying/projecting a Protestant simplicity of worship in the practices of early Christianity. Long’s painting contrasts modest ‘Christian’ worship with the

⁹ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Timothy Willem Jones and Lucinda Matthews-Jones, *Material Religion in Modern Britain: The Spirit of Things* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁰ For example, Colleen Denney, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877–1890* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2000). See, however, Lucinda Matthews-Jones, ‘Lessons in Seeing: Art, Religion and Class in the East End of London, 1881–1898’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 16 (2011), 385–403.

¹¹ Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 821–45 (p. 842).

¹² A counterpoint would be the outraged Catholic response to Philip Calderon’s *St Elizabeth of Hungary* (1891). See Philip McEvansoneya, “‘A Libel in Paint’: Religious and Artistic Controversy around P. H. Calderon’s *The Renunciation of St Elizabeth of Hungary*”, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 1 (1996), 254–79.

pomp, incense, and idolatry of ‘Paganism’. Although no responses specifically mention or disparage Catholicism, parallels between pagan and Catholic customs were a standard part of Protestant discourse — and, indeed, something Long claimed had inspired his 1878 *The Gods and Their Makers*.¹³ The (putative) condemnation of incense might also be read as a statement against (or illustration of the temptations of) Anglican ritualism, a subject of considerable controversy in the 1870s and 80s.¹⁴ Nineteenth-century Protestants were far from a unified group, and although most of the responses I have found hail from more evangelical publications, I do not mean to suggest that these emotional responses are representative of all Victorian Protestants.

An 1899 article in *Quiver* on the relationship between religion and painting noted that ‘a great picture is not so much one that displays the technical skill of the painter as his power to appeal to the emotions of those who look at it’.¹⁵ This concern perhaps suggests an interest in narrative over form and might immediately appear to be the polar opposite of later nineteenth-century aesthetic, art-critical concerns with the material nature of artworks and with the application of paint. But both are intriguingly engaged with varieties of response to aesthetic objects. This ‘appeal to the emotions’ as a key facet of religious viewing is my point of departure, and will, I hope, draw together art critics and religious viewers in new ways.

Steadfast maiden

Anglo-American Protestant responses to *Diana or Christ?* (Fig. 1) demonstrate that it became far more than the mere passing fancy that *The Times* had anticipated, ‘which arouses interest for a moment and then becomes a thing of the past’ (6 June 1881, p. 4). The painting was assuredly a great success with its many viewers in London in 1881, and later among the 4.7 million visitors to the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition in 1887, where it was prominently displayed in the central hall of the fine arts section.¹⁶ In a poll conducted by the *Manchester City News*, some twelve thousand people voted

¹³ Mark Bills, *Edwin Longsden Long RA* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1998), pp. 116–17.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Ayla Lepine for suggesting this reading of the painting. On discourses of martyrdom in relation to ritualism, see Dominic Janes, ‘The “Modern Martyrdom” of Anglo-Catholics in Victorian England’, *Journal of Religion & Society*, 13 (2011) <<http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/toc/2011.html>> [accessed 29 October 2016].

¹⁵ Arthur Fish, ‘Pictorial Sermons’, *Quiver*, January 1899, pp. 387–94 (p. 387).

¹⁶ On the painting’s popularity, see A. M. J. (Leicester, aged 16), p. 780; ‘The Man About Town’, *County Gentleman*, 30 April 1881, p. 461; ‘Our Man’, *Baily’s Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes*, 1 June 1881, p. 231; ‘Painters in their Studios, II — Mr. Edwin Long, RA’, *Graphic*, 9 June 1888, pp. 612–14 (p. 612).



Fig. 1: Edwin Long, *Diana or Christ?*, 1881, oil on canvas, 121 × 211 cm. Image courtesy of Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery. Long painted this second version of the painting in 1881. It is slightly smaller than the first version, and differs in two small details: the centurion does not have a plume on his helmet, and the standard has one less disc. The first version was exhibited at the RA (1881), and at the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition (1887). This version was shown at the Gallery of Sacred Art (1892), the Victorian Era Exhibitions, Earl's Court (1897), and since 1919 has been on display at Blackburn Art Gallery. For further details, see Mark Bills, *Edwin Longsdon Long RA* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1998), pp. 131–32.

Diana or Christ? to be the second-best painting of the Jubilee Exhibition.¹⁷ In response to its popularity it was available for purchase as a print from 1889, allowing even wider dissemination.¹⁸ It rapidly became the subject of sermons and was widely reviewed in Protestant publications like *Sunday at Home*, *Girl's Own Paper* (both published by the evangelical Religious Tract Society), Cassell's evangelical, temperance-supporting *Quiver*, and the Anglican *Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church*. One young woman's painting of her print of *Diana or Christ?* acted

¹⁷The top twelve were an intriguing mixture of social realism and history paintings. Luke Fildes's *The Village Wedding* beat *Diana or Christ?* to number one. For more, see Julian Treuherz, 'The Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition of 1887', *Victorian Poetry*, 25.3–4 (1987), 192–222. On the painting's popularity at Manchester, see 'The Manchester Jubilee Exhibition', *Glasgow Herald*, 9 June 1887, p. 4.

¹⁸The engraving of the painting was deemed of significant public interest to merit an article in the *Manchester Guardian*. 'Diana or Christ', *Manchester Guardian*, 13 September 1889, p. 5.

as the fulcrum of a cautionary fictional narrative for evangelical youth, and, in 1911, the Religious Tract Society published a novel by 18-year-old Irene Strickland Taylor based on the painting.¹⁹ In America, the painting inspired an 1892 novel *Ione: A Tale of Ephesus* by Detroit author James Stanton Park, while Willa Cather refers to the performance of Sunday school tableaux of the scene in her 1922 novel *One of Ours*.²⁰ Prints circulated widely — one is recorded hanging in an Alabama parlour in the 1930s.²¹ Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science movement, had two large copies of the painting on the wall of her Massachusetts home, and Christian Scientists continued to discuss the significance of idol worship in the painting well into the 1950s.²² How did this wide range of Anglo-Protestant responses understand the arts and the feelings of this image?

Set at Ephesus in the third century CE, *Diana or Christ?* centres on a white-robed young Christian woman with a serious decision to make. Should she cast a few grains of incense on the altar and show her allegiance to Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt, and live? Or, should she declare herself a Christian and face death? As the question mark in its title reinforces, the painting deals with a decision which is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. There is only this tantalizing frozen moment, that frustration but also potentiality of painting, which allows it to elude any conclusive outcome. It is an image which deliberately invites viewers to supply their own interpretation of what the young woman will decide. Yet this equivocal aspect of *Diana or Christ?* slipped out of view for many contemporary viewers — especially in accounts in Protestant periodicals, which almost exclusively omitted the question mark from the painting's title. *Sunday at Home* (1894) declared that 'she has made her choice. Neither by word nor touch, neither by gesture nor by look, will she pollute herself with the idol-worship which she has renounced forever.'²³

In his 2012 exploration of religious seeing, David Morgan emphasizes that the 'the study of religious seeing is the study of embodiment'.

¹⁹ 'A Grain of Incense; or, Diana or Christ?', *Monthly Packet*, 1 December 1887, pp. 186–203; Irene E. Strickland Taylor, *Diana or Christ: A Tale of the Days of Marcus Aurelius* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1911).

²⁰ See Marilyn Arnold, 'The Allusive Cather', *Cather Studies*, 3 (1996) <http://cather.unl.edu/cs003_allusive.html> [accessed 29 October 2016].

²¹ George Ely McLellan, letter to curator, 17 October 1991, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, object file for *Diana or Christ?*.

²² Douglass Roberts, 'Diana or Christ?', *Christian Science Journal*, 70 (1952), 632–34.

²³ D. Alcock, 'Aut Diana Aut Christus', *Sunday at Home*, 2 June 1894, pp. 483–86 (p. 484). See also (among others), 'Answers to Correspondents', *Bow Bells*, 10 January 1890, p. 42; 'A Grain of Incense; or, Diana or Christ?', p. 191; *Catalogue: Exhibition of the Celebrated Works by the Late Edwin Long, RA; F. Goodall, RA; A. Ciseri, &c., in the Fine Art Gallery* (London: Evans, 1895), p. 9; Reverend J. H. Chambers Macaulay, *Diana or Christ? Painted by Edwin Long RA: An Appreciation* (Sheffield: Northend, 1915).

For Morgan, drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, 'the *embodied eye* means that seeing is never independent of touching, hearing, feeling, and the manipulation of the body and environment' (p. 54, emphasis in original). *Sunday at Home's* multisensory response to *Diana or Christ?* (cited above) suggests a religious embodied eye at work. *Diana or Christ?* offered viewers a religiously sanctioned sensory appeal, and viewers seem to have revelled in its broadly laid-on brushstrokes, its colour scheme, and its contrast in surfaces: marble, silver, flowers, papyrus, leopard skin, cotton robes.²⁴ The painting is also emphatically concerned with touch — a different sort of feeling, but one central to religious sight, as Morgan stresses.

Long's protagonist demonstrates her faith by refusing to touch the glistening pearls of incense in the hand of the moustachioed man to her right, who is attempting to guide her hand towards them. Victorian viewers added additional intimacy and pathos to this interaction by declaring him to be her 'betrothed'.²⁵ The tangle of hands in the centre of the painting seem detached from the bodies to which they belong, two extremities upon which all the action of the scene ultimately hinges, suspended against the white backdrop formed by the robes of the Roman priest seated behind them. Hands suggest the emotionally tense nature of the scene: the Roman ruler's grasp on his throne seems to lift him out of his seat; the priest's hands are clenched; the figure to the left of the woman tightly grips the manuscript accusing her of Christianity, the apparently heavy hand of a Roman soldier resting on his shoulder. Only one outsider figure to this central, nearly life-size group is not part of this tactile encounter between doubt and faith: the black man at the edge of the canvas, whose folded arms bar him from any engagement with the spiritual drama taking place in front of him.

Bow Bells Magazine for Family Reading (1890) attributed spiritual meaning to the colours of the painting: the woman's white robes and glowing face were 'transfigured by the inward light of religious fervour'.²⁶ Her blonde hair, blue eyes, pale flesh and dazzling robes stand out from the darker-skinned men clad in muted browns on the left-hand side of the painting. Contemporaries remarked upon her white robes as testimony to her innocence and virginity, dwelling on her fragility and youth.²⁷ Within Victorian evangelical culture, the protagonist's gender connoted piety.²⁸

²⁴ 'Mr Edwin Long, A.R.A', p. 540; Alcock, pp. 483–84; Macaulay, pp. 5, 10.

²⁵ For example, A. M. J. (Leicester, aged 16), p. 780; 'Answers to Correspondents', p. 42; *Catalogue: Exhibition of the Celebrated Works by the Late Edwin Long*, p. 9; 'Art Chronicle', *Portfolio*, January 1881, p. 103.

²⁶ 'Answers to Correspondents', p. 42. See also Macaulay, p. 18.

²⁷ *Catalogue: Exhibition of the Celebrated Works by the Late Edwin Long*, p. 9; 'Answers to Correspondents', p. 42; Macaulay, p. 18.

²⁸ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 58–87.

The popularity of the image among young religious women — especially in creative responses such as Irene Strickland Taylor’s novel — suggests how well it fed into, and in turn contributed towards, expectations and ideals of female religiosity.²⁹ This whiteness, sexual purity, and sacred affiliation were also understood in relation to nineteenth-century hierarchies of race. The *New York Times* praised the presence of the black man, ‘whose dusky skin, stalwart frame, and earnest-speaking face throw out into greater prominence the pale patrician beauty of the Roman maid’.³⁰ As is so common in the depiction of black people in Victorian painting, a black person was reduced to skin and pigment, an oppositional force to show up the central narrative-making importance of whiteness.³¹ In a letter to *Girl’s Own Paper*, a 16-year-old from Leicester described the black man as ‘watching unmoved the touching scene before him’.³² While every other figure on the canvas was brimming with feelings, this man was deemed to be incapable of appropriate religious sentiment — or any emotions at all. In contrast, the Christian woman’s femininity and whiteness connoted the ability for virtuous, pious feeling; how could she make any decision but to die for Christ?

The Protestant press also identified her gestures as signs of devotion: pushing the young man away and clutching at her chest to indicate feelings of the heart. It remarked upon the devotional bearing of her facial expression: lips slightly parted, eyes looking upwards and out of the scene to another spiritual realm.³³ Nineteenth-century theorists of expression also agreed that devotion was made manifest by lifting the face and rolling the eyeballs upwards. They differed, however, as to whether they believed this was an involuntary, innate form of expression — the view held by physiologist and natural theologian Charles Bell — or learnt behaviour, as Charles Darwin argued in his 1872 *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.³⁴

²⁹ Its appeal to women is likely to have contributed towards its dismissal as sentimental. For further exploration of the gendered dynamics of sentimentalism, see Howard, pp. 72–73.

³⁰ ‘Royal Academy Pictures: Subjects Treated by Famous Hands and How Treated’, *New York Times*, 14 June 1881, p. 2; see also Gosse, p. 698.

³¹ For further discussion of painted black skin, touch, and religion in Victorian culture, see Lynda Nead, ‘The Secret of England’s Greatness’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 19 (2014), 161–82.

³² A. M. J. (Leicester, aged 16), p. 780. See also Macaulay, p. 16.

³³ Alcock, p. 484; ‘A Grain of Incense; or, Diana or Christ’, p. 191; *Critical Notices of the Pictures and Water-Colour Drawings in the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887* (Manchester: Heywood, 1887), p. 41. The painting also came in for criticism for its protagonists’ exaggerated expressiveness. See Gosse, p. 698.

³⁴ Charles Bell, *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression: As Connected with the Fine Arts*, 3rd edn (London: Murray, 1844), pp. 102–03; Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: Murray, 1872; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 220.

Bell's *Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression as Connected with the Fine Arts* was first published in 1806, and by 1900 was in its seventh edition. It was aimed at, and employed by, artists seeking to represent human expression in paint throughout the nineteenth century. In his discussion of religious devotion, Bell refers to 'the works of the great masters' 'as evidences' that 'in all stages of society, and in every clime, the posture and expression of reverence have been the same' (p. 102). In Bell's influential text, the physiological understanding of emotional expression is mediated through the 'great masters' — that is, via the history of art. Art was central to understanding the emotions, even if, as Bell understood it, Christian religious devotion was expressed in the same way throughout history. He regards art as a passive reflection of human social interaction. But in using painting as evidence for his theories, artistic representation contributes towards shaping, rather than reflecting, nineteenth-century understandings of human expression of religious commitment. Art, expression, and devotion were all enmeshed, producing each other. The history of emotions and the history of art were inextricably bound together.

Doubting viewers

The Victorian Protestant press did not *see* feelings of doubt or even vacillation in the young Christian woman central to the painting. Any third-century CE doubt was evicted from the picture, for the varied reasons explored above. But in responding to the image, they reflected on, and perhaps also felt, doubt. In a five-page article on Long's painting, *Sunday at Home* (1894) identified the 'constancy of the Maiden Martyr' as a foil for contemporary challenges to faith: 'even if our personal grasp of Christ is firm and strong, doubts and perplexities crowd continually around our paths, whether of intellectual research or of daily duty.'³⁵ It went on to contrast the anxieties felt by nineteenth-century Christians with the certitude of early Christian martyrs, and the apparent ease with which martyrs might enact and demonstrate their faith:

In these moods we almost envy the rest which was won by one conflict however bitter, one sacrifice however great. An hour of anguish less or more; and the Maiden Martyr was at rest with Christ, all struggle and all suffering over with her for evermore. (Alcock, p. 486)

Unlike a wide range of contemporary paintings of early Christian martyrs that hung in the Royal Academy, and which were widely disseminated

³⁵ Alcock, p. 486. See also 'Short Arrows', *Quiver*, January 1888, pp. 312–20 (p. 318).

as prints, Long's painting avoids explicitly depicting the violence of its subject matter.³⁶ It does not show any threat to bodily autonomy by stripping its protagonist of her clothes, as in Herbert Gustave Schmalz's *Faithful unto Death: 'Christiana ad Leones!'* (1888). It does not include any obvious suggestion of violent death by lions, tigers, or crucifixion, as in Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* (1883), or Briton Rivière's *A Roman Holiday* (1881). Its protagonist is not a corpse, like John William Waterhouse's *Saint Eulalia* (1885). Nor is it based on a popular novel where viewers brought knowledge of a horrific death to come, as in Charles William Mitchell's *Hypatia* (1885; this painting was on display at the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition in gallery 1, a few rooms apart from *Diana or Christ?*).³⁷ Rather than visually representing the bodily suffering of martyrdom, *Diana or Christ?* foregrounds the possibility of mental and emotional turmoil, an engaging point of contact for religious viewers.

For all its supposed decorum, *Diana or Christ?* seems to have nonetheless stimulated viewers' sadistic imaginations. Almost all commentators speculate on how the young woman would die, filling in the blanks of the painting with salacious details that perhaps didn't fit so obviously with the pious tone of the other pages of, for example, *Sunday at Home*, which noted: 'the choice of Christ means death and suffering, the rack, the axe, the stake, the blood-stained amphitheatre, the lion's tooth, or the tiger's claw' (Alcock, p. 484). The idea that such an (imagined) violent death was preferable to the feelings of doubt, the 'moods' that brought on 'struggle' and 'suffering', suggests the lived spiritual and emotional turmoil faced by some religious Victorians (Alcock, p. 486). Further, these worries created an audience ready to engage with *Diana or Christ?* in a very particular reflective and religious mode. *Sunday at Home* had a circulation of over 130,000.³⁸ The discussion of doubt as a common experience in such a prominent evangelical publication suggests just how widely examined these troubling feelings were by the late nineteenth century. This is not to imply any sort of teleological secularization narrative lurking behind these reviews of *Diana or Christ?* but to situate it as an example of what historian David Nash has called the 'fluidity' of Victorian religious culture, looking beyond an insurmountable chasm between doubt and faith.³⁹ This fluid religious culture was not just limited to the intelligentsia. It had a significant visual aspect, stimulated and expanded upon in response to paintings like *Diana or*

³⁶ See Maureen Moran, 'The Art of Looking Dangerously: Victorian Images of Martyrdom', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32 (2004), 475–93.

³⁷ *Hypatia* was voted number twelve in the *Manchester City News* poll. On this painting's reception in Manchester, see Treuherz, pp. 197, 215.

³⁸ Rosemary Scott, 'The Sunday Periodical: *Sunday at Home*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 25 (1992), 158–62.

³⁹ David Nash, 'Reassessing the "Crisis of Faith" in the Victorian Age: Eclecticism and the Spirit of Moral Inquiry', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 16 (2011), 65–82.

Christ?, which became part of public culture in the later nineteenth century. Faith-based responses to the painting fixate on doubt as part of faith. Like the Christian martyr who might perhaps have wavered *before* the moment of certainty apparently depicted here, these nineteenth-century writers saw doubt as part of a process of being a believer. Commentators explored these feelings via the specifics of the visual representation of martyrdom, that one safely fixed, decisive moment.

Personal reflections on doubt and faith are built into the composition of *Diana or Christ?*. Such invitations to the audience are a prominent feature of visual representations of doubt. In his analysis of Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* (1601), Glenn Most explores the challenges and possibilities of representing doubt visually. Most emphasizes the difficulties of representing modalities: 'one can show "he touches," but hardly "he should touch" or "he may touch" or "he must touch" or "he wants to touch."' If a painter wants to show Thomas's desire to touch Jesus's wounds, they have no option, according to Most, but to depict Thomas with his fingers placed inside the wounds.⁴⁰ Most argues that, by inserting Thomas's finger into Jesus's side, the painting leaves no room for doubt in the central figure of Thomas but instead displaces it to the two accompanying disciples. Most asks whether these disciples will remain sceptical — not something which the painting can ever reveal to us. Further, he invokes these figures as standing in for the viewer, who is implicated afresh in the personal, emotional, and social world of religious feeling. He concludes that *Doubting Thomas* 'may therefore be interpreted as a dramatization of the conflict between faith and scepticism', and of the interdependence of these two modes (p. 204).

The deferral of doubt may well be a more general characteristic of representations of religious doubt/faith, and one that is especially marked in multi-figured canvasses with inbuilt spectators like *Diana or Christ?*. Nineteenth-century British exhibitionary culture intensified the significance of such invocations of viewers, since paintings were subject to mass examination by new viewing publics and were disseminated and debated in print; indeed, Long's critics were ever keen to note his pandering to the new crowds of exhibition-goers and print-buyers.⁴¹ The incredulity in *Diana or Christ?* is arguably not borne out on the face and gestures of its protagonist but deferred to the faces and bodies of the bystanders. As discussed above, many nineteenth-century religious viewers felt that the young woman was firm in her faith, and had made her decision. But what would become of the onlookers with whom Victorian viewers might also identify? Irene Strickland Taylor's 1911 novel *Diana or Christ* (which also omitted a question mark from its title) culminates in the aftermath of the

⁴⁰ Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 178.

⁴¹ Armstrong, p. 54; Gosse, p. 698; 'The Royal Academy', *The Times*, 6 June 1881, p. 4.

young woman's sentencing to death, when her 'betrothed', having desperately sought to convince her to sacrifice to Diana, confesses himself to be a Christian, and is also sent to the lions.⁴² The only uncertainty Taylor saw in the painting — or, at least, the wavering she chose to emphasize in her novel — was that of the young male figure. The young woman at the centre of the image was defiantly resolute in her faith. The fixed moment of this visual image, then, adds something very specific to the representation of doubt/faith. It explicitly seeks a response from its viewers, who are implicated as spectators within this bustling scene. Rather than being a demonstration of either faith or doubt, *Diana or Christ?* might be read as an enactment of the struggle between the two.

Exhibiting doubt

For all his prioritization of the viewing experience, Most's viewer is detached in time and space, and he does not take into account an important aspect of the viewing of artworks: their exhibitionary context and, in particular, the conversations this one image might have had (and continue to have) with others displayed alongside it. Mieke Bal has explored the emotionally moving possibilities of groupings of images. For Bal, groups of images come together to form new texts, perhaps 'authored' by the curator who hangs objects, but brought to life by the movement of the viewer between juxtaposed images.⁴³ The Victorian responses to *Diana or Christ?* discussed here do not capture the immediacy of its viewing in a specific context, and none acknowledge which other paintings it was displayed alongside. There is, however, a photograph of the central hall at the 1887 Manchester Jubilee Exhibition (*Fig. 2*). It offers some striking 'implications of relation' between *Diana or Christ?* and its wall-mates, which relate particularly to the theme of feelings of faith and doubt.⁴⁴

Looming over *Diana or Christ?* is the instantly recognizable figure of Charles Darwin, accompanied by his avid apologist Thomas Huxley.⁴⁵ The

⁴² Taylor, pp. 179–81. *Baily's Monthly Magazine* (1881) also dwelt on the future actions of the characters surrounding the protagonist; see 'Our Man', p. 231.

⁴³ Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 87–134.

⁴⁴ Michael Baxandall, 'Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 33–41 (p. 34).

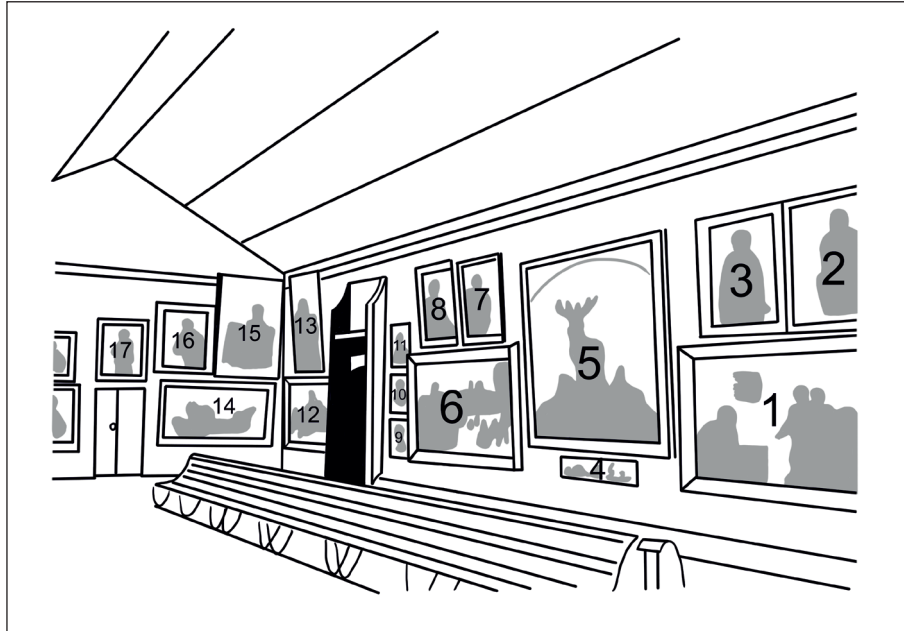
⁴⁵ Janet Browne suggests that, in the digital age, this particular image of Darwin — bearded, benign, and immersed in thought, as typified (and indeed codified) by Collier's portrait with its deep, brooding eyes — has become shorthand for an irreconcilable chasm between science and religion. Darwin's very recognizability (to a twenty-first century person) feeds in to the difficulty of perceiving a more fluid Victorian religious and scientific culture. Janet Browne, 'Looking at Darwin: Portraits and the Making of an Icon', *Isis*, 100 (2009), 542–70.



Fig. 2: Photograph of the Central Hall of the Fine Art Department, Manchester Jubilee Exhibition, 1887. Image courtesy of Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, Manchester City Council GB127.m61864.

Manchester Jubilee Exhibition aimed to display and narrate the progress wrought in Victoria's reign. In this context, was Long's painting resituated to ask whether the choice — in an era of new biological knowledge — was between not Diana, but Darwin or Christ? I do not want to overemphasize the role played by Darwin's ideas in later nineteenth-century doubt; there were plenty of other challenges to faith, which were, for many people, part of belief (as explored above). But for those viewers who recognized Darwin and found his ideas difficult to reconcile with their faith, the juxtaposition of these two images dramatically transported the third-century Christian martyr's tribulations into a later nineteenth-century context. The contrast might also have served to reaffirm religious certainty or perhaps have been received with humour. The lack of comment on this juxtaposition is noteworthy. By the late 1880s were Darwin's ideas unremarkable, or *too* remarkable to have aroused comment? If nothing else, *Fig. 2* demonstrates the perhaps surprising fact that Darwin was present in the world of late-Victorian martyr painting. A nineteenth-century audience would, of course, also have recognized other familiar figures and images alongside John Collier's portrait of Darwin (*Fig. 3* provides a key).

To the left of Long's painting hangs Edwin Landseer's vast (nearly three metres square) *Scene at Braemar* (1857), depicting a bellowing stag



*Fig. 3: Key to paintings and sculpture in Fig. 2, drawn by Rhiannon Williams (2016) and used with her permission. 1. Edwin Long, *Diana or Christ?* (1881); 2. John Collier, *Thomas Huxley* (1883); 3. John Collier, *Charles Darwin* (1883); 4. Harry Bates, *The Aeneid* (1884); 5. Edwin Landseer, *Scene at Braemar* (1857); 6. Edwin Long, *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875); 7. George Richmond, *Earl Granville* (1876); 8. J. E. Millais, *George Grote* (1871); 9. G. F. Watts, *The Duke of Argyll* (c. 1860); 10. G. F. Watts, *Lord Lyndhurst* (1862); 11. G. F. Watts, *Viscount Sherbrooke* (1874); 12. Edwin Long, *The Gods and Their Makers* (1878); 13. John Lucas, *Robert Stephenson* (1853); 14. James Dromgole Linton, *The Benediction* (1881); 15. W. M. Tweedie, *William Cavendish, Seventh Duke of Devonshire* (1856); 16. T. H. Munns, *The Marquis of Hartington MP* (1883); 17. J. E. Millais, *John Bright MP* (1880).*

swathed in the mists of the Scottish Highlands. It was another popular image, coming in at tenth place in the *Manchester City News* poll. Contemporaries praised the defiance but gentility of this stag.⁴⁶ Its juxtaposition with *Diana or Christ?* might have further emphasized the resolute but respectable nature of the young woman at the centre of Long's painting — indeed, the postures of the woman and the stag are not dissimilar. A comparison between human and non-human animal expression, however, might engender anxieties about the relationships between humans and other animals which were so controversial in Darwin's thought, and it is worth noting the number of

⁴⁶ Frederick Stephens, 'The Private Collections of England. No. VII — Middlesborough-on-Tees', *Athenaeum*, 22 November 1873, pp. 664–66 (p. 665).

commentators who remarked upon the excessively ‘human’ expressions of Landseer’s non-human animals.⁴⁷ Some 1870s commentators were reinterpreting Landseer’s paintings in the light of Darwin’s ideas about struggle in nature and the survival of the fittest, while, more recently, Diana Donald has shown how Darwin used Landseer’s imagery to construct his arguments, artistic representation contributing to scientific knowledge.⁴⁸ These three images might appear quite distinct, but, positioned together on the wall at Manchester, they may have triggered thoughts and conversations about faith, science, and nature.

Harry Bates’s bronze-sculpted relief triptych *The Aeneid* (1884) depicts scenes from book 4 of Virgil’s epic and sits beneath Landseer’s *Scene at Braemar*, somewhat dwarfed by it.⁴⁹ Bates’s depiction of Dido in particular, collapsed in grief at Aeneas’s departure, takes on new relevance in relation to Long’s painting. 1880s commentators on Virgil tended to condemn Dido’s excessive displays of broken-heartedness (especially since she had, temporarily, derailed Aeneas’s civilizing imperial destiny) (Turner, pp. 304–08). In an 1883 essay, the poet and philologist Frederic Myers noted ‘how far our whole conception of womanhood has advanced since Virgil’s day under the influence of Christianity, chivalry, civilization’ (Turner, p. 307). The prostrate pagan Dido might serve to reinforce the evident emotional benefits of Christianity displayed by the devout heroine of Long’s canvas, calmly accepting her fate with decorum and poise.

I have concentrated specifically on the paintings that immediately surrounded *Diana or Christ?* which would have been immediately within viewers’ eyesight as they inspected and reacted to Long’s painting. This is not to deny the productive dialogues that might have taken place with the paintings on the walls adjoining and directly opposite, as well as between Long’s own celebrated *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875), which came in just behind *Diana or Christ?* at number three in the *Manchester Evening News* poll, and *The Gods and Their Makers* (1878). Like *Diana or Christ?*, both of these are set in the ancient Near East and speak to issues of idolatry, gender, and racial hierarchies.⁵⁰ Provocative dynamics between these images emerge, which might reinforce doubt or faith, causing viewers to speculate on the relationship between human and non-human animals or the refinement of female emotion brought about by Christianity. The drama of the

⁴⁷ *Catalogue of the Works of the Late Sir Edwin Landseer, R.A.*, comp. by Algernon Graves (London: Graves, [1874?]), p. 2; Stephens, p. 665.

⁴⁸ Diana Donald, ‘The “Struggle for Existence” in Nature and Human Society’, in *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Diana Donald and Jane Munro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 81–99.

⁴⁹ See Susan Beattie, *The New Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 52–53.

⁵⁰ Imogen Hart, ‘The Politics of Possession: Edwin Long’s *Babylonian Marriage Market*’, *Art History*, 35 (2012), 86–105; Bills, pp. 116–17.

relationship between doubt and faith might shift from the central figure of Long's female protagonist to the figures surrounding her, the painting's viewers, and the surrounding paintings and sculpture.

Transhistorical feeling

Many Victorian viewers engaged with *Diana or Christ?* as an image that provided a Protestant 'emotional community' across the centuries. They were quite aware of the different contexts of the challenges to faith in the nineteenth and third centuries, but nonetheless saw a struggle akin to their own in Long's painting. The idea that Victorian viewers experienced common *religious* feeling with the third-century CE figure on canvas is a very different mode of viewing to that usually associated with late-Victorian paintings set in the ancient world. For example, Lawrence Alma-Tadema's archaeologically involved paintings of Roman or Athenian art viewers have seemed to so obviously refer to the new nineteenth-century museum-going public that they have regularly been dismissed as Victorians in togas, images that deal with exclusively Victorian matters, invoking the past merely as fancy dress. Liz Prettejohn has convincingly countered such long-standing suppositions, suggesting that 'the pictures' Victorian aspect has something significant to say about ancient Rome, just as their Roman aspect has something significant to say about nineteenth-century modernity'.⁵¹ These images are two-way dialogues between past and (nineteenth-century) present, each contributing to the formation of the other. Such temporal interrelatedness is even more pertinent in avowedly Christian works like *Diana or Christ?* which ask viewers to recognize the antiquity of the setting but to imbue it with a sense of continuity of religious feeling and practice. Several commentators on Long's painting remarked that Victorian Christian life could only exist *because* of the actions of early martyrs.⁵² For these commentators, chronological distinctions collapsed, and an image of the third century CE becomes simultaneously the inception of the nineteenth-century Protestant present. As Maureen Moran suggests, viewers of martyrdom imagery 'must inhabit a double-time, simultaneously both early Christian and modern' (p. 479). For religious viewers, however, there were also pasts present in the painting which needed to be marked off as chronologically and religiously distinct, in the form of the persistent, solid archaeological remnants of ancient Greek and Roman worship, the silver Ephesian Diana, and the fourth-century BCE column drum behind it.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Lawrence Alma-Tadema and the Modern City of Ancient Rome', *Art Bulletin*, 84 (2002), 115–29 (p. 121).

⁵² *Catalogue: Exhibition of the Celebrated Works by the Late Edwin Long*, p. 9; Alcock, p. 483; *Critical Notices*, p. 41.

The sculpture of Diana might also have served as a marker of the idolatrous, pagan tendencies of Catholicism, further separating Protestantism from the ancient worship depicted.⁵³ Yet an intriguing ambiguity is provided by the similarity in posture between Long's third-century Christian protagonist, and the fourth-century BCE figure of the messenger-god Hermes on the column drum. The *Saturday Review* described Hermes as 'looking upwards with parted lips, as if awaiting a command from above'.⁵⁴ His presence in the painting might suggest a commonality between pagan and Christian bodily expressions of religious devotion, traced through the history of art, in a manner similar to the ideas of nineteenth-century theorist of expression Charles Bell explored above. Aby Warburg's concept of the 'pathos formula' suggests that classical motifs continued to be employed in later visual culture as a means of expressing emotional crises (pp. 553–58). Warburg's Renaissance examples transposed gestures and poses from antiquity into new figures. Long does something rather different by including a potential source *and* a reworking of its pose on the same canvas. This continuity of devotional expression might facilitate a Protestant embrace of some aspects of classical culture; writing in 1880, the cleric, art writer, and follower of Ruskin, Reverend Richard St John Tyrwhitt noted that the ancient Greeks had the potential to worship God, but simply hadn't had the good fortune to live at the same time as Christ.⁵⁵

Most Victorian martyrdom imagery is set in Rome. The setting of *Diana or Christ?* at Ephesus forges further connections between pagan and Christian antiquity. According to some traditions, Ephesus was the final resting place of the Virgin Mary. Was Mary also evoked in an image where the classical virgin goddess Diana, and the apparently virginal female protagonist are the focus of attention? If so, was this evocation troublingly Catholic? Ephesus was also where Paul preached against the Artemis/Diana cult, and the setting provides a clear scriptural connection for a depiction of Christian life not contained within the Bible (Acts 19; 1 Corinthians 15. 32; Ephesians), a matter of no small importance for Protestant viewers.⁵⁶ Long's painting forged a new link between third-century CE martyrdom and the Bible.

Confusing chronological distinctions further, *Diana or Christ?* may have informed understandings of the archaeological past that it represented,

⁵³ On Victorian responses to the Ephesian Diana, see Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Ephesus', in *Cities of God: The Bible and Archaeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by David Gange and Michael Ledger-Lomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 254–84 (pp. 277–78).

⁵⁴ 'The Sculptures from Ephesus', *Saturday Review*, 11 January 1873, pp. 50–51 (p. 51).

⁵⁵ R. St John Tyrwhitt, 'Hellenic and Christian Views of Beauty', *Contemporary Review*, March 1880, pp. 474–91.

⁵⁶ Macaulay quotes these references at the beginning of his 'appreciation', and continually refers to them throughout.

and was certainly credited with breathing emotional life into ancient objects. The column drum had been brought from John Turtle Wood's excavations at Ephesus to the British Museum in 1871. The British Museum's 'Ephesian Gallery' was not opened until 1884, and it is possible that viewers were more familiar with the column drum as part of Long's painting, adding one further layer of Christian context to ancient Greek archaeological remains which were, as Michael Ledger-Lomas demonstrates, already often interpreted through St Paul and a narrative of Christian supersession (pp. 264–84). The male figure to the Christian woman's left clutches a papyrus, the top line of which reveals an accusation against the Ephesian Christians in ancient Greek, reminding viewers of the scholarly nature and immersive accuracy claimed by the painting. In the 1890s archaeologists discovered third-century CE papyri declaring devotion to Roman gods from suspected Christians on trial. These were evaluated and understood in relation to Long's painting. *Diana or Christ?* was regarded — by *Sunday at Home* at least — as a context for the newly unearthed third-century relic, the fragmentary, inaccessible Greek text which the magazine reprinted alongside the painting. Long had been able, the magazine argued, to 'reproduce for us what was seen or felt or done, making it live again for us in its pathos, its passion, and its power' (Alcock, p. 483). *Diana or Christ?* was a reproduction, with all the verisimilitude and authenticity that this implies, not an imitation or reconstruction. Long's painting gave a religious emotional repertoire to antiquities (pagan and Christian), and to present-day believers. It brought pagan and Christian into intimate conversation in ways that defied but also reified chronology.

Conclusion

In March 1919 John Edmondson donated *Diana or Christ?* to Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, where it still hangs today. It was set up as a memorial to the First World War. The label that accompanied the painting set out to obliterate any doubt in the painting, and, indeed, among its viewers, linking the choice and the sacrifice of the Christian martyr to local men's 'decision' to go to war:

This picture is presented to keep ever in the memory of the Blackburn people the great Choice that was made by our men in the Great War, and to help their children to make a similar choice for the Right in all the circumstances of Life.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, object file for *Diana or Christ?*.

This official memorialization attempts to remove any ambiguity, fixing *Diana or Christ?* as an image of transhistorical (and local Blackburnian) Protestant sacrifice, laying claims to continuity and the future in its reference to children, as well as to the past. But the radical figure of the martyr also attracted rival interpretations. In November 1919 a conscientious objector who had been imprisoned during the war delivered a well-attended lecture in which he described the painting as representing the ability to make decisions that go against popular opinion.⁵⁸ The painting continued to elicit tense, emotional responses and was newly imbued with serious civic significance.

Many Victorian viewers seem to have commented on experiencing religious feeling before *Diana or Christ?*, but a religious feeling that permitted, and was indeed reinforced by, moments of uncertainty. These responses suggest that Victorian history painting had a significant and under-acknowledged faith-based life alongside (and as part of) its better-known position as aesthetic object in the (perhaps not-so-secular) exhibitionary contexts of the late nineteenth century. *Diana or Christ?* helped formulate, and gave an opportunity to express, feelings of doubt and certainty through engagement with its visual narrative and painted form. The varied responses to the deferred doubt in the painting suggest the importance of visual representation in grappling with the complexities of Victorian religious emotion. It offered some a sense of shared (but also racially exclusive) white Protestant transhistorical and transatlantic feeling. Such responses to the painting are not preserved in the art press, which tended to dismiss the painting as insufficiently spiritually and intellectually elevated to be religious, characterizing it as containing 'a good deal of sickly sentiment and pseudo-religious feeling'.⁵⁹ But as Nicola Bown has demonstrated in her re-evaluation of Victorian sentimentality, the welter of feelings roused by sentimental artworks are not just important for thinking about responses to aesthetic objects, but can exercise viewers' and readers' moral faculties.⁶⁰ The 'sickly sentiment' of *Diana or Christ?* is also the source of its power as an object inviting ethical engagement.

⁵⁸ This is the only instance I have found of a response to the painting which might remind viewers of the unorthodox and radical nature of martyrdom in antiquity, the paradox that such imagery embodies. See Moran for further discussion.

⁵⁹ Walter Tomlinson, *The Pictorial Record of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887*, ed. by J. H. Nodal (Manchester: Cornish, 1888), p. 31.

⁶⁰ Nicola Bown, 'Introduction: Crying Over Little Nell', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007), p. 4 <<http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.453>>.