

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

**INTOXICATING WOMEN OF THE BELLE ÉPOQUE:
Absinthe's Influence on Painted Depictions of Women
During the Bohemian Golden Age**

THESIS

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by

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DEDICATION

To the hopeful cynics, artists, and those who walk amongst the fringe.

To Billy, the cats, and too much coffee.

“What a delightful thing is the conversation of specialists!
One understands absolutely nothing and it’s charming.”
- Edgar Degas -

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This essay examines how the developing moral panic over absinthe during the Belle Époque of Paris (1871–1914) played a pivotal role in influencing the painted representations of absinthe drinking women during the turn of the twentieth century. Societal anxieties regarding the *femme moderne* are found to run parallel with the widespread increase of absinthe consumption, resulting in artistic perspectives mirroring these societal fears through depictions of women in various states of absinthe induced intoxication. Through tracking the vivacious spirit of the new woman freely enjoying the pleasures of the world of absinthe drinking and leisure, notable shifts in art styles and women's representation show influenced perceptions on women's rights, etiquette, and the growing tensions regarding the lower-class. As a social archetype, the absinthe drinking woman would prove to be a compelling source of inspiration both as an artist's muse and as a convenient societal scapegoat.

INTRODUCTION

Known as a time of unparalleled beauty and innovation, the Belle Époque of Paris came to be defined not only by its fleeting figures of the chic and fashionable Parisienne but also by the tint and lingering presence of effervescent absinthe's ability to cross class and gender divides. The resulting art movements and changing social lives of women of this era created complex imagery and evolving depictions of the new modern woman painted as a vessel of social balance, an emblem of moral panic, and a projection of a changing culture's hopes and fears. While the initial seed that would later flower into the golden era of the Belle Époque of 1871–1914 seemed planted in the rough political terrain and ruins of the fallen Paris Commune's aftermath, the citizens left bewildered by its disruption nonetheless began to return to their everyday lives and rebuild the City of Light with greater resolve and determination.

Exploring new modes of living in a quickly industrializing world, Paris and greater France was culturally propelled forward by the captivating imagery of the chic Parisienne whom served as the personification of this reinvigorated era. The graceful Parisienne would visually carry forth the torch of social progress, changing etiquette, and the newfound pleasures of the world of leisure. She became a modern muse, and artists would seek inspiration for their paintings by capturing the vivacious spirit of the new woman who now was able to publicly drink, dance, and engage with entertainments of her own accord.

However, with time this initially favorable depiction of the modern drinking woman would shift as the image of the graceful yet vibrant drinker transformed into that of a listless and crestfallen casualty of modernization. As growing pressures began to corner

the new Bohemian lifestyle and rise of the *femme moderne*, absinthe and the leisure lifestyle would be branded by traditionalists as running directly counter to women's roles and duties.¹ This tonal shift is most evident in the painted representations of women drinking absinthe as the years progress through the Belle Époque, as artists depict various states of intoxication. At the same time, art styles markedly morph to more abstracted impressions which impart a sense of inner anguish on their female drinking subjects with coinciding visual cues to display the hypnotic and potential dangers of women's drunken altered state.

Tracking the absinthe imbibing Parisienne through the parallels of their depiction in painting and the simultaneous influence of societal forces, this essay begins with an exploration of the development of this trend of social commentary. Looking to three prominent artists of the era, namely Edgar Degas (1834–1917), Axel Törneman (1880–1925), and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), we delve into the societal history that influenced their artistic perceptions, followed by the artist's own background, and finally a visual analysis of how their work showcases a particular iteration of one of the infamous "absinthe woman" archetypes. Through this we unravel the curious manner that the absinthe drinking woman came to embody the diverse multiplicity of freedom, restraint, admiration, pity, allure, and ultimately danger.

Paintings such as these act as useful reflections that distill the era's concerns of absinthe's grip on women as we visually trace key themes of absinthe linked to the bohemian woman, the worry that past *pétroleuse* behaviors would reappear in the new

¹ Rachel Mesch, *Having It All in the Belle Époque: How French Women's Magazines Invented the Modern Woman*, United States: Stanford University Press (2013), 3.

unruly *femme moderne*, and how class divides instrumentally created the industrialized poverty faced by many women of the era. I hope thus to explore the complex reality in relation to the painted fears behind the era's preferred green-hued drink.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE – THE MINGLING OF ART, WOMEN, AND LEISURE

Much as artists of this era broke away from traditions and restrictions, this generation of French women were more substantially seeking out personal interests, achievements, education, and separate identities.² The Belle Époque opened up possibilities and access to alternative lifestyles and freedoms that provided a sense of self not tied directly to the family home. The *femme moderne*, or the modern woman began to take shape in new forms both on canvas and in everyday life and was depicted as capable of forging, as Erika Spencer notes, “her own independent life while retaining traditional aspects of femininity.”³ This new femininity would act as a primary subject in Impressionist works that sought to capture the freshness of modern life, moving away from earlier Realist depictions of rural women, classic nudes, and historical or mythological figures common in academic painting to instead capture the exquisite fashions, bold colors, and individual personality of the model herself.⁴

For the mid to late eras of the Belle Époque, art styles would continue to evolve with the subjects of paintings opening up more broadly beyond that of the definitive, elegant, and perfected representations of the chic Parisienne woman as its foundational pillar. Instead, facets of an ever complicating modern Paris emerged as Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and early Modernism styles would look to further abstractions that featured explorations of often denied social realities.⁵ The artists’ gaze

² Erika Spencer, “Vive le Féminisme! French Women in the Belle Époque,” Library of Congress (2018), Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2018/07/vive-le-feminisme-french-women-in-the-belle-poque/>.

³ Spencer, “Vive le Féminisme!”

⁴ Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, Cambridge University Press (2007), 198.

⁵ Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture*, 214.

now considered more difficult subject matter and the forgotten struggles of those whose lives were being left behind in the fast-paced world of the burgeoning consumer culture's ever hungry demands. For a woman of this era, reform in the 1880s provided an educational boon with the guarantee of secondary schooling for girls further paving the way for the *femme moderne* to imagine a very different life for herself from that of her mother's. This tension caused both growth and strain as many women were caught, according to feminist historian Rachel Mesch, "reconciling traditional family structures with an independence of mind and spirit."⁶

For the first time, women began to confidently explore the nightlife's cafes, clubs, cabarets, and theatres of Paris as they desired, often unaccompanied as the walls that separated the private sphere of home and the public realm of gathering collapsed. An intermingling of genders and social castes would congregate at the same entertainments on tree lined boulevards, public parks, and at the notably racier scenes found in districts such as Montmartre set both physically and socially on the fringe of the city. Women within the lively and rich world of cafés had years earlier in the mid-19th century already began to adopt the practice of imbibing in an alcoholic drink before having a meal as an *apéritif*, under the belief that it would medically stimulate their appetite. As the definitive drink of choice, absinthe would come to monopolize the *apéritif* market during the dawn of the Belle Époque due to its aesthetics, affordability, easy access, and overall preference changes in the alcohol market.⁷

⁶ Mesch, *Having It All*, 3.

⁷ Gretchen Schultz, "Celebration and Censure," *Art in Print*, November – December 2017, Vol. 7, No. 4 (November – December 2017), 19.

The *apéritif* practice was entrenched in the lives of both men and women of sufficient means leading to the prevalent trend of, *l'heure verte*, meaning the green hour, as a well-established daily event and social occasion held at cafes, bars, and related establishments.⁸ While absinthe was originally formulated in Switzerland during the late eighteenth century, French demand boomed one hundred years later, inspiring diverse brands and competition among venders. French consumption would increase an astounding fifteen-fold between its uptick in 1875 right up until 1913!⁹ The drink came to signify, *la vie de bohème*, or the bohemian life as absinthe became a source of social entanglement and for many unfortunate estrangement. Its consumption inevitably became an unavoidable aspect of city life tied to the machinations and impacts of industrialization.¹⁰

Artists, poets, musicians, the working class, and others who sought out nontraditional lifestyles, whether permanently or for an entertaining night on the town, gravitated to the drink. It was believed to act in the words of historian Rod Phillips, “not only as an intoxicant—and a potent one, because the alcohol level was often well above 40 percent—but also a hallucinogen.”¹¹ For the *femme moderne*, whether socialite or working woman, going outside the home to partake of absinthe became a way to push the boundaries of foisted expectation—an act not unnoticed by increasingly concerned members of the middle and upper class who remained resolute in maintaining their rigid

⁸ Wilfred Niels Arnold, “Absinthe,” *Scientific American*, Vol. 260, No. 6, Scientific American, a division of Nature America Inc (JUNE 1989), Accessed 2021-04-19, Web: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24987293>,114.

⁹ John Strang, Wilfred N. Arnold and Timothy Peters, “Absinthe: What's Your Poison? Though Absinthe Is Intriguing, It Is Alcohol in General We Should Worry about,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, Dec. 18 - 25, 1999, Vol. 319, No. 7225 (Dec. 18 - 25, 1999),1590.

¹⁰ Strang, et. al., “Absinthe: What's Your Poison?,” 1590.

¹¹ Rod Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, United States: University of North Carolina Press (2014), 299.

codes of behavior and perception of the correct moral order.¹² By this point the bourgeoisie were already deeply anxious and fearful of the fast and momentous scale of social and economic changes they already witnessed as a result of the tumultuous failure of France's Second Empire (lasting from 1852–1870), the following loss of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and relatively recent political uprisings during the 1871 Paris Commune.¹³

This anxiety would come to a head with absinthe playing the part of the ultimate “folk devil,” a term that sociologists Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda summarize as the source of blame that becomes the prime, “...agent responsible for the threatening or damaging behavior or condition.”¹⁴ This absinthe folk devil proved a useful tool to rally against politically and economically, creating a perfect storm of propaganda and subject matter that mirrored the general public's sentiments. With time, this outlook on absinthe would become a frenzied “moral panic,” a term originally coined by sociologist Stanley Cohen as, “a condition, episode, person or group of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is [typically] presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media.”¹⁵ In essence, to allay their dread, rather than acknowledge the plight of the working class or emerging challenges for women's rights, high society would create dual moral panics that would intertwine absinthe consumption on one hand and advancing gender roles on

¹² Miami Dade College, “La Belle Époque: The Twilight of the 19th Century,” *Miami Dade College Arts Letters*, Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: https://www.mdc.edu/wolfson/academic/artsletters/art_philosophy/humanities/belleepoque.htm.

¹³ Schultz, “Celebration and Censure,” 20.

¹⁴ Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*, 2nd Ed., John Wiley & Sons (2009), 27.

¹⁵ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis (2011), 1.

the other as the sources of blame for societal disruption – placing the drinking woman in a curious position as an alluring yet fascinating spectacle to capture on canvas.

The primary groups of this crusade were the same, “moral entrepreneurs,” that arose in the era’s earlier years concerned about absinthe, largely stemming from the worried upper class, temperance movements, and proponents in support of wine over hard liquor. The term, “moral entrepreneur,” coined by sociologist Howard S. Becker in, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, denotes a group whose double action involves attempted, “rule creator,” turned, “crusading reformer.”¹⁶ Displaying great fervor to correct perceived societal slights, moral entrepreneurs use their persuasive power to redefine the societal change they disagree with as a form of deviance worthy of legal punishment or at the very least public shame.¹⁷ Many of the moral entrepreneurs involved in anti-absinthe and anti-feminist circles are noted by Mesch to hold the belief that feminist carried substantial further risks to the downfall of the social system due to foolishly tricking themselves and others through, “acting disingenuously, arriving at success through manipulation rather than merit, and thus subverting the very gender norms they often feigned to preserve.”¹⁸

Paintings of the period tended to follow public opinion on the absinthe drinking woman who served as the evolving embodiment of absinthe influence. Compelled to capture these fluctuating associations of absinthe, artists moved from the drink as the green fairy muse of creativity to focus more on its capacity as an addictive mind duller.

¹⁶ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York: Free Press Glencoe (1963), 147-148.

¹⁷ Becker, *Outsiders*, 148-152.

¹⁸ Mesch, *Having It All*, 160.

Yet for others, their canvases focused on the changing social dynamics that now cast the drinking free spirited modern woman into the role of manipulating succubus. Further, the magnified rumors of absinthe's ability to transform the idealized figure of a loving mother into that of a fallen woman stuck in poverty would prove a worthy subject as well. Noting trending portrayals of women in nineteenth century France, foundational feminist art theorist and historian Linda Nochlin traces the persistence of an, "underlying scheme of values or beliefs," that carries over in artists' perceptions and depictions of women despite the development of the era's diverging art styles.¹⁹ Fellow feminist historian Griselda Pollock expands upon this concept further in the introduction of her work, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, remarking how visual cultural constructions of femininity typically remained, "structural to the maintenance of a certain Eurocentric masculinist conception of art and artist."²⁰ Like the fables told of the infamous *pétroleuses* of the Paris Commune, propagandistic counter narratives would crop up holding working class women responsible for perceived dangers to society. Rather than the destructive arsonists who burned down great swaths of Paris in the final days of the rebellion,²¹ the idea of the drinking woman now set fire to the moral order of society and took the burden for its pressures and tribulations. Modern Paris was now seemingly besieged by the presence of the *femme moderne* and her penchant for absinthe.

¹⁹ Linda Nochlin, *Style and Civilization: Realism*, United Kingdom: Penguin UK (1991), 22.

²⁰ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis (2015), xx.

²¹ Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, Presses Universitaires de France (1988), 117.

THE SPIRIT OF AN ERA

Absinthe and the Bohemian Woman

Many contemporaries believed that changes in the City of Light's social structure were caused by the growing density of Paris' population and modernizing industrial society, and absinthe became a rather useful scourge of blame. As Rod Phillips's dive into the history of alcohol reveals, absinthe was regarded as, "a danger to the moral and physical health of the drinker and a menace to society,"²² and quickly became the simplified explanation for French society's ills. As absinthe turned folk devil, it would later provide a convenient way for the upper and middle classes to mitigate and influence laws in their favor, a practice that would continue to appeal to the upper echelons even after the later outbreak of war.²³ The surge of anxieties over the ever-growing, degeneration of the French race, would curiously occur concurrently with the wine industries' inability to bounce back after the arrival of the invasive phylloxera aphid cleared out a staggering number of the beloved vines. Phylloxera caused the "Great Wine Blight," that historian Gretchen Schultz notes decimated, "vineyards across the country from the 1860s through the turn of the century," effectively wiping out the wine industry's ability to compete with the growing popularity and affordability of its absinthe manufacturer rivals.²⁴ Simultaneously, as the general public began to more openly

²² Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 301.

²³ P.E. Prestwich, "Temperance in France: The Curious Case of Absinth." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 6, no. 2 (1979), Accessed 2021-04-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41298722>, 312.

²⁴ Gretchen Schultz, "Celebration and Censure," 22.

question burgeoning women's and workers' rights, further class unease and worries would manifest stirring continual debate.²⁵

As Paris arose from the flames of the Commune, new hopes and optimism sprung forth like a phoenix reinvigorating the architectural, artistic, and philosophical outlooks of those wishing to build an enlightened and beautiful new era of stability. Yet the grip of the past's bourgeois needs for hierarchy and desire to maintain past social structures would still remain ever present beneath the surface of Parisienne life. Excess consumption, untoward behaviors, and alcoholism would be blamed upon the drinking working class, despite similar and more notable wealthy extravagances and pleasures still being enjoyed by elites – albeit in a more private exclusive manner at higher end clubs so as to preserve appearances.²⁶ Being at the heart of the issue, the rise of the middle class and the growth of a working class now more able to freely enjoy the pleasures of Parisian nightlife would cause further social clash as more people would choose to shake off the turbulent past and its restrictions to more openly enjoy what the wealthy had already been privy to, putting Bohemianism in full swing.

By the time of the Belle Époque, the drinking scene was already filled with the second generation of “Bohemians,” a term that denoted artists, creatives, and free thinkers who chose to live an unconventional way. According to etymologist Douglas Harper, people of the era regarded these individuals as those who lived, “a free and somewhat dissipated life, despising conventionalities and having little regard for social

²⁵ Anne R. Epstein, “Gender and the Rise of the Female Expert during the Belle Époque,” *Histoire@Politique: Politique, culture, société*, n° 14, Cairn. Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po (2011), Accessed 2021-03-25, Web: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-politique-2011-2-page-84.htm>, 11.

²⁶ Miami Dade College, “La Belle Époque.”

standards.”²⁷ Acting as the hub for Bohemians, the Montmartre district would define the aesthetics and living culture of the Belle Époque by supplying its lifeforce with the steady pulse of evolving art movements, entertainment, fashion, music, and the plentiful absinthe drinking scenes made readily available at dance halls, cabarets, circuses, and brothels.²⁸ Offering thrilling adventures away from the prying eyes of central Paris as well as inexpensive housing, the area was primed to receive a diverse cast of characters from working-class laborers, performers, tourists, and the artists who would embrace the lifestyle and its provocative denizens as subjects for their works.²⁹

During the earlier years of the Belle Époque the murmurs of the dangers of absinthe hadn't quite taken root as they would in the mid to late years. For a while the drink continued to garner a favorable reputation as, *la fée verte* or the green fairy for its unique green hue and its, “mind-altering hallucinations,” said to enhance one's perceptions and experience of the world.³⁰ During this time, the endless stream of absinthe supplied the critical components that would define the emerging styles of shifting artistic visions, as the voyeuristic canvases of many artists portrayed rambunctious parties, lovely fashionable women, and a general sense of in the moment *joie de vivre* accompanied by the populace's favorite *apéritif*.

As the shift in artist's outlook over the substance changed however, so did the reputation of its subjects. While propaganda and rumor was certainly at work, the

²⁷ Douglas Harper, "Bohemian etymology," Online Etymology Dictionary (2001), Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/Bohemian>.

²⁸ National Gallery of Art, "Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre," Nga.gov, Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/toulouse-lautrec-and-montmartre.html>.

²⁹ National Gallery of Art. "Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre."

³⁰ Mary McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Epoque: The Paris of Monet, Zola, Bernhardt, Eiffel, Debussy, Clemenceau, and Their Friends*, United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2011), 83-84.

impact of industrialization led some to become dependent on alcohol to cope with the times, with more Parisians and the world at large gaining an increased understanding of alcoholism as a disease in the late nineteenth century.³¹ Just as alcoholism was becoming known as a condition, absinthe took on a flair of its own with descriptions of its side effects being found in early medical journals to include an even wider range of symptoms such as acute auditory and visual hallucinations, potentials for epilepsy and brain damage, and an increased risk of psychiatric illness and suicide.”³² The chic Parisienne woman caught in the grips of absinthe now became a sought-after modern subject matter whose downtrodden and unfortunate condition was compelling to artists and observers alike. What better manner to capture all of the beauty, fear, and madness of an absinthe-soaked era than with the very women who stirred artists into the era of Bohemia in the first place?

³¹ Ayman M. Hamdan-Mansour, “History of Alcoholism: A Scientific Evolution,” University of Jordan: Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, School of Nursing (2016), 4.

³² John Strang, et al., “Absinthe: What's Your Poison?,” 1591.

Edgar Degas and *The Absinthe Drinker* (1875-76)

For Degas beauty lay in the truth of arresting the fleeting and hidden aspects of society upon his canvas. Ever enthralled by the fringe elements of society, his eye would fall upon the drunken figure of a lower-class woman in his oil on canvas work, *The Absinthe Drinker*, (Fig. 1, pg. 35) also known by other titles: *In a Café* or *Absinthe*, painted in 1875-76. Like his compatriots, Degas participated in the pleasures of the era's entertainments and would frequent bars and clubs around Paris seeking new muses as an urban painter. A rebellious antagonist against the stifling standards of the Académie des Beaux-Arts (save for a short period early in his career), Edgar Degas' fascination with unusual brushwork and "ordinary" subject matter looked to capture the everyday moments of a living, breathing, modern Paris, remaining unconcerned with perpetuating historic portraits and religious allegories.³³

Degas primarily gravitated toward behind the scenes moments of ballet dancers, quiet moments in clubs, and other scenes of forgotten daily life within Parisian nightlife.³⁴ Known for his prickly character and wit, his conservative upbringing and cynicism would cause him to butt heads with fellow Impressionists throughout his career.³⁵ His peculiar outlook would extend to his painted subjects as well. Historian Mary McAuliffe goes on to describe him as, "constitutionally unable to pay a false

³³ Kelly Richman-Abdou, "How "La Belle Époque" Transformed Paris Into the City We Know and Love Today," *My Modern Met* (2020), Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://mymodernmet.com/la-belle-epoque-paris/>.

³⁴ McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Époque*, 56.

³⁵ McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Époque*, 47.

compliment to a woman,” as he frequently chose to represent his female figures during moments of discomfort, hard work, or in less than graceful behaviors for the times.³⁶

In *The Absinthe Drinker*, a seated woman dominates the scene. She stares vacantly off into the distance with glassy eyes and a sense of hopelessness emanating from her face and slumped forward posture. A man is seated adjacent to her at the booth on her left, and he seems similarly disengaged from the world. Placed before her on the white marble table, the probable culprit of her depression makes its presence known – a large glass of absinthe, filled nearly to the brim, with its tell-tale lightly green minted hue. While she may not be out on the town on her own, maintaining a semblance of etiquette, her vice of absinthe drinking suggests she is hurdling down the path of no redemption.

Her clothing fashion marks her as a member of the lower class within society, as she displays her social status with her hair tucked under a simple grey hat upon her head, dull fabrics accent a plain high neck style, and loosely tied ribbons adorn the fabric shoes poking out from her earth toned skirt.³⁷ Our voyeuristic eye notices however that something more is amiss, as the outward presentation of her womanly charm is tinged with the unmistakable befuddled air of inebriation. So effective was Degas’ depiction of this state of drunkenness, the actress Ellen André and the engraver and artist Marcellin Desboutin who posed as models for the work had to have Degas

³⁶ McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Epoque*, 47.

³⁷ Philippe Jullian, “La Belle Epoque: An Essay,” New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1982), 38.

publicly state that they indeed were not alcoholics as the, “painting [started to] cast a slur on their reputations.”³⁸

With the woman’s veneer of dignity removed, Degas’ painting showcased the sight of a woman publicly imbibing the pernicious spirit in the beginning throes of alcohol induced depression, exhibiting the rising fear of the dignified chic Parisian woman of the middle and upper classes succumbing to the lure of the Bohemian lifestyle. Her feet seem unsteady and appear as if she is nervously tapping her right foot as it tilts awkwardly outward at an angle. Meanwhile, her arms fall to her sides limply following her drooping shoulders, imparting a defeated and feeble disposition to her body. Under the table her hands lay listlessly upon her lap, hidden from our view. For many women absinthe drinking cast aside the previously followed formalities, cracking the visage of moral superiority with the merging of the public and private spheres of leisure activities.³⁹ Notably, as women consumed absinthe outside of the privacy of their homes, shifting instead to the multitude of communal pleasure spots, concerns would gain momentum due to greater visibility of their drinking habits.⁴⁰

Given the fullness of her glass and her emotionally numb expression, one is left with the impression that this is not her first drink of the outing. Her pale face is rendered with finer strokes and edges toward an unfinished Realist style directing our attention to her subtle expression and downcast mood. However, the rest of the work quickly shifts to the wistful and charged broadened swabs of color common to impressionistic

³⁸ Musee d'Orsay, “Edgar Degas In a Café,” Works in Focus, Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire_id/in-a-cafe-2234.html.

³⁹ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 342.

⁴⁰ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 290.

techniques, albeit with a far more drab and somber color palette of browns and greys. The lengthened mirror behind her head hints to us that for her, *l'heure verte* has been more akin to a full day, as bright sunshine still attempts to pierce through the delicately patterned curtains from the opposite wall being reflected.

A careful look reveals that perhaps the gaze of the viewer is in an altered state as well, as subtle shifts of hallucinogenic non-reality reveal themselves. Rather than reflect the back of her or her companions' heads, the mirror only shows their blurred shadows. The positioning of the couple's tables are additionally suspect, their stability uncertain due to a complete lack of supporting legs to carry the weight of the marbled surface. Our vantage point too has produced a strange viewing angle that seems both too close, yet too far giving the startling feeling that the floating tables are slowly levitating of their own accord. Perhaps Degas cleverly channels her inebriated perceptions in an effort to foster empathy for her addiction – a sentiment and visual tactic that would grow in the later Belle Époque years amongst other artists, the rising temperance movement's propaganda, and among scientific publications.⁴¹

⁴¹ Prestwich, "Temperance in France," 306.

DISTILLED DELIRIUM

Pétroleuses and the Unruly Femme Moderne

Running parallel to the growing concern of an absinthe intoxicated population was another collective problem some believed was tipping society even more so toward perceived societal ruin and moral bankruptcy – the advancing changes and altered expectations brought on by advancing women’s rights and the increasing number of tradition breaking roles sought out by the *femme moderne*. Acting as another fuel that lit the fires of distress for those resistant to the new modes of an evolving more expressive society, the *femme moderne* chose to harness her femininity in altered manners as she entered into a greater variety of professions, engaged in sports, attended institutes of higher learning, and begin to push back against previous gender limitations. As historian Rachel Mesch details, most of these advancements started to make headway during the 1890s and the early 1900s as more feminist women became interested in pursuing, “the rights of women workers, poor women and prostitutes; infant mortality; changes to the French civil code; and, eventually, suffrage.”⁴²

Despite the new domains opening up uncharted pathways before her, the long-held beliefs of proper living and established practice nonetheless influenced the *femme moderne* and the public’s opinion on what separated a new modern woman from the irresponsible feminist and the recent past’s radical *pétroleuses*. For the Belle Époque, a woman could still be considered successful and welcomed to explore new roles, as long as she occupied a space that was still, “sensitive to gender norms and social

⁴² Mesch, *Having It All*, 18.

constraints,"⁴³ that ultimately lead to her balancing her career and passions with the needs of family and motherhood.⁴⁴ The fiercely independent woman became associated with anti-feminist stereotypes distributed through the mass press with imaginations running rampant. Women were cast as dissidents bent on hedonistic desire who behaved, "mannish and severe, sporting pants and spectacles, smoking cigarettes, riding bicycles, and unabashedly entering male-dominated professional realms."⁴⁵

Similarly, a carryover from the Paris Commune still remained burned in the mind of Post Commune France, as the unruly *femme moderne* became rumored to have the same degree of madness as the earlier era's infamous fire-starter, the dangerous and destructive *pétroleuse* whose outrageous behaviors were fueled by her refusal to accept her proper place and by her predilection for drunkenness. A useful propaganda device for the recovering political party and wealthy classes, blaming disorderly women – who must clearly be under the influence – as disrupters of the status quo allowed a potent representation for society's "sudden" sickness.⁴⁶ With the spark of imagination lit, these female figures provided a convenient fabrication of past events, enveloping the public discourse for the years that would follow as symbols of the perceived evils of the Commune.⁴⁷

⁴³ Mesch, *Having It All*, 29.

⁴⁴ Mesch, *Having It All*, 57.

⁴⁵ Mesch, *Having It All*, 18.

⁴⁶ Wren Awry, "Pétroleuses, Witches & Fairy Tales: The Myth of Revolutionary Women as Arsonists," *Fifth Estate* # 396, Summer (2016), Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/396-summer-2016/petroleuses-witches-fairy-tales>.

⁴⁷ Gay L. Gullickson, "Les Pétroleuses," *In Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune*, ITHACA; LONDON: Cornell University Press (1996), 159.

The object of a same tactic, the drinking woman of the early 1900s would become a useful caricature for opposition to feminism as she was transformed from the position of a misunderstood damsel in distress in the early époque golden years to the figure of a would-be manipulative feminist bent on creating a, “violent rupture to the social order ... [through her] undermining of social structures [and] a refusal [to follow] conventional feminine norms.”⁴⁸ The selfish feminist who spent her time with men in clubs, willfully ignored her womanly duties and embraced a purposefully subversive life in pursuit of endless leisure, would prove to be an fitting subject of portrayal not only in mass publication, but by painters lured into her dangerous realm.

A further transformation in attitudes followed a few years later, as the *femme moderne* were seen by the next generation as figures of confidence and individuality that could advance France into the future. The intermingling of gender and classes for purposes of leisure certainly created new dialogues and afforded more opportunities to foster understanding and intrigue. Nonetheless, the *femme fatale* imagery of the dangerous woman remained powerful in the societal consciousness, with the drinking woman continuing to be a popular subject matter for artists in the era’s middle years and onward.

⁴⁸ Mesch, *Having It All*, 19.

Axel Törneman and *Absinthe* (1902)

If our first painting captured the plight of a depressed woman falling prey to absinthe, Axel Törneman's painting titled, *Absinthe*, (Fig. 2, pg. 36) infiltrates the world of turn-of-the-century Paris and explores the wild, evocative, and alluring pleasures absinthe may offer. Featuring the commanding figure of the treacherous modern woman many had come to fear and that others came to admire; his painting provides an exciting glimpse of the absinthe-drinking woman from the outsider perspective offered by a visitor to Paris. Painted during the earlier years of his four year Paris stint in 1902, *Absinthe* reflects Törneman's adventurous spirit and evolving painting style that developed while he studied at Académie Julian, a way of painting that provides an early hint of his later painting styles created in the vein of the expressionist and modernist movements.⁴⁹

Fond of cafes, clubs, and music, Törneman readily embraced Bohemia, often enjoying friendly conversations and sketching the lively characters he encountered between his studies and urban trawling. He developed an interesting habit of painting on napkins in cafes around the city – a trait that his Parisian friends claim was the only way to locate him by following them as if they were breadcrumbs.⁵⁰ Later upon his return to his home country, he would establish himself as a pioneer in Swedish

⁴⁹ Hans Alexander Gerlanus, "Johan Axel Gustaf Törneman," Biographical entry at Konstnärslexikonett Amanda (online biographical dictionary of Swedish/Nordic artists in Swedish), Accessed 2021-03-25, Web: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151117084025/http://www.lexikonettamanda.se/show.php?aid=20131>.

⁵⁰ Jonna Säll, "En av de viktigaste banbrytarna för svensk konst" (in Swedish, EN title: "One of the most important pioneers of Swedish art."), *Nya Wermlands-Tidningen*, nwt.se culture section. Google translate, Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://web.archive.org/web/20110620212736/http://www.nwt.se/kultur/article922825.ece>.

expressionism and modernism with his popular works being inspired by the decadence, charismatic people, and bustling scenes of the new era.⁵¹ He would later go on to marry a talented singer he originally met and fell in love with in Paris; they had a son together. Beyond these memoirs, he otherwise remains a rather aloof figure with much of his adventures lost to the sands of time.

His openness, eager character, and hardworking spirit reveals itself in the legacy of his captivating paintings and murals that pull the viewer into the dramatic, vivid, and colorful world of leisure with his most evocative works from his Paris stint falling in line with other artists lured unto the scene by the enchanting sight of drinking and women.⁵² Presented before us is a rather formidable female figure whose direct piercing gaze carries the intriguing quality of pulling you into her domain as if a welcoming seductress who knows your hidden desires. Yet, there is the unmistakable sense that one has perhaps overstepped their bounds and become ensnared into a trap they are unable to escape from, as the vortex-like surrounding of green hues threatens to envelope everything within reach. If Degas' gentle and docile woman seemed lost in a haze, Törneman's *femme moderne* is ever the opposite, embracing in full her altered state and dubious surroundings. Unlike Degas's previous depiction of a not-quite-so-happy happy-hour with its subtle hint of an altered reality, the view before us now bends and folds in bold bands of swirling green and yellow distorting into a full-blown hallucinogenic ambience.

⁵¹ The Thiel Gallery, "Axel Törneman. Bohemia and Modernity," Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://www.thielskagalleriet.se/en/utställning/axel-torneman-bohemia-and-modernity/>.

⁵² Säll, "Pioneers of Swedish Art."

As if a witch straight out of fables and folklore, the woman depicted in Törneman's painting transfixes us with her eyes, confronting the viewer for trespassing into her space. We are made to sit down before her frozen as if made of stone, her eyes enchanting us with the power of the mythological gorgon medusa. She offers up nothing of herself for display either physically or emotionally. Instead roles are reversed as she appears to be sizing *us* up as the viewer. She appears to express herself freely by casting off and subverting the expected behaviors of polite society. Her elongated claw like fingers curl nonchalantly around a lit and nearly finished smoking cigarette that she begins to gingerly raise to her mouth. If we avert our eyes from her glare, one of the few areas of greater clarity within the painting comes into focus: a large glass of nearly glowing fluorescent absinthe placed next to a *pyrogène*, a clever dual use match holder and striker.

Trying to focus on the background in an effort to gain our bearings produces a feeling of further bewilderment. Layered colors in thickened swaths, wandering shadows of bustling pedestrians, a stopped coach and horse waiting on the nearby street, strobing city lights, and a conglomeration of distant faces in a crowd flow into one another, forming yet another whirlwind. Our attempt to take in the scene is slowed and off-kilter, as if our depth perception has gone askew. Perhaps we too have been drinking with her for quite some time – although it appears as though she may be better able to hold her liquor. Dressed to the nines, our lady appears in the finest debonair clothing for her times, but her peach toned flower boutonniere seems to be the only delicately feminine aspect about her get-up.

The darkened deep blues and verdant greens of her dress have the textural sheen of then-fashionable velvet, offsetting the color of the quaint swirly pastel rose and its vibrant foliage. Upon her head, a large menacing hat dominates our field of vision, crossing diagonally through the piece. Its top tips in an exaggerated manner, while its feather plume adornment mimics the coiled grasp of her hand, thereby dividing the foreground and background into strange quadrants while framing her pale, stern face. A tan shawl adorns her shoulders to chase off the cold. Given the night sky, city lights and brightly-lit interior leaking out from a store-front, we can assume it is quite late in the evening, even if she still has much absinthe left in her glass.

For a woman to so brazenly consume this lifestyle is no surprise in retrospect. To a well-to-do or audacious city dweller, this age of industrialization gave access to the latest goods, finery, and amusements. Supported by the presence of a visual culture that promoted decadence and consumption, the chic independent Parisienne delighted in material goods as industrialization generated abundant products and convincing advertisements abounded.⁵³ Being a diligent consumer to show status was expected, but the rising feminist notions on public alcohol use still marked a woman as a figure of concern, especially if she expressed a lack of remorse for venturing into spaces previously monopolized by men and pushed beyond what Anne R. Epstein labels the, “gendered structure of the public sphere.”⁵⁴ Nonetheless, women who drank would continue to find themselves socially and quite literally painted as dangerous and fascinating figures to the moral order until the start of World War I.

⁵³ Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture*, 223.

⁵⁴ Epstein, “Gender and the Rise of the Female Expert,” 11.

DRINKING DEGENERATES

Class Divides and Industrialized Poverty

As the outcry of the absinthe moral panic continued to rise in general, the worry of women succumbing to the vice of drinking the spirit increased in propaganda efforts by temperance, religious, and political groups. These groups used the figure of the drinking woman as a victim to invoke feelings of guilt and sympathy for their causes, even though in reality men continued to far outpace women in alcohol consumption.⁵⁵ If the drink itself or the recent liberties taken by women weren't the problem, the anti-absinthe groups set their sight on blaming an easier target – the mentally ill and poverty stricken. Once the party drink of Bohemian inspiration, absinthe was now cast by moral entrepreneurs as belonging to the degenerate tastes of the lower class.

While alcoholism unquestionably was on the rise in urban areas on a broader scope, absinthe drinking in France became the narrowed field of focus for groups who desired a desperate need of reform but who nonetheless culturally and commercially viewed wine as a healthy beverage.⁵⁶ Phillips argues these commentators insisted that, “drunkenness in itself was not perceived as a problem, as apologists argued that there was a particular kind of French drunk, not boorish and violent like drunks of other nationalities, but one that was witty, vivacious, and intelligent.”⁵⁷ Instead it was the uncultured working class and foreigners who bore the responsibility for the increases in crime and degeneration. A view supported by the upper and middle classes, Phillips

⁵⁵ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 297.

⁵⁶ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 335.

⁵⁷ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 335.

elaborates, “deplored the behavior of what they thought of as the ‘dangerous classes’—the workers and the poor—whose living arrangements, relationships, hygiene, and social comportment left so much to be desired.”⁵⁸ Among the members of the upper classes still imbibing, a belief persisted that they could not fall victim to its harmful characteristics as, “only ‘degenerates,’ those already weakened by disease ... would be harmed by the drink.”⁵⁹ It was the weak and already delusional that temperance supporters argued quickly lost themselves to absinthe. Prestwich reveals these beliefs were followed by the assertion that if, “alcohol was a poison that led to madness and death, then absinthe provided a particularly horrible form of lunacy and a faster death.”⁶⁰ Its notoriety growing, absinthe would acquire nicknames nodding to the idea of the altered mind and potential hysteria as, *la correspondance*, a reference made to the *la correspondance a Charenton* or the quick coach to the madhouse and at times utilized a reference to its coloring as the, “green peril!”⁶¹

Despite many of the legends surrounding absinthe as the great mind waster that would lead to lunacy, much of the side-effects and the descriptions of absinthe in actuality line up with, “acute alcohol intoxication, withdrawal, dependence, and other neuropsychiatric complications,”⁶² not unique to the substance. Having a public concern that linked business, politics, and social order under one roof would provide a favorable and veiled way to influence laws against the working class. The bourgeois would hypocritically, “control working-class drinking while ignoring the drinking that went on in

⁵⁸ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 310.

⁵⁹ Prestwich, “Temperance in France,” 313.

⁶⁰ Prestwich, “Temperance in France,” 308.

⁶¹ Prestwich, “Temperance in France,” 308.

⁶² John Strang, et al., “Absinthe: What's Your Poison?,” 1591.

ritzier cafés.”⁶³ They would push the agenda that the popular working-class drink and its dangers were the cause of rising working-class agitations. The “rejection” of wine for the industrially processed and “unnatural” drink of absinthe became an additional proof of degeneracy,⁶⁴ ignoring the severe wine shortage and its prohibitive costs.⁶⁵

The plight of impoverished women would similarly be attributed to mental derangement, either enhanced or manifested by absinthe. The household angel was now reduced to a fallen woman of the night, given to criminality, indolence, promiscuity, and various mental disorders. In some instances, she would even be blamed for the alcoholism of her husband or for his domestic violence, provoked by *her* drinking as Phillips notes anti-absinthe groups’ claims that, “the suffering angel ... is found to be rather an angel of the fallen class, who has made her husband’s home an earthly hell, who spends his earnings in drink.”⁶⁶ Destitute women were blamed for acts of violence by men and as the cause for unplanned births due to drinking and, “allowing men to take advantage of them.”⁶⁷ Viewed as a lost cause, the struggling working class woman who turned to drink was regarded by the upper classes as someone who willingly abandoned herself and society; her shortcomings were not viewed as a product of her urban living conditions and gendered limitations. Rather than upset their advantageous status quo, it was easier to ignore industrialization’s distressing reality for the penniless woman who suffered through, “long hours, low pay, poor food, and sickness.”⁶⁸

⁶³ McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Époque*, 84.

⁶⁴ Prestwich, “Temperance in France,” 304.

⁶⁵ Schultz, “Celebration and Censure,” 22.

⁶⁶ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 329.

⁶⁷ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 333.

⁶⁸ Miami Dade College, “La Belle Époque.”

Pablo Picasso and *Sleeping Drinker* (1902)

For the *femme moderne* of France, a life of poverty was suggested to go hand in hand with absinthe should the Bohemian lifestyle be allowed to run its course. Despite such notions, the leisure scene would march on offering a veritable stream of new muses from both high and low society. Urban artists were no strangers to studying the poverty-stricken as a subject matter and would extend this fascination to studying working class drinking women, prostitutes, beggars, and other unfortunates. A young Pablo Picasso, recently arrived in Paris, exemplifies this practice. Roaming the city's underbelly, Picasso would readily immerse himself into the Bohemian lifestyle, focusing heavily on painting women. The world of leisure before him, Picasso would find himself painting drinking women throughout his career, but would concentrate on depictions of the distressed ruined woman and other, "dark and dismal subjects," during his Blue Period after the suicide of his fellow Spanish bohemian Carlos Casagemas.⁶⁹

Overcome with grief and prone to drink himself, Picasso would direct his sadness and frustrations into painting many morose works while still haunted by the overwhelming specter of guilt for his deceased friend.⁷⁰ Of these works, the figure of a lonely woman lost deep in a world of blue-tinged melancholia found within his 1902 painting, *Sleeping Drinker* (Fig. 3, pg. 37) also known as, *The Absinthe Drinker*, stands apart. Despite experiencing a major depressive episode, Picasso remained quite the notorious womanizer and readily seized many women's core spirit, both on and off the

⁶⁹ Mary McAuliffe, *Twilight of the Belle Epoque: The Paris of Picasso, Stravinsky, Proust, Renault, Marie Curie, Gertrude Stein, and Their Friends Through the Great War*, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2014), 54.

⁷⁰ McAuliffe, *Twilight of the Belle Epoque*, 40.

canvas.⁷¹ Whether painted from a stance of sympathy or disgust, Picasso's perception of drinking women undoubtedly was influenced by the rhetoric being propagated during this era, even taking into consideration his well-documented misogynistic character. Clearly the subject matter, based on his numerous iterations of the forsaken female figure, was deemed as a worthy vessel of contemplation even if only to reflect upon his own dejection. Female suffering was in reality a trivial matter for him personally, as he freely told one of his mistresses that, "women are machines for suffering." Going further to divide women into two categories, he elaborated that, "for me there are only two kinds of women: goddesses and doormats."⁷² Seemingly compelled to envision and paint those less fortunate than him, Picasso would invent new stylistic devices that would define future art movements for generations, even as his narcissism and views on women would fail to evolve.

A useful archetype, the despondent woman in *Sleeping Drinker* sits before us on a simple hard-backed dark wooden chair, her head tilted downward with eyes closed as she slumps forward at a dining table. Her unkempt hair tumbles out in thickly painted brunette blocks of color, coming loose from the once-fastened white headscarf that has begun to slide down the back of her neck, as she tightly wraps a dark blue blanket around herself to stay warm. The room is sparse, dimly lit, and oppressive. Set before her on an otherwise empty table rests the familiar *apéritif* glassware of absinthe set just within reach near the table's edge. Lit slightly more brightly from a duller light source

⁷¹ Alexandra Schwartz, "How Picasso's Muse Became a Master," New York: The New Yorker (2019), Accessed 2021-04-01, Web: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/22/how-picassos-muse-became-a-master>.

⁷² Schwartz, "How Picasso's Muse Became a Master."

just off frame, the *apéritif* stands alone unaccompanied by a meal – unable to fulfill its original purpose of preparing the stomach to receive food.⁷³ For tonight, it appears that the lure of alcohol was stronger than the desire to eat, a choice that the frail frame of her body would indicate she has made before. The unshown light source casts a circular glow from the table with its reach ending on the wall just behind her. The illumination reveals a dingy, barren surrounding; its flickering color tones suggest it to be a lone candle.

No party scene is present, the glass is empty, and it appears as though the woman finished her drink quite some time ago, as she has begun to nod off and fall asleep at the table. This is a solo affair hidden away in her home or in a dark corner of a bar, far away from the jovial atmosphere of leisure life, elegant gatherings, and fashionable extravagance. From what we can see of the attire not tucked away under her wrapped blanket, she wears a light blue simple dress that peeks out in roughly painted strokes beneath the table. She lacks any of the typical feminine adornments of recent fashion that money could buy, such as a flowering boutonniere, dainty ribbons, or a graceful hat. The lack of even a hat further reinforces the possibility that this may be an isolated domestic interior, since it was still common practice to cover one's head with an appropriate headpiece when out in public. Or perhaps her hatless state indicates that her destitution had taken from her even the usual accouterments of proper living.⁷⁴

If her clothing did not divulge her status, her gaunt pale face removes any doubts. Her cheeks appear fallen-in, with the ridges of her brow casting a shadow that

⁷³ Schultz, "Celebration and Censure," 19.

⁷⁴ Jullian, "La Belle Epoque: An Essay," 3.

darkens the bridge of her nose and sunken eyelids. Further, her skin tone takes on the ghastly coloring of a victim of drowning with pursed lips tinged blue from the cold, seemingly frozen in place as she fades into absinthe-induced slumber. For many members of the working class who lived on the razor-thin line of desperation and poverty, drinking supplied the only relief from the stressful working conditions and crowded lifestyle in poor urban living areas. Not able to afford even the cheapest aspects of the Bohemian lifestyle and its activities but still desiring escapism, impoverished woman such as this who were caught in the machinations of industrialization might well choose to imbibe in the safety of the home.⁷⁵

Using bold strokes for his single figure, Picasso's painting provides a sobering gaze at a victim of absinthe. The painting removes any allure of the drink or of the potential excitement of its purported hallucinogenic properties. Picasso painted her as if looking through the glass of an empty but dirtied glass, with dingy colors applied in a layer as smudges of grime climb the walls and a strange sense of bending occurs that directs our focus to the empty *apéritif* glass upon the table. This sense of curvature manifests in the cast light, the table's edge, the top of the chair, and even the woman's slouching back, which all bear a slight bend that leans in toward the empty glass that has arrested all movement. We are left to contend with the aftermath of the drink, with little to distract us from the stark, dismal, and downright depressive reality of the setting as if we ourselves have just sobered up beside her at the table from our own alcohol induced slumber. Picasso shifts our vision to a hard life rendered in simple terms

⁷⁵ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 290.

through his use of unrefined layered broad strokes and the selective use of muted colors to further refine our awareness and strip away diversions. The glass here is empty with no other absinthe in sight: we as viewers are unable to escape into the altered fantasies offered by the detailed illusionistic interiors of Degas or the bright distracting swirls of color found in the Törneman works. Rather than hinting that absinthe flirts with danger, Picasso's style directs us to the feared pitiable final result of a life of absinthe addiction, marked by loneliness and tinged with the cold rejection of isolation.

Lacking the social mobility of the other classes, especially if limited finances forced her to live in rougher neighborhoods, this domestic "hidden" drunk found herself blamed for the destruction of families and the cause of, in Phillips's words, "prostitution, suicide, insanity, and criminality."⁷⁶ The life of an underprivileged woman often left her with minimal choice and heavy judgement giving rise to cohabitating before marriage which resulted in greater rates of urban illegitimacy, denied paths to education, and with little time to attend church.⁷⁷ Wealthy traditionalists trying to come to terms with the sweeping change of the new era often denied the harsh reality of the "poor situation" by rejecting them as disposable degenerates, a condemnation that extended even to the women they claimed they wished to protect. Becoming a common theme and point of contention within growing class divides, tensions surrounding absinthe use would continue to extend to issues of greater class consciousness as society tried to adapt and reconcile with its cognitive dissonance and the mounting problems of urban living.

⁷⁶ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 288.

⁷⁷ Phillips, *Alcohol: A History*, 342.

CONCLUSION

With growing class mobility, greater access to new technologies, and a desire to once more enjoy the finer aspects of life, the late Bohemian period filled the cultural void left in the wake of the Paris Commune. As the city itself and greater France settled into redefining social classes, pursuing leisure, and exploring new moral realms, the populace pushed beyond the strict confines of their predecessors' socially and artistically stale paradigms. However, the long-standing efforts of anti-absinthe groups would prove fruitful shortly after the start of World War I, with the banning of absinthe finally taking hold in France over rising concerns on possibly drunk soldiers returning home. Ultimately, while these moral entrepreneurs achieved their goal through their continued application of pressures on the media and governing bodies to enact new laws, they had no real impact on alcoholism itself as those afflicted merely switched to other types of spirits offered up by the heady world of leisure that danced on.⁷⁸

Moving on to other folk devils, these concerned citizens would take up the mantle to confront the next wave of moral panics that would surface during and after WWI with artists becoming similarly attracted to exploring these "new deviants" as compelling archetypes and trendsetters of yet another new age. La Belle Époque's short reign from 1871 to 1914 while quite literally translating to, "the beautiful era," would later be applied retroactively after the horrors of battle later faced during World War I.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, while a period of ephemeral beauty, the era still teemed with social tensions that brewed into growing concerns on the shifting roles of women, hedonisms tied to a boisterous

⁷⁸ Prestwich, "Temperance in France," 319.

⁷⁹ Richman-Abdou, How "La Belle Époque."

nightlife and cafe culture, and the emergence of the drink absinthe as the fuel of both heightened inspirations and degradations – with women serving as both artists' muses and as convenient societal scapegoats to be painted as they saw fit.

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Figure 1: Degas, Edgar. *The Absinthe Drinker*, aka *In a Café* or *Absinthe*. 1875–76. Oil on canvas. 92 x 68.5 cm. RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay), France.

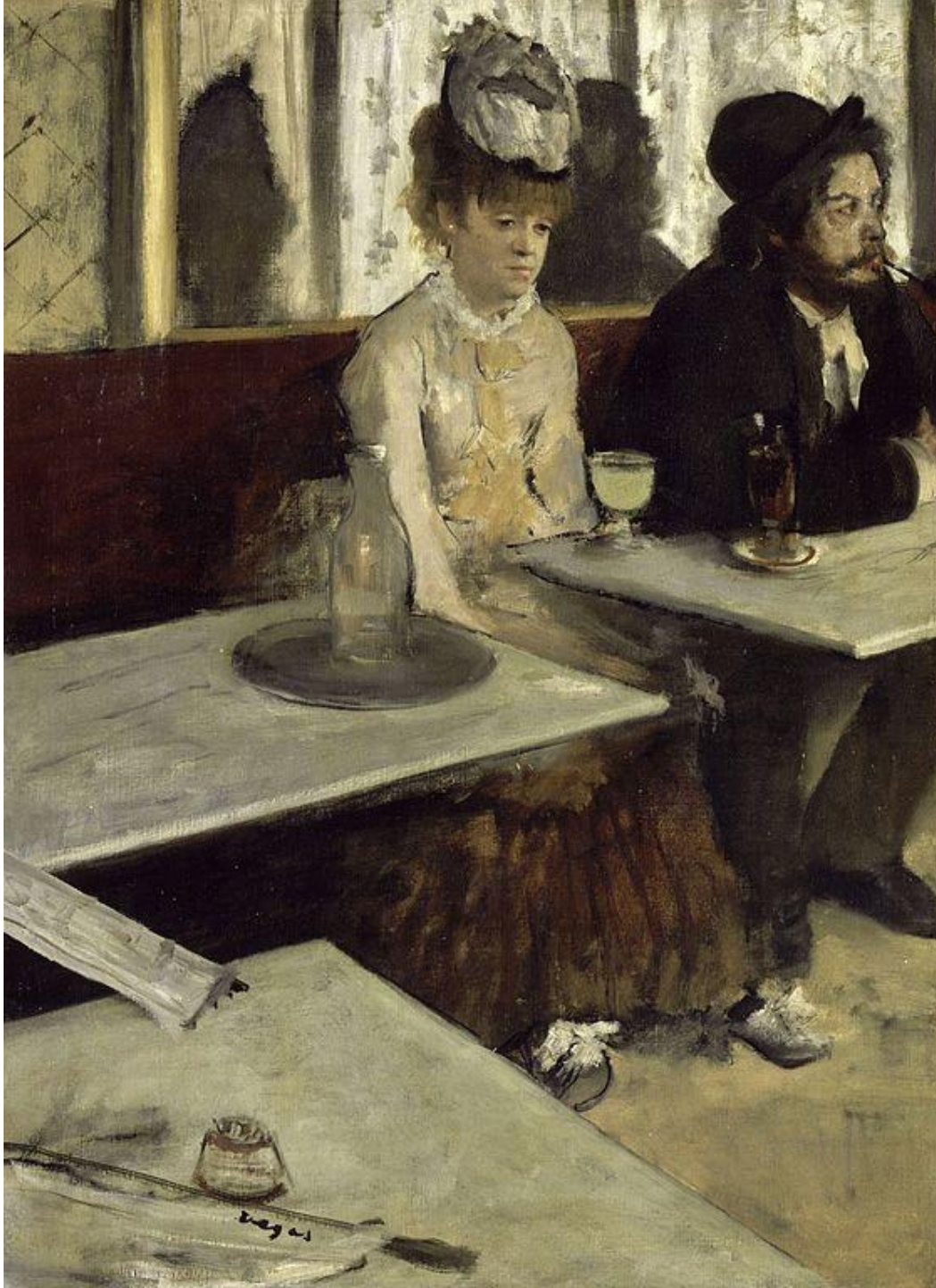
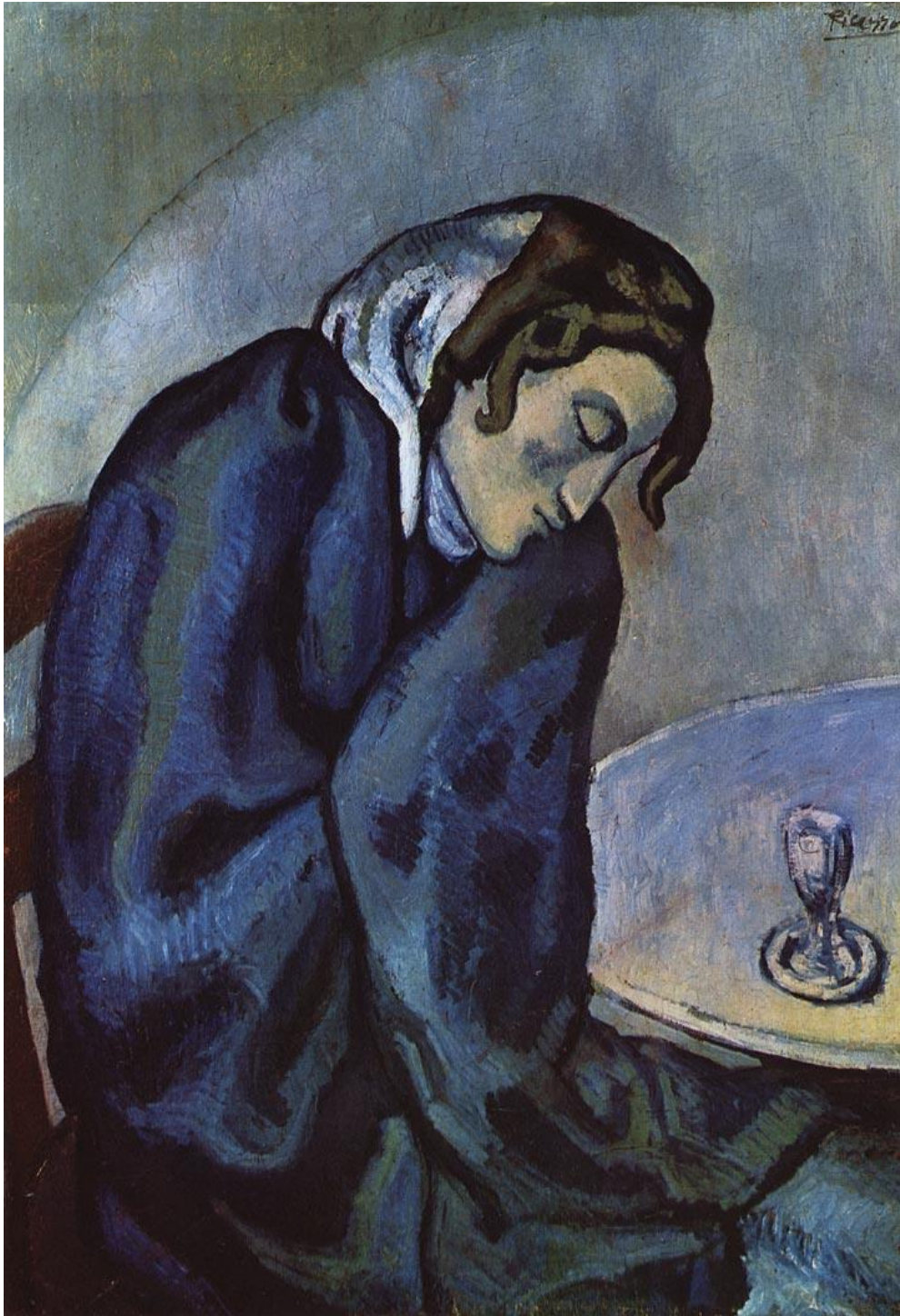


Figure 2: Törneman, Axel. *Absinthe*. 1902. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection.



Figure 3: Picasso, Pablo. *Sleeping Drinker*, aka, *The Absinthe Drinker*. 1902. Oil on Canvas. 80 x 62 cm. Museum of Fine Arts Bern, Switzerland.



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