From Muse to Maker: The Woman Artist's Struggle for Individuality in Elizabeth Macneal's The Doll Factory

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Abstract

This study deals with the journey and struggle of a woman artist in the neo-Victorian gothic novel *The Doll Factory* (2019), by Elizabeth Macneal. In Victorian England, strict social conventions limited women's opportunities to pursue art outside the domestic domain. The chances for women to become professional artists remained quite low, even after they started to receive more education. *The Doll Factory* is set at the heart of London, witnessing the rise of the art group known as the pre-Raphaelites. The novel uniquely contrasts the success of the male pre-Raphaelite artists with the attempts and hardships of women around them, who were trying to reach the same degree of success and recognition.

***Keywords*:** *The Doll Factory*, the Pre-Raphaelite, woman artist, neo-Victorian fiction.

من ملهمة إلى صانعة: كفاح الفنانة من أجل الفردية في رواية مصنع الدمى لإليزابيث ماكنيل

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المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث رحلة وكفاح فنانة في الرواية القوطية النيو–فيكتورية (*مصنع الدمى*) للكاتبة إليزابيث ماكنيل (٢٠١٩). ففي إنجلترا الفيكتورية، حدّت الأعراف الاجتماعية الصارمة من فرص النساء في ممارسة الفن خارج نطاق المنزل. وظلت فرص النساء في أن يصبحن فنانات محترفات محدودة للغاية، حتى بعد أن بدأن في الحصول على المزيد من التعليم. تدور أحداث *مصنع الدمى* في قلب لندن، حيث تشهد الرواية صعود الجماعة الفنية المعروفة باسم ما قبل الرافائيليين. وتقارن الرواية بصورة مميزة بين نجاح الفنانين الذكور من مجموعة ما قبل الرافائيليين وبين محاولات النساء من حولهم ومعاناتهن، وهن يسعين إلى الوصول إلى الدرجة نفسها من النجاح والاعتراف.

الكلمات المفتاحية : (مصنع الدمى)، ما قبل الرافائيليين، الفنانة، الأدب النيو–فيكتوري.

1. Introduction

Around the 1970s, the history of art started to receive a more serious evaluation from a feminist point of view. Both the representation of women in art and the history of woman artists were put on the tale for analysis and explanation. By reviewing the canon of great artists in history, a clear bias against women artists appeared in both the opportunities of professional training and the critics' recognition. The feminist critique of the history of art started with "berating the discipline for its discriminatory exclusion of women artists" (Pollock, 2003, p. 128). Linda Nochlin contributed a major work that helped to start the feminist investigation of art history in her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971). Instead of focusing on the neglected women artists, Nochlin's work shows that men artists dominate history with their great work because they benefitted from opportunities that were not available to their female counterparts. Women artists have received less serious attention and faced many obstacles that hindered them, for instance, formal education, availability of nude models, patronages, etc. Thus, women were exiled from the mainstream of art production and were criticized for their lack of creativity and achievements outside it. This idea is further discussed in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art And Ideology* by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock who confirm:

> There simply had been no great women artists because institutions and social attitudes had limited women by denying them access to fundamental forms of art training and by shaping for them subservient, domesticated life-worlds. Moreover, the very concept of genius, of greatness, was itself gendered masculine. (Pollock, 2013, p. xviii)

Pollock (2013) contends that no matter the gender or orientation of the historian, in order for any artist to enter into art history, he has to have the divine gift of being male. Documenting artists' masterpieces means objecting them to the gendered protocols and language that are used to criticize anyone's work. Thus, "[w]hatever women did or do is separated out from the domain of art pure and simple; qualified by an adjective it is effectively expelled and becomes partial, local and lesser" (Pollock, 2013, p. xx). The gender bias faced by women artists is concretized in the novel *The Doll Factory,* which makes art and the pursuit of artistic perfection its main topic.

In the nineteenth century, where the novel is set, middle-class women could access education, but they were not expected to engage in the art market. It was encouraged that women would receive some form of basic art education. The prevalence of female amateur artists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries helped the English public to accept the idea of women creating art. However, they were expected only to pursue art as a hobby and not to demonstrate their professionalism or receive the recognition and benefits associated with it. It became difficult for middle-class women to earn a living from their art (Quirk, 2019). Thus, even if a woman becomes a successful artist, she still would face the difficulty of earning a living without a supportive husband or family.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, professional artists began to emerge in England as middle-class audiences started to visit art galleries and museums more often. The rapid industrialization enabled the middle class to buy original artworks and engravings and started to criticize artists and debate their work. Also, there appeared reviewed shows, articles, and books about art and artists. At the same time, art education expanded as more galleries and art events started to take place (Devereux, 2016, p. 1). Although the Royal Academy School had been established since 1768, the growing interest in visual art led to the creation of more educational institutions besides it. Notable examples include Henry Sass's School of Art (1813) and the Government School of Design (1835).

2. Artists and Models in *The Doll Factory*

The Doll Factory is set in the 1850s London, focusing on a society that witnessed many social, political, and artistic changes. The novel intersects with the history of art with a specific reference to the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, a group of English artists, poets, and critics who created their brotherhood with seven members, the most prominent of which are John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Although the Brotherhood was loosely organized, other artists shared similar ideals with them, such as Ford Madox Brown and Arthur Hughes. The pre-Raphaelites studied nature and tried to produce art that drifts away from the drawing and painting of the Renaissance artist Raphael (Bowness, 1984, pp. 11, 13). Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his friends tried to restore art to its former state before the Renaissance and invent their own style of poses, angles, and colors. This movement is used as the background for the novel as the fictional female protagonist becomes part of their group, not as an artist but as a model.

The main character of *The Doll Factory* is Iris, a middle-class woman who tries to maintain her love for painting while working in a doll shop under the supervision of a mentally unstable woman. The novel opens with a line that emphasizes both her loneliness and longing for art practice; "When the streets are at their darkest and quietest, a girl settles at a small desk in the cellar of a dollmaker's shop" (Macneal, 2019, p. 3). Iris suffers from social discrimination due to having a physical deformity in her shoulder, which makes her less confident. She grew up with a constant comparison with her twin sister, Rose, who is considered the prettier of the two until she contracted smallpox. Iris wishes to be an artist and has her paintings shown in the Royal Academy, where great living artists are celebrated. Yet, this dream cannot be easily fulfilled for Iris because she has not attend art school, and is required to work to support her parents and herself. Iris paints secretly above the doll shop and her daily practice becomes an outlet for her suppressed passion:

> In the candlelight, the shadows magnify, and the edges of her hair are one with the blackness. She paints on, a single sweep for her chin, white for her cheekbones where the flame catches. She copies her faults faithfully: her widely spaced eyes, the deformed twist of her collarbone. (Macneal, 2019, p. 3)

In the absence of the necessary tools for learning, such as models, Iris uses the mirror to portray herself for her own paintings. Iris' early portraits in the novel are all self-portraits. She uses the canvas as a cite to draw herself as she perceives it. While an artist may hide her flaws or fix her posture, skin, eyes, etc. she attempts to represent her own faithful female gaze, not just that of a traditional artist. In fact, Iris' paintings and artistic vision are quite different from the pre-Raphaelites. That becomes clear by comparing her work with theirs. Nochlin (1971) emphasizes that art schools helped to increase the gap among genders and races by preferring the white race and the male gender, excluding by that talented individuals who may have become great artists only because they were born outside these preferences. "The miracle is, in fact, that given the overwhelming odds against women, so many have managed to achieve so much in bailiwicks of masculine prerogative like science, politics, or the arts" (Nochlin, ١٩٧١, p. 346). Some women managed, indeed, to enter the mainstream of art and became notable actors, singers, dancers, and more, despite the bias towards them.

Significantly, the limitation of women as artists during the Victorian age often worked in quiet ways and through structure rather than open rules. As Giorgio Vasari (1996) writes in the introduction to *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, "I shall speak only of those who have distinguished themselves in the arts" (p. 1), and this choice left women almost absent from the early canon of art history. Also, Leon Battista Alberti describes painting as a discipline requiring strict intellectual training and writes, "painting requires a knowledge of geometry, anatomy, and proportion," areas of study that denied women an access for centuries (p. 37). In the novel, the protagonist struggles to keep working at the shop since she is forced to practice a sort of art that she distastes, and at the same time working as an independent artists was not an option: "What would you do if we could escape here?" Rose asked, to which Iris replied, "I should like to paint real things, not these endless china eyes and lips and cheeks, and – ugh" (Macneal, 2019, p. 19).

At first, Iris is fascinated by the work at the doll shop, especially the details of decorating the dolls with fox-hair brushes, and painting tiny facial features. But over time, she begins to get bored and exhausted by the repetitive work. Iris' body turns into a spectacle as the owner of the shop, Mrs. Salter, forces her and her sister to sit in the middle while working. Customers come and stare at her with Rose like two more dolls that decorate the place. Both of them find themselves exposed to the public eye where their deformities become a sight for customers' discussions.

Iris describes the shop as a graveyard because of the smell of burnt candles and the dolls that feel like they are watching her; "It is a weight of exhaustion she never could have imagined, a drudgery greater than if the shop were a factory" (Macneal, 2019, p. 16). Unlike conventional descriptions of Victorian women as perfect lady-like and beautiful, Macneal presents Iris as a hard working woman with deformity and secret pursuit that society may not approve. Traditionally, "[t]he feminine is located by the textual strategies and ideological formations of art history as the passive, beautiful or erotic object of a creativity exclusively tied to the masculine" (Pollock, 2003, p. 128). Iris lives a split life between a body that is crashed in work and hands that long for a painter's brush, yet this situation is altered as Louis Frost meets her by accident and offers to make her his model for an upcoming painting.

Louis Frost is a member of the pre-Raphaelite. He embodies their principles being a dedicated painter of nature and distinguished scenes and faces; yet, like many of the

members, he also forsakes his life to chaos by focusing on art and nothing else. He promises to pay her handsomely and even teach her to paint if she accepts his offer to be his model. Choosing a female model was not quite common before that time in the 1850. The majority of model, especially for the nude paintings, were male. The Royal Academy in London preceded other European institutions in accepting the female models, which reflects the Academy's "unusual nongovernmental nature" (Philips, 2006, p. 5). Iris saw in Louis' proposal a very generous offer, but she cannot easily accept it because models were seen as prostitutes in the Victorian era. The bad reputation attached to modeling came from the fact that early models were indeed prostitutes (Philips, 2006, p. 6). Millias, the famous artist and one of Louis' friends in the novel, comments on Iris' potential fear for her reputation that she is already of a low class, so there should not be any worries on her part: "[a] shop girl turned model. What is enough to be ruined?" (Macneal, 2019, p. 177).

The character and story of Iris are inspired greatly by the true model and artist Elizabeth Siddal, who later became the wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In an article that Elizabeth Macneal published with *Pan Macmillan*, she explains the inspiration she had reading about the Pre-Raphaelites before writing the novel, especially the 'discovering' of Iris. She states:

> The male artists were known to link arms on the streets and filter women past them, seizing on potential models whom they deemed 'stunners.' […] The most significant inspiration to me was Lizzie Siddal, a cutlery-maker's daughter who worked in a milliner's shop. […] She had always enjoyed painting, and sketched on butter wrappings as a child. She left her job in the milliner's shop, and threw herself into the decadent and vivid world of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, where she […] posed for many famous Pre-Raphaelite paintings, such as *Ophelia.* (Macneal, 2023)

Louis chooses Iris for the same reason that Siddal was chosen, they both have delicate features and strikingly long and beautiful red hair. Iris' deformity does not hinder Louis who is taken by her demeanor and fiery red locks. In fact, it might have helped her to be more noticeable for him. Paintings of the female beauty usually focus not only on how beautiful or attractive they might be, but also on their delicate pose and fragile body. In reference to Siddal's long term illness in biographies, Pollock (2003) comments that "illness – suggested

in terms such as 'fragile', 'tragic life' – implies dependency, incapacity, inactivity, suffering" (p. 134). Physical weakness may have been sought in the female model because these paintings constructed a version of femininity that operated as "the foil to the masculine usurpation of activity, productivity, creativity, health" in the nineteenth-century discourses (p. 136). Iris reluctantly considers this opportunity then decides to accept it as it seems the only chance to become a painter. She ponders:

> 'Louis trained at the Royal Academy. He had two paintings in their last Summer Exhibition. He is on the brink of great things, I am sure.' Her voice falters. 'Albeit, the critics need some convincing.' Royal Academy, exhibition, critics. Iris repeats these words in her head. They sound delicious, as ripe as cherries. To pluck such words out of the air, frame such sounds! Perhaps they have found some way of seeing her paintings, and they want her to join them in the brotherhood – but already, she knows from the name that this is a group only for men. (Macneal, 2019, p. 59)

The Royal Academy appears as more than a place in the novel, it is as vital as any of the characters. Not only is the Academy's exhibition considered as the criteria for success, but also it seems as main way to gain a professional training in art. The Academy provided a "loose framework" for artists to show their work, with over 100,000 works of art being displayed during this period. It is a major platform for art and a place for education. It is credited with making a significant contribution to shaping the standards of art and directing it towards a big audience (Fox, 1975, p. 323). By selecting and displaying certain paintings, the Academy chooses the artists whose names are going to be preserved in history:

> The visual arts have always existed within a certain preserve; originally this preserve was magical or sacred. But it was also physical: it was the place, the cave, the building, in which, or for which, the work was made. […] During all this history the authority of art was inseparable from the particular authority of the preserve. (Berger *et al*, 1977, p. 32)

Iris becomes impressed by Louis' studio. Even though she is aware of the risk of her reputation, she begins to model and receive lessons about painting and art from him. He teaches her the principals of their brotherhood and how they aim to draw nature as it is and

be inspired by it. He also tells her about "the importance of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and how much rests on where a picture is hung – on the line, which is within the viewer's eyeline" (Macneal, 2019, p. 82). Iris learns how having high and middle-class backgrounds helped the brotherhood to make their own studios in places from their own choosing. However, as a neo-Victorian novel, Macneal portrays the brotherhood as the backdrop of the events and brings the female model to the front, centering the tale around her pursuit instead of the success of male figures.

Iris finds that the Pre-Raphaelites are all well-known artists with solid achievements. She wants to be one of them but her role as a model has come to oppose her passion for art. Days pass while Louis is painting her. She becomes the subject of his painting for the next Exhibition of the Royal Academy. She realizes that she is slowly transforming from an artist to an object of art:

> He sketches her for *The Shepherdess*, and she has pins and needles each day from having her legs tucked underneath her. He asks her if she is comfortable, and she lies that she is. When he teaches her in the evening, he has the coldness of a professional […] 'No,' he says, tapping her drawing. 'That disobeys the fundamentals of perspective. Draw it as you see it. I know you can do better than this' (Macneal, 2019, p. 129).

Louis' teaching makes her aware that the standards for artistic professionalism are applied differently to women than they are to men. 'Amateurism in art' had traditionally been associated with those who practiced art for the purposes of pleasure, not for earning a living, and it was applied to women's artistic creation. The male artists became increasingly concerned with defining and defending the status of their work by adopting the attributes and behaviors of "professional" masters, and they described things and accomplishments they did not like as "amateur" (Quirk, 2019, p. 2). With more women being excluded from professional art training, the term became more feminized and was understood as the opposite of professional male art. It became clear to her that women's art is considered 'inadequate.' The work of white male artists was seen as the criteria to which others' production was subjected:

> The terms 'art' and 'artist', seemingly neutral terms, in fact register, without having to advertise it openly, a privileging of masculinity as

> synonymous with creativity because in order to indicate that an artist is a woman, the neutral term artist must be qualified by an adjective. […] Artist/woman artist, artist/ black artist, artist/queer artist: [… leaving the] universal term, artist, as the space for masculinity, whiteness, heterosexuality. (Pollock, 2013, p. xix)

Iris' work with Louis teaches her about the pain that models have to endure whether they are men or women. Modeling is very difficult and can be even a painful job that is not less important than that of the artist. As she poses to be painted, she understands that both the subject and the creator of the painting stand on equal grounds. The artist in front of the canvas is not greater than the model behind it. Yet, critics do not acknowledge the model, only the artists who paints her. As time passes, Iris finds that her appearance, rather than her art production, becomes her most important asset. Louis describes her as "interesting" and "extraordinary," noting in particular her "untamable" hair and her face that is "half beautiful and half bewildering" (Macneal, 2019, p. 60). Louis sees in her the ideal model for his painting of Guigemar's Queen. Like Lizzie and Rossetti, Iris becomes Louis' 'stunner'.

A 'stunner' is a term that was adopted and popularized in the 1850s by the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti. It refers to a woman of breathtaking beauty and allure. She is the kind who commands attention anywhere she goes. Unlike an ordinary woman, a stunner transcends class. She must embody star quality. Though she might be married, her appeal goes beyond the role of a wife. The stunners influenced Pre-Raphaelite art constantly with their beauty and character, including figures like Rossetti's muse Lizzie Siddal and Maria Zambaco, as well as Jane Morris. These women became cultural icons among the artists of the nineteenth century (Garnett, 2012, p. xi). Unlike the other stunners in the book, Iris looks at modeling as a way to develop her skills and becomes close to mastering her craft:

> Iris learns how to stand still ('I am now a model woman,' she says to Louis, archly), and how to paint too: how to build up the colours and depth of oils, how to add increasingly fine detail with a sable brush so that no strokes are apparent, how to discern the geometry and perspective in a face or a hand. She washes down the paints with so

> much linseed oil that her pictures almost have the transparency of watercolour. (Macneal, 2019, p. 123)

Iris's progress as a painter is discouraged by the sudden destruction of her painting before the Summer Exhibition. She could not submit her work like Louis. She contemplates and mourns the long hours of labor in the studio; "the way she'd thinned the oils so that the white background shone through behind the hand. … The threads of the canvas were torn, the paint chipped and flaking – she knew there was no repairing it" (Macneal, 2019, p. 123). Instead of attending the Exhibition as an artist, Iris went as the object of drawing in Louis painting, *The Imprisonment of Guigemar's Queen*. The painting is supposed to represent the queen from the Medieval Romance tale "Guigemar," where the jealous old lord jails his young wife in a tower with a strict guarding and high walls of green-marble near the sea after finding out about her affair with the knight Guigemar. She admires his work but it is quite different from her style. Her painting would include her sister, Louis, herself, and Albie who is an orphan that she financially looks after. She thinks that "[t]heir postures will be relaxed, not drawn with the china-doll stiffness that the brotherhood is known for; […]it will be a celebration of life as it is, each object indicating joy" (p. 210). While contemplating herself in Louis' work, she hears the sound of wealthy attendees starting an auction over the painting:

> Four hundred pounds! That is her worth. She stares again at the painting, at the paintings of other women about it – their images, too, will be preserved for hundreds of years, there for anybody to criticize or gaze at – and they all have a price. This is little more than a prettied-up shop, where rows and rows of wan, painted women are for sale. And she is among them. (Macneal, 2019, p. 310)

The sight of her painting offered for sale shattered her acceptance of being a model. She is no longer interested in being represented for someone else's benefit and glory. Iris storms out of that Exhibition and remembers the words of Millais "*By Jove, I'll need to find a stupendously beautiful creature for it!* And now: *What a fine creature she is!*" (p. 310, *emphasis is original*). Iris realizes that exhibitions are not about art alone but also about commerce. Images were traditionally created and produced for the male gaze. An image or painting has to please the ones who are going to buy it and the majority of purchasers were men (Berger *et al*, 1977, p. 64). She looks at the rows of women depicted on the walls and finds herself a

place among them, yet no woman was in sight among the artists who stood before the paintings.

Iris recalls how the model Lizzie Siddal was treated. Rossetti tells her "Don't we want to rescue women, and don't women want to be rescued in turn? We rescued Miss Siddall and Miss Whittle, after all" (p. 157) as he and other members exchange positions in drawing Siddal's beauty. Millais decides to paint *Ophelia*, and Rossetti volunteers Lizzie. She accepts at first but then he tells her that she will have to lay still in a bathtub that will be heated for her. She says, "I'm not quite ready to perish of the cold for art's sake yet" (p. 156). It is important that Iris recalls that incident as she leaves the auction behind her, because even though Millais' painting turned out to be of extreme beauty and allure, it brought Siddal's health in real life to great danger, after staying in the cold water for long hours. That painting might indeed have quickened her untimely death at 32 years-old (Ayres & Maier, 2021, p. 248). Even after all the sacrifices that Siddal presented for art, she was not remembered as anything more than a muse. Thus, the artist gains all the recognition while the model's efforts are eroded with time. "For example, in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1975) Siddall has no history other than her relation to Rossetti, no characteristics other than beauty, melancholy, illness" (Pollock , 2003, p. 147).

Iris is not only ignorant of the commercial nature of art, she is also ignorant of the fact that Louis keeps a secret wife that is unwell and suffers a frequent mental breakdowns. She is the one that destroyed Iris painting and even follow her at times outside Louis' home. This discovery brings her story to the gothic conventional architype of the madwoman in the attic. Just like the protagonist of *Jane Eyre* who escapes her employer and lover after finding out about his secret mad wife, Iris too decides to leave the place and the love bond between her and Louis and fend for herself. She knows that Louis' situation "will not allow Iris the same dignity" of marriage. (Macneal, 2019, p. 269). Iris leaves and decides to pursue her dream by herself. What pushes her to cut ties with the aspiring painter is that she becomes fully convinced that Victorian society cannot appreciate the work of artist who works as a model. Iris efforts as a model will not be respected or even remembered because "[i]n patriarchal ideologies of art the role ascribed to the feminine position is either as art's object, the model, or as its muse" (Pollock, 2003, p. 134).

Iris had to find a source of income after she deserts modeling. However, women in the Victorian era did not have many available jobs. They were limited to jobs like servants, factory workers, seamstresses, needle-workers, prostitutes, models, etc. Domestic service was one of the primary jobs available for women, especially in wealthy households where there is a high demand for housekeeping and the daily care of children or the elderly. Women working in this role were seen as playing an important role in maintaining the structure of the home. But even with their important role, servants often lived in the homes of their employers, which shows a degree of limited independence (Higgs, 1983, p. 205). Iris found survival and painting to be two opposite forces. She cannot pursue her dream without being financially safe, yet she cannot gain that safety without sacrificing the time she needs for painting.

Iris attempts to transcend her difficult situation. Yet, she is distracted by another artist's transgression. Silas is a taxidermist who buys human organs and dead animals to preserve their bodies and offer them for selling. He watches Iris and starts a schizophrenic love tale with her in his mind. He imagines her with him admiring his work. When he sees that she walks away from Louis, he decides to kidnap her, preserve her body organs, and make dolls out of her red hair. He is another male artist who wants to confine her to the purposes of commerce and display. When Iris opens her eyes, she realizes that she is tied to a chair waiting for a sentence from Silas to end her suffering. "She stares at the walls of the cellar.[...] The light quivers and dips, and Silas's gaze is searing. He does not stop looking, and she thinks it will shrivel and wither her, burn her to a crisp" (Macneal, 2019, p. 182). Iris experiences a great physical pain from being chained for days in that cellar. Her incapacity to move and the lack of food shrivels her body. She creates an illusion in her head to cope with the pain that she's not being tied and abused, she is only a model at the moment. She begins to see the damp cellar as an artist studio where a new painting of hers is being made:

> *I must gaze on this for days until I've learned it by rote.* She is merely modelling; the ache is from sitting still, holding a pose. The eye watching her is that of an artist – of Louis, his look one of desire and love. Two dark pools she could drown in; a colour she could never mix. And soon he will tell her she can move. (Macneal, 2019, p. 209, *emphasis is original*)

Iris' kidnap lasts for days while Louis and her sister roam the streets of London looking for her. She realizes eventually that Silas is an artist of death. He requires her dead body to labor on, study, and transform into a set of trophies in his shop. It is not a relationship that he wants but a masterpiece made of her hair, skin, and vital organs. When Iris models for Louis, she is metaphorically chained to the chair and plundered of her right over her image. Silas simply literalizes these aspects of being a model. She describes Louis' painting, "not as a celebration, but as a trap which has snapped around her. The woman in the painting […] has suffocated her, until Iris does not know where she ends and this image begins" (Macneal, 2019, p. 233). In a moment of snapping speed she attacks Silas with the chair when he frees her to eat. She doesn't hesitate murdering him and escaping his captivity. While escaping the house, she looks at Silas' corpse on the floor and wishes she could paint the scene of her escape, "the black of a topper, the unmixed emerald of a whisking carriage, and a girl with loose red hair – running." (p. 354).

Iris' final liberation symbolizes her escape from the dominance of artists and male gaze. She dedicates her time and effort after survival to create a painting that she constantly considered. A home setting that gathers her with everyone she loves. That painting is welcomed by the Royal Academy as a work that is worthy of preservation and celebration. The final pages of the novel hint that after years, Iris succeeds in gaining a recognition. Her painting is described by critics as "This simple, though cluttered, painting may not take its cue from poetry or Shakespeare, but its quaint and honest rendering of a domestic scene has left this critic […] filled with an admiration for the natural loveliness therein" (Macneal, 2019, p. 376). Her artistic imagination drifts far from standard and literary topics. She seeks honesty, familiarity, and the warmth of family home, which makes her work different from any other painting that appeared in the novel. Iris celebrates her models, who are also her family members. She paints to immortalize a moment with them, rather than making them disappear behind her brush. The novel ends with the success of a woman that wants to be an artist, yet her work as a model is not embraced or remembered at all by the critics' note at the end. Which gives the impression that the conflict in the novel is not only between patriarchal values and women's aspiration, but also between the role of the artist and that of a model. Ultimately, the novel reveals that although art depends on both the artist and the model, recognition remains reserved for the creator, leaving the contribution of the model out to be lost and forgotten .

Conclusion

The Doll Factory discusses women's access to work opportunities in art during the Victorian age. Macneal has set her story and protagonist in Victorian England to show the success of women which is usually shadowed by society. During the Victorian era, there were many women artists whose works were worthy of attention from the Royal Academy. However, they gained little fame or appreciation for their work. The novel shows the difficult and significant contributions of models to art creation. At the same time, these contributions are undermined and forgotten and only the artist's name is preserved. The novel eventually shows that women artists have unique and different vision towards artistic creation, and their art is as worthy of celebration and remembrance as their male counterparts.

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