



# John Singer Sargent and the fin de siècle Culture of Mauve

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**John Singer Sargent and the *fin de siècle* culture of mauve**  
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**Abstract:**

This article focuses on what Edwin Blashfield described as John Singer Sargent's 'predilection for aniline suggestions in colours'. This is particularly striking in the early oils of Sargent but also in the writings of some of his French literary acquaintances, from Robert de Montesquiou to Judith Gautier, who strangely described the painter's works from his formative period in Paris and London using the new chromatic terminology and notably the colour epithet 'mauve' or its variants such as lilac or heliotrope. It is this 'culture of mauve', to paraphrase Sabine Doran's essay on the 'culture of yellow', as the subversive colour of modernity which I will attempt to unveil, in keeping with what Vernon Lee described as Sargent's 'curious' francophilia.

**Keywords:**

John Singer Sargent, Robert de Montesquiou, Judith Gautier, Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, Claude Monet, Vernon Lee, impressionism, mauve, aniline, pigments, dyes, colour, fin de siècle, poetry, text and image

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The eruption, which is of a mauve colour, soon spreads, until in some cases the sufferer becomes completely covered with it. Arms, hands, and even feet are rapidly disfigured by the one prevailing hue, and strange as it may seem, the face even looks tinted with it.<sup>i</sup>

This quotation is not taken from a medical treatise but from a satirical article published in *Punch*, commenting upon the 'catching' craze for mauve, the first coal-tar based aniline dye accidentally discovered in 1856 by William Henry Perkin. Ironically the English chemist initially called his artificial dye 'Tyrian purple' but the term was soon replaced by 'mauve', the French name for the common mallow plant, which seemed more marketable than the antique reference, conjuring up instead the prestige of contemporary French haute-couture.<sup>ii</sup> Consequently the colour epithet 'mauve', which had existed in French only since 1829, officially entered the English language in 1859, the year of Perkin's patent and of the *Punch* article on the 'Mauve Measles'. The connection with France was so strong that *Punch* described the contaminating dye as being of French origin:

There are many who regard it as of purely English growth, and from the effect it produces on the mind contend it must be treated as a form of mild insanity. Other learned men, however, including *Dr. Punch*, are disposed to view it as a kind of epidemic and to ascribe its origin entirely to the French.<sup>iii</sup>

Twenty-five years later, on 22 May 1886, a reviewer from the *Illustrated London News*, described John Singer Sargent's *The Misses Vickers* (1884) as 'an admirable specimen' of 'vivid portraiture', wherein the artist 'has attempted to engraft French method and dash upon the solid principles on which Velazquez worked'. The critic deemed the exercise an utter failure since 'the aniline dyes, which seem to have such an attraction for the *Misses Vickers*, are precisely those colours which accord least with the black and white that play so important a part of Velazquez' colouring'.<sup>iv</sup> Here the 'solid', serious, and almost a-chromatic black and white palette of Velazquez is contrasted with Sargent's modern 'French method' relying on the use of artificial, aniline-looking colours. Not only are the new dyes presented as both French and fake, they are also feminised by the critic's gendered rhetoric, which establishes a clear parallel between the title of Sargent's painting and the Misses Vickers themselves who supposedly felt such a strong 'attraction' to the gaudy hues of modernity.

The rainbow colours devised by the modern chemical industry, from aniline mauve to the cobalt violet of the Impressionists, elicited mixed responses in artistic circles in France and in England, two countries which actively competed in the chromatic revolution of the industrial age. John Ruskin, William Holman Hunt and William Morris who witnessed the discovery of the new dyes, had been particularly wary of these new fugitive colours described as 'pestilential'.<sup>v</sup> However, by the 1880s and 1890s, the colours progressively became creative material for both poets and painters. This is particularly striking in the works of some of Sargent's French acquaintances, like Robert de Montesquiou and Judith Gautier, who described the painter's early works from that formative period using the new chromatic terminology and notably the colour epithet 'mauve' or its variants such as lilac or heliotrope. To paraphrase Sabine Doran's essay on the 'culture of yellow', it is this 'culture of mauve'<sup>vi</sup> as the subversive colour of modernity which I will be exploring in this article, in connection with the early oils of Sargent. My contention is that for the French and English avant-gardes of the 1880s and 1890s, who were then in close contact, mauve became a colour metaphorically encoding the modern, the liminal, and the artificial. It inaugurated a new type of chromatic syntax, which further strengthened the links between text and image as 'the chemical mimesis of the colours of the rainbow (...) enabled the creation of a virtual world, homologous to that of language'.<sup>vii</sup>

Sargent was a great admirer of French literature.<sup>viii</sup> As noted by Elaine Kilmurray, the cosmopolitan painter spoke fluent French and, 'throughout his life, his taste was for French literature, his library biased towards the French classics. He was sensitized to the rarefied aspects of early Decadent or Symbolist strain of French aesthetics rather than to the more literal, documentary concerns of the realist and naturalist schools.'<sup>ix</sup> This francophilia is well illustrated by the contents of his personal library, which included numerous French contemporary novels and volumes of poetry, from Charles Baudelaire to Joris-Karl Huysmans.<sup>x</sup> Although Sargent never wrote any poetry himself, references to the poetic quality of his early paintings are strikingly recurrent in the works of his literary friends. Judith Gautier, the daughter of Théophile Gautier, even claimed that it was because of Sargent's poetic sensibility that she agreed to be painted by him after he came to visit her and Mme Gautreau in Brittany: 'John Sargent seduces us even more; there is in his manner a nervous grace, a *unique* poetry which makes us favour him over all others. He will therefore be the one granted the honour of painting us'.<sup>xi</sup> Judith Gautier was a close friend of Robert de Montesquiou, the wife of the *Parnassien* poet Catulle Mendès, as well as the muse of Richard Wagner whom poets and painters of the *fin de siècle* were still adulating. Sargent was not only a Wagner enthusiast himself, he also shared the modern poetic tastes of his literary friends with a particular interest in Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire, Gustave Flaubert, Paul Verlaine or José Maria de Heredia whose works he often evokes in his correspondence, notably with Vernon Lee. In her essay *In Memoriam*, Lee directly connected the 'bizarre' and 'curious' beauty of Sargent's early works with this love for French poetry:

I have spoken, almost overmuch, of his love for the bizarre. (...) It may also have been connected with the Parnassian, the Heredia and Leconte de Lisle movement in literature. (...) The boyish hankering after the 'curious' would have been entirely transmuted into the particular imaginative habit, poetical, yet of almost scientific insight, which distinguishes Sargent as much as his individual quality of line and colour.<sup>xii</sup>

The first *Parnassien* poets, like Leconte de Lisle, were the direct heirs of Théophile Gautier. They emulated his formalism, his passion for *recherché* words as well as for poetic craftsmanship, exemplified in the poem 'L'Art' in *Emaux et Camées* (1852). The Symbolist movement also sprang from the Parnasse although the Symbolists were more indebted to the sensual and synaesthetic *écriture artiste* propounded by Baudelaire, who

had heralded the works of Eugène Delacroix, 'the alchemist of colour', as the index of the new Romantic sensibility. This celebration of colour over academic drawing (in particular in Baudelaire's article on 'Colour' in the *Salon de 1846*) paved the way for its autonomization and liberation from all forms of mimetic injunctions: 'Colour (...) thinks by itself, independently of the object it clothes.'<sup>xiii</sup>

But Gautier and Baudelaire also influenced the apostles of *l'art pour l'art* in England, like Walter Pater or Algernon Charles Swinburne, who in turn supported the younger generation of French poets, from Heredia to Mallarmé.<sup>xiv</sup> They too experimented with the new sensuous chromatic syntax advocated by contemporary French poets, embracing their 'strange dyes, strange colours'<sup>xv</sup> to use Pater's Baudelairean expression in *The Renaissance* which Sargent, himself an advocate of art for art's sake at the time,<sup>xvi</sup> references in a letter to Lee in 1881.<sup>xvii</sup>

Such cultural exchanges between France and England were frequent from the 1860s till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as shown by the francophilia of Graham Robertson, Oscar Wilde, Edmund Gosse or George Moore, whom Sargent frequented during these formative years. But the painter was also a cultural *passeur* himself, as he introduced Paul Bourget and Montesquiou to his English artist friends when they visited London in the mid 1880s.<sup>xviii</sup>

In keeping with these literary acquaintances on both sides of the Channel, I will discuss the poetic dimension of Sargent's use of new colours and their contemporary literary reception. The poetry of Baudelaire and Gautier, in particular, was a great source of inspiration to painters with literary affinities. For instance, James McNeill Whistler's non-narrative *Symphony in White* echoed both Baudelaire's poem 'À une mendiante rousse' and Gautier's 'Symphonie en blanc majeur'. The literary reference to *Emaux et Camées* would later be applied in 1880 to Sargent's *Fumée d'ambregris* by Louis Leroy. In a satirical piece published in *Le Charivari*, Leroy has Manet say that the painting 'is a complete symphony in White Major. White on white, white everywhere'.<sup>xix</sup> Some critics were more favourable to Sargent's literary chromatic compositions, such as Paul Mantz, a disciple of Gautier, who celebrated the painting that same year as a 'melodic fantasy, a game like those which the impeccable master, Theophile Gautier, liked to play. He alone could have described this delicate and unique painting by M. John Sargent'.<sup>xx</sup> Such poetic and synaesthetic allusions were often a means for art critics to set off their own literary skills. However, more conservative commentators, especially in England, were

suspicious of these 'beastly French'<sup>xxi</sup> literary connections, as shown by this anonymous review from the *Academy* describing *La Carmencita* in 1891 as 'a creation sprung from the artificial soil of the expiring century, a veritable "Fleur du Mal", such as would have delighted Baudelaire himself.'<sup>xxii</sup>

Focusing on Sargent's eccentric chromatic and literary tastes, my aim will be to situate the early works of the painter within this specific *fin-de-siècle* zeitgeist. After a general introduction to the retrospective reconstruction of the 1880s and 1890s as the 'mauve decades', I will analyse two specific examples of the literary inscription and reception of mauve in the early oils of Sargent:

- the 'strange blotches of mauve' which Wilde and his contemporaries associated with Impressionist shadows, *Parnassien* twilights and Sargent's landscape and figure paintings
- the artificially-coloured '*cheveu mauve*' of some of Sargent's sitters of the 1880s which Lee described as of an 'improbable-looking colour'

### **The Culture of Mauve: decadence, colour and artifice**

In both French and English criticism, the epithet mauve has been applied to the *fin de siècle* – alongside yellow, which Doran associates with the decadent aesthetics of the 1890s. Robert Delevoy, in his 1982 study of Symbolism describes the French avant-garde (in particular Joris-Karl Huysmans) as living in a 'mauve decade' spanning from 1876 to 1885, without however explaining the choice of the colour adjective or quoting any specific examples testifying to this peculiar 'culture of mauve'.<sup>xxiii</sup> This seems indeed to have been very much a retrospective reconstruction, and not necessarily a positive one, dating back to the modernist 1920s and 1930s. The American author Thomas Beer was the first to describe the 1890s as the 'mauve decade' in 1926. Interestingly enough the colour epithet appears only once in the book itself, in the chapter devoted to 'depravity' – a depravity described as of French origin and associated with Théophile Gautier, whose sexually ambiguous *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is evoked alongside the works of Sargent as 'a fashionable artist of the 90s'.<sup>xxiv</sup> The colour is also mentioned in connexion with the year 1900 by Paul Morand in his biographical recollection of the turn of the century, published in 1930. A whole chapter of the book (separately published in *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*) is entitled – rather pejoratively – '*Mauve et Guimauve*'<sup>xxv</sup> to portray this decadent period, epitomised by the aesthetic

clique of Sargent, Sarah Bernhardt and Dr Pozzi. But shades of lilac are equally alluded to in the Preface:

I wrote this picture of the society of 1900, stimulated and worried by the parallel between 1900 and 1930 that I sensed as I felt lifted towards summits of happiness from where I could nonetheless glimpse the little pink cloud lined with lilac which, in the Chinese seas, foreshadows a typhoon, well before any barometer.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Mauve and its lilac or lavender variations were indeed liminal colours, nuances aptly suggesting the end of an era. These were also hues particularly favoured by the late 19th century avant-gardes – notably by the ‘divine’ Sarah Bernhardt whom Sargent almost painted according to Graham Robertson.<sup>xxvii</sup> In *Time Was*, which he sent to Emily Sargent in 1931, Robertson relates the following anecdote about the French actress’s aesthetic tastes:<sup>xxviii</sup>

‘Come and look’ she cried, ‘I’m having my bedroom done up: what colour should I choose?’  
‘I like white for a bedroom’, said I  
‘White?’ said Sarah, in tones of deep amazement, ‘*white*?’  
‘Well, why not?’ I asked.  
‘White!’ repeated Sarah who seemed unable to get over the suggestion. ‘Why, it would be ridiculous. People would *laugh*. They would find it absurd!’  
‘I was thinking of this pattern of violets’, said Sarah, who had of course made up her mind before asking advice. ‘Or this with the bunch of lilac’  
‘But’ I began ‘I don’t see why lilac –’  
‘It’s mauve’ said Sarah ‘Mauve and violet are half-mourning, and if a woman of my age is not a widow she ought to be.’<sup>xxix</sup>

This quotation is interesting because it sheds light on the avant-garde’s reappropriation of what was also then an established colour for half-mourning, here subverted into a chromatic signal of aesthetic elitism and sophistication.<sup>xxx</sup> The colour mauve had of course existed before 1856 but the invention of its aniline version ~~not only~~ increased its visual presence and raised it to the prominent and yet ambiguous status of the artificial colour par excellence. Thanks to this scientific transformation, mauve became a cultural event, a social fact<sup>xxxi</sup>. However, the aniline revolution not only affected the textile industry but also the materials of artists and the terminology of poets, as somehow anticipated by Théophile Gautier in his definition of the style of decadence:

... a style that is ingenious, complicated, learned, full of shades of meaning and research, always pushing further the limits of language, borrowing from all the technical vocabularies, taking colours from all palettes, notes from all

key-boards. (...) Such is the inevitable and fatal idiom of peoples and civilizations where factitious life has replaced the natural life, and developed in man unknown wants. (...) This style (...) expresses new ideas with new forms and words that have not yet been heard.<sup>xxxii</sup>

How did Sargent respond to this new language, articulating colour and artifice? According to his artist friend Edwin Blashfield (in his 1925 recollections), Sargent enthused about the chromatic potentialities offered by the aniline revolution:

*Apropos* of breakfast things, one morning in English Broadway he exclaimed with delight over the table where the white cloth was covered with magenta colored flowers, dazzling silver shining among the buds, and said "Oh, I MUST make a study of that!" Just at that time (1887) he seemed to have a predilection for the aniline suggestion in colors. One evening at a birthday party in the big garden we had been ordered by the hostess to wear wreaths, ladies, men, and all. The rest of us were contented with roses except Alma Tadema, who wove big leaves together in a manner so skilful as to provoke attention, but Sargent was splendid in a garland of big dahlias of the color that in 1860 or thereabouts was a new creation of the dyers dubbed Solferino. In fact, he was not only able in everything, but also a little original.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Here Sargent's eccentricity is directly related to his interest in artificial colours, such as Solferino or Magenta, two new French dyes named after Italian battles fought and won by Napoleon III in 1859. The question here is not whether Sargent's materials were aniline-based or not, but what these colours *suggested* to the painter himself and to his literary commentators.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

As noted by Blashfield, the flowers favoured by Sargent may well have been artificially 'colored' – the dyer's art here competing with that of the painter. This not only anticipates Sargent's enthusiastic response to Ellen Terry's 'Magenta' wig<sup>xxxv</sup>, it equally paves the way for Oscar Wilde's green carnation. The artificial colour of this flower was obtained by plunging its stem into aniline malachite green.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The flower was then worn at the première of *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Wilde himself and his acolytes, such as the 'jade-d' Graham Robertson (*Punch's* chromatic pun referring to the gem on his cane in the Sargent portrait). Robert Hichens turned this aniline green carnation into a symbol of decadent aesthetics in his eponymous novel published in 1894, another *roman à clef* featuring Mr Amaranth as the witty Oscar Wilde figure. The novel opens with Reggie Turner – a Lord Alfred Douglas epigone – admiring his reflection in the mirror as he is wearing a green carnation and a pair of 'lavender gloves'. In order to justify his eccentric outfit, he explains:



Of course (the carnations) are dyed. That is why they are original. Mr Amaranth says Nature will soon begin to imitate them, as she always imitates everything, being naturally uninventive.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Following this discussion, Sargent's name is evoked to suggest a sinful deviation away from nature in favour of chromatic artifice:

How exquisitely coloured these strawberries are, yet if Sargent painted them he would idealize them, would give to them a beauty such as Nature never gave to anything. So it is with the artist in sinning. He improves upon the sins that Nature has put, as it were, ready to his hand. He idealizes, he invents, he develops.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Like Sargent's sinful but inventive aniline colours, Hichens's green carnation, imitated by a less inventive Nature, illustrates Wilde's aesthetic credo exposed in *The Decay of Lying* (1889):

That white quivering sunlight that one sees now in France, with its strange blotches of mauve, and its restless violet shadows, is (Art's) latest fancy, and, on the whole, Nature reproduces it quite admirably. Where she used to give us Corots and Daubignys, she gives us now exquisite Monets and entrancing Pissaros (*sic*).<sup>xxxix</sup>

### **'Strange blotches of mauve': Impressionist shadows and *Parnassien* twilights**

Wilde's emphasis on the 'mauve' 'blotches' and 'shadows' found in French Impressionist painting reinforces the idea that mauve *was* the modern colour par excellence, not only because it had been invented thanks to new scientific means, but also because it entailed new ways of seeing, often perceived as deviant and bizarre. This signals a clear shift away from the empirical observations about violet shadows and complementary colours formulated by earlier painters like Eugène Delacroix. But following the aniline revolution, these shadows suddenly became 'strange' as shown by Wilde's use of the Paterian or rather Baudelairian adjective to describe the 'blotches of mauve' of the Impressionists. The French novelist and essayist Michel Butor in his analysis of Proust's Vinteuil Sonata also connects the literary predilection for mauve at the turn of the century with the Impressionist practice: 'the colour mauve, characteristic of the time, of the art of 1900, was also the colour of shadows (Monet was defined as the one who had discovered that 'all shadows are violet') – that is to say the colour of what cannot be seen, cannot be spoken' – in a word, a literary and pictorial challenge.<sup>xl</sup> Jean Carré in his

1912 'Notes sur Renoir' recalled that these violet shadows were discovered fortuitously by Monet, Renoir, Pissaro and Sisley one day when they had run out of black which they were no longer able to afford.<sup>xli</sup> The violet 'purée' described by Carré would elicit endless controversy in the art journals of the late 19th century, both in France and in England, including by James McNeill Whistler who denounced the so-called 'Impressionist anal-ines', which he deliberately misspelt as if to underline their excremental coal-tar provenance:

'The Impressionist analines (I can't even spell it) seem to have been spilled over all the palettes - Even the man Dannat, who by the way is <sup>right</sup> next to the really holy Valparaiso has mauve and ultramarine running into the huge legs of his Spaniard - and, by the same token, there is no B - to be found any where - They must have got through with her! - But beyond this, the drawing is marvellous in its blatant badness! - The men seem to [have] thrown all tradition and discipline to the winds, in the crazy hope that something else shall take its place - Sargent's 'Boy' that was supposed to be a masterpiece is horrible! - Boldini has some bad paintings & some hysterically clever pastels - but wildly out of drawing.'<sup>xlii</sup>

Here Sargent is implicitly associated with this mauve, Impressionist clique, alongside Dannat or Boldini. In the 1880s, the American painter was indeed very much under the influence of Monet who may have encouraged him to shun black. As noted by Elaine Kilmurray, a recorded conversation between the dealer Georges Bernheim and Monet reveals that Sargent did not whole-heartedly embrace the Impressionist notion of 'pure colour' which jarred with his master Carolus-Duran's emphasis on tonal relationships. Monet recalled: 'One day the American painter Sargent came here to paint with me. I gave him my colors and he wanted black, and I told him: 'But I haven't any' 'Then I can't paint' he cried, and added, 'how do you do it?'<sup>xliii</sup>

However Monet certainly helped Sargent experiment with a new chromatic syntax, as noted by Trevor Fairbrother:

Impressionism exerted its greatest impact on Sargent's use of colour. He experimented with brighter, less black-inflected palettes and sought to capture the colors of highlights, shadows and reflections in all their varieties. An element of paradox often came into play, for the artist's emphasis on the natural effects of light - blue and lavender shadows on a sunlit white dress - could produce a pictorial effect that struck some viewers as forced or unnatural.<sup>xliv</sup>

This impressionistic use of 'lavender' shadows is well reflected in his artfully staged *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* although a luminous sheen of soft mauve had already pervaded Sargent's early twilight landscapes of the Luxembourg gardens in Paris.

The choice of an evanescent mauve certainly emphasized the liminality of the twilight hour as suggested by the poet Alice Meynell who singled out Sargent's 'system of shadows' and 'violet tints' as worthy of particular interest:

Portraits of childhood and an exquisite study of twilight and lantern-light, with the fine violet tints that artificial light lends to evening air, and with white as lovely in its coolness as the white of Titian in its gold, are united in the Garden picture *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*.<sup>xlv</sup>

Such twilight scenes were equally favoured by the *Parnassien* and Symbolist poets like Mallarmé as '*l'heure souverainement ambiguë*',<sup>xlvi</sup> an hour touched with 'mauve, and undecided purple'<sup>xlvii</sup> recalling Paul Verlaine's *Fêtes Galantes*, according to George Moore, whom Monet visited with Sargent in 1901.<sup>xlviii</sup> However, this new chromatic syntax was often as misunderstood as that of the *Parnassien* poets whom Sargent so much admired. In a review published in *Le Gaulois*, an anonymous critic thus explained that 'the impressionism of the intransigent painters of 1880' was as 'unreasonable' as that of contemporary poets who used 'vague words, connected to one another not by meaning but by sonority' and which substituted 'onomatopoea to the logical development of ideas and facts'. The text ends with the following recommendation: 'the time for such eccentricities is now over (...) We only have one piece of advice to give to Messieurs Les Intransigents: if they want to be taken seriously, they have to be serious. Men are not tattooed in green, red, yellow or violet. (...) These (painters) are lost, mad or sick'.<sup>xlix</sup>

The French writer Huysmans also analysed the spreading use of mauve and violet as symptomatic of both deviance and disease in modern art, anticipating Max Nordau's stigmatization of the decadent violettomania of Manet:<sup>l</sup>

Having noticed that, in a garden, for instance in summer, the human figure turns purple (*se violace*) in the light filtering through the green leaves and that, in the evening particularly, in gas lighting, the faces of women who use white powder called *blanc de perle*, become slightly violet, when the blood rushes to their cheeks, (these painters) have daubed their faces with lumps of intense violet, pressing heavily where the hue was only a hint, where the nuance was only barely perceptible. (...) The study of these works required physiological or medical competence. (...) This man saw violet; land, sky, water, flesh – everything in his work looked either lilac or aubergine; most of (these painters) confirm Dr Charcot's experiments on the alteration of colour perception which he noted in several hysterical patients of La Salpêtrière.<sup>li</sup>

Huysmans here strangely conflates the diseased perception of Impressionist artists and the decomposed complexion of their models, particularly that of the made-up women with violet faces. As this quotation reveals, the debate was not limited to violet shadows but pertained to all of the Impressionists's chromatic effects. These new colours, just like Sargent's aniline suggestions or the *recherché* syntax of *Parnassien* poets, were evidently perceived as eccentric.

### **'Improbable-looking' colours or *Le cheveu mauve***

Having stigmatised the diseased violet cheeks of Impressionist ladies, Huysmans<sup>lii</sup> was certainly not prepared to welcome the portrait of Mme Gautreau. In his review of the 1884 Salon, published in *La Revue Indépendante* (which Jacques-Emile Blanche would later fictionalize as 'La Revue Mauve' in his autobiographical novel *Aymeris*)<sup>liii</sup> he mentions Sargent only in passing as 'insidieux et brut',<sup>liv</sup> totally ignoring the portrait. Did Huysmans object to Mme Gautreau's white powder turned mauve? At the time, the peculiar colours of both the painting and the model were perceived as almost more scandalous than her *risqué* cleavage, as noted by Sargent's friend, the artist Ralph Curtis:

All the women jeer. (...) Then the blagueur club man – 'C'est une copie !' 'Comment une copie ?' 'Mais oui – la peinture d'après un autre morceau de peinture s'appelle une copie.'<sup>lv</sup>

Sargent himself commented upon the excessive chromatic matter used by Mme Gautreau to construct her social persona, in a letter to Vernon Lee:

In a few days I shall be back in Paris, tackling my other 'envoi' the portrait of a Great Beauty. Do you object to people who are 'fardées' to the extent of being a uniform lavender or blotting-paper colour all over ? If so you would not care for my sitter; but she has the most beautiful lines, and if the lavender or chlorate of potash-lozenge colour be pretty in itself I should be more than pleased.<sup>lvi</sup>

As suggested by Susan Sidlauskas in her discussion of the portrait as a *mise en abyme* of painting, chlorate of potash may have been one of the toxic components of Mme Gautreau's lavender face powder.<sup>lvii</sup> Sargent's use of the French word '*fardée*' seems to further corroborate the correlation between Frenchness, colour and artifice, as if the painting were a direct illustration of Baudelaire's *L'Éloge du Maquillage*.

The anglophile Jacques-Emile Blanche, himself a novelist and a painter, may have had Baudelaire's text in mind when he stressed Sargent's sense of 'glamour' in his 1926 ambiguous tribute to the artist, entitled '*Un Grand Américain à Paris*'. The English word 'glamour' – which we associate today with the elegance of Hollywood stars, did not then exist in French and yet Blanche twice evokes the modern 'glamour' of Sargent's early works.<sup>lviii</sup> As the term was particularly *recherché* at the time, Blanche was certainly aware that a glamour originally meant 'a spell cast by a witch to deceive eyes', 'a way of 'altering the true appearance of things, ontologically on the side of seeming, (...) counterfeiters, and cosmetics'.<sup>lix</sup> His description of Sargent's works indeed suggests that the painter's art was too much a matter of surfaces and 'masks', adding that: 'His theatrical decors, his props, he never treated them firmly (...) His paint (*pâte*) is already cracking, thinning, losing its freshness'.<sup>lx</sup>

Blanche's discussion here almost metaphorically conflates thinning pictorial matter and ageing skin ('*perd sa fraîcheur*')– possibly that of some of his made-up models, such as the *fardées* performers Ellen Terry, the Carmencita, or the professional beauty, Madame Gautreau.

In the BNF papers of Robert de Montesquiou, one finds colour reproductions of some these beauties<sup>lxi</sup> who exerted a particular fascination over the French poet and aesthete. Montesquiou, who was an artist himself, even copied the profile of Sargent's Mme Gautreau, which he admired. The two men knew each other well in the 1880s as their correspondence reveals. They may even have visited the 1889 Exposition Universelle together as Sargent wrote to Montesquiou that he would send him a sketch of one of his Javanese dancers whose performance, involving a lilac shawl, had 'charmed' them both. Montesquiou also sent the painter some of his poems – which Sargent alludes to as '*vos vers curieux et charmants*'.<sup>lxii</sup> Even though Montesquiou remained an admirer of '*l'étrange beauté*'<sup>lxiii</sup> (another Baudelairian expression) of the painter's early works,<sup>lxiv</sup> their relations eventually cooled. In *Le Pavé Rouge* (1905), a scathing response to the red volume on Sargent's works prefaced by Meynell, the French poet denigrates most of the painter's later portraits. He is also particularly harsh on his use of colour:

Are all these paintings better off in their black and white reproductions? (...) Is the suppression of their colours a diminishing, almost a degradation as it should be? I regret I have to admit that I am not so sure of this (...) In particular for the portrait of Miss Terry, whose wounding peacock blue

(*blessant bleu-paon*) and all its theatrical showiness I have not been able to forget.<sup>lxv</sup>

Despite the French poet's stigmatisation of the excessive theatricality of Sargent's colourful models, the reference to the '*blessant bleu-paon*' may not be as negative as it seems at first, given Montesquiou's personal taste for Whistlerian blue peacocks.<sup>lxvi</sup> In *Les Quarante Bergères* published in 1919 but written over 20 years earlier, Montesquiou dedicates a satirical poem to Sargent's portrait of Mme Gautreau which is just as ambiguous. The text is entitled 'Vénus' - possibly a reference to Mme Gautreau's nickname 'la Vénus de la République' following her affair with the President Jules Grévy.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Comme elle eut les frisons roses, le nez sans borne,  
Le portrait de Sargent, le profil de licorne  
Et, la nuit, pour dormir sous le haut baldaquin,  
Un oreiller sonore et tout en maroquin  
Afin d'être avertie, à temps, d'un cheveu mauve  
Tout près de se briser sur la tempe, et qu'on sauve !  
Comme elle eut la truelle en or garni d'émail  
Pour enduire sa face, en un exquis travail,  
De mortiers odorants et de crépit suave  
Elle promène encor de beaux restes d'épaves,  
Et son galbe fameux, chaque jour qui s'en va,  
Gagne du Caran d'Ache et perd du Canova.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Like Blanche, Montesquiou questions the freshness of the complexion of Mme Gautreau who is described as having to 'coat her face, with exquisite workmanship' possibly to hide the 'wreck' of her ageing features. Cosmetic glamour, if not witchcraft, is presented as the beauty's means to defy the onslaught of time. Initially depicted as a chimeric Oriental princess, with the profile of an impossible unicorn, she has become by the end of the poem a caricature of herself, more similar to Montesquiou's friend Caran D'Ache's satirical cartoons, than to Canova's impeccable neo-classical Venus – to whom Mme Gautreau apparently liked to compare herself. The poem certainly sounds a little cruel at first and yet when one analyses it more closely, it is quite clear that Montesquiou celebrates Mme Gautreau's talents as a painter – possibly a greater artist than Sargent himself, who only managed a '*copie d'une peinture*'. Moreover, the synaesthetic images referring to smells and sounds which pervade the poem are typical of Montesquiou's own Baudelairian affinities. The rhyming pattern stresses some of his sensual key

words, such as ‘*suaves*’ (meaning soft or smooth) – which he uses in the title of one of his early volumes of poetry (*Le chef des odeurs suaves*).<sup>lxix</sup>

But another detail in the poem is revealing: Montesquiou’s rather odd reference to Mme Gautreau’s ‘*cheveu mauve*’. The fact that ‘*mauve*’ rhymes with the positive ‘*sauve*’ recalls another poem of his, entitled ‘*salve malva*’ and published in the very Verlainian *Demi-teinte* section of *Les Chauve-Souris* in 1892, which the novelist Matilde Serao, who was a close friend of Montesquiou, considered as the most representative of the poet’s aesthetics. The poem opens with an epigraph by the Romantic poet Lamartine, celebrating the twilight hour: ‘Entre la nuit qui tombe et le jour qui s’enfuit’

Dirai-je tout ce que j’entends  
Dans la sonorité du *mauve*,  
Et que j’y vois, en même temps ?

Rose qui vient, bleu qui se sauve,  
Livrent des assauts hésitants  
Dans le ton incertain du mauve.

Puis ce sont des rêves flottants  
Par le mystère de l’alcôve  
Aux crépuscules invitants.

Et, sous les clairs de lune mauves,  
Voici les vols inquiétants  
Et tournoyants des souris-chauves

Qui palpitent sur des étangs.<sup>lxx</sup>

The colour mauve is here made to suggest the ‘uncertain’ transition between day and night, a fragile and ephemeral balance that brings about a form of eroticism (‘*le mystère de l’alcove*’) as well as a heightened sensitivity to sounds (‘*la sonorité du mauve*’). The poem ends with the palpitation of bats, Montesquiou’s tutelary animal, suggesting again that mauve was indeed his emblematic hue, possibly a variation on the artificial blue of hydrangeas, which Sargent, Blanche and Helleu equally cherished, as Alison Symes has noted.<sup>lxxi</sup> Montesquiou even wrote all his correspondence in violet ink as in this letter to Graham Robertson in which the French poet explains how impatient he is to see *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* **(FIG)**.<sup>lxxii</sup>

Montesquiou’s evocation of Mme Gautreau and her ‘*cheveu mauve*’ is certainly an allusion to Baudelaire’s synaesthetic praise of les ‘*cheveux bleux*’<sup>lxxiii</sup> of his mistress in the

poem 'La Chevelure'.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Like Baudelaire or Montesquiou, Sargent seems to have been drawn to what Lee describes as 'improbable-looking colours', falling on 'skin, hair and stuffs' in her essay '*In Memoriam*'.<sup>lxxv</sup> Mme X's chromatic eccentricities strangely anticipate Sargent's Broadway palette, her lavender skin and dyed hair paving the way for the mauve streaks found in the hair of the Barnard children. Sargent certainly had a strange obsession with improbably coloured hair during that period<sup>lxxvi</sup> – as shown by his portraits of the Francophile and *Parnassien* enthusiast Edmund Gosse and his daughter Teresa. Sargent painted Teresa on her 8th birthday, in September 1885. Teresa described her portrait in a letter of 1948 to David McKibbin: 'He was so pleased with the colour of the mauve flowers, my red hair, white dress, that he quickly painted a sketch on canvas over a landscape'.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Writing about the Broadway summer he spent with Sargent, her father Edmund Gosse also recalled:

As I approached him, Sargent looked at me, gave a compulsive plunge in the air with his brush, and said 'oh ! what lovely lilac hair, no one ever saw such beautiful lilac hair !' The blue sky, reflected on my sleek dun locks, which no one had every thought 'beautiful' before, had glazed them with colour, and Sargent, grasping another canvas, painted me as I stood laughing, while he ejaculated at intervals 'Oh ! what lovely hair !' The real colour of the hair was nothing, it existed only in the violet varnish which a single step into the shade would destroy for ever.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Although the lilac colour of Gosse's hair is not visible in Sargent's portrait, it nonetheless plays a central role in the chromatic harmony of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, where the mauve flowers blend harmoniously with the lavender shadows of the children's white dresses and the mauve twilight sheen falling on their hair. But other paintings from that Broadway period seem to illustrate this mauve phase, like the portrait of Mrs Frank Millet for whom Sargent specifically selected the mauve breakfast shawl<sup>lxxix</sup> just as he chose the lilac dress of Mrs Archibald Douglas Dick painted that same year.<sup>lxxx</sup>

If mauve was Sargent's and Montesquiou's cherished hue during this period, it also coloured the fictional world of Marcel Proust who depicted the French society of the Belle Époque in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Mauve and its variations, from lilac to Parma violet, are recurrent chromatic motifs throughout the seven volumes composing *La Recherche*, which induced synaesthetic writer Vladimir Nabokov to celebrate 'the mauve shades of Monsieur Proust'.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Not only did this hue offer rich connections between chromatics and onomastics, it was also an erotically charged epithet, closely associated with the coquette Odette in the eyes of both Swann and the narrator: '*La*



*couleur délavée, liquide, mauve et dissolue des violettes de Parme*<sup>lxxxii</sup>, with a pun on 'dissolue' suggesting a diluted as well as a dissolute colour. As noted by Butor, in Proust's works mauve is indeed closely linked to 'sexual secrecy', it is 'the catleya colour'<sup>lxxxiii</sup> – Swann and Odette's coded expression for sex. It is also the colour of the homosexual baron de Charlus, inspired by Robert de Montesquiou and described as a 'figure mauve' associated with 'sodomist scandals' in *Le Temps Retrouvé*.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Could this colour have been meant also as a sign of Sargent's and Gosse's own secret sexual inclinations?<sup>lxxxv</sup> Be that as it may, the specific mention of mauve hair is found twice in connection with Elstir, the painter of ambiguity.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> In *Du côté de chez Swann*, the chromatic choices of Elstir (nicknamed M. Biche by the Verdurin circle) are totally misunderstood by M. and Mme Cottard who believe that:

...the painter simply flung the colours haphazard upon his canvas. When, on one of these, they were able to distinguish a human form, they always found it coarsened and vulgarised (...) and devoid of truth, as though M. Biche had not known how the human shoulder was constructed, or that a woman's hair was not, ordinarily, *mauve*.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Proust may have been thinking of Sargent here, and of the mauve hair and shocking shoulder of Mme Gautreau, whose poetic evocation by Montesquiou he certainly knew better than Sargent's works.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

## Conclusion

Mauve was therefore a transitional, liminal hue which Sargent and the French literary avant-garde of the *fin de siècle* embraced in all its infinite synaesthetic variations. But this 'mauve mania'<sup>lxxxix</sup> was only a short-lived vogue, soon replaced by more clear-cut chromatic contrasts of Mediterranean colours, favoured by artists like Henri Matisse or André Derain. Contrary to the culture of yellow, which Doran argues persisted well into the 20th century, mauve, by the 1920s, thus appeared as a *passée* colour, a modern colour relegated to the decadent past, in keeping with the 'mauve remoteness'<sup>xc</sup> which Nabokov so poignantly associated with the vanishing world of the turn of the century.

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<sup>i</sup> *Punch*, 'The Mauve Measles', 20th August 1859, p. 81.

<sup>ii</sup> Mauve was known to be the favourite colour of Empress Eugénie. On the invention of mauve, see Ball, *Bright Earth* (2001), pp. 236-241; Garfield, *Mauve* (2000) and Travis, *The Rainbow Makers* (1993).

<sup>iii</sup> *Punch*, p. 81. On the 'mauve measles' see Matthews David, *Fashion Victims*, pp. 107-113.

<sup>iv</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 22 May 1886, quoted in Simpson, 'Sargent, Velazquez and the critics: 'Velazquez come to life again'', p. 7.

<sup>v</sup> Hunt, 'The Present System of Obtaining Materials', p. 498.

<sup>vi</sup> See Doran, *The Culture of Yellow* (2013).

<sup>vii</sup> My translation. Le Rider, *Les Couleurs et les mots*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>viii</sup> Sargent certainly had a taste for subversive French literature. As noted by the French painter Jacques-Emile Blanche in 'Un Grand Américain à Paris' (p. 74), Sargent died reading Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique* - a scandalous text that was burned and banned shortly after it was first published, in 1764.

<sup>ix</sup> In *Sargent : The Complete Paintings*, vol.4, p. 27. (From then on abbreviated as CP, 4 :27)

- <sup>x</sup> Sargent's personal library (private collection) contained innumerable works by Stendhal, Flaubert, Balzac, Dumas, Fromentin, Goncourt, De Vigny, Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Verlaine, Huysmans, Gautier, Baudelaire, Anatole France. I am very grateful to the cataloguer, Richard Ormond, for this information.
- <sup>xi</sup> My translation. Gautier, 'Le Salon', *Le Rappel*, 1 May 1888. Gautier's use of the future tense may suggest that Sargent's portrait of her (in the Detroit Institute of Art) dates back to 1888 or 1889. Gautier certainly looks older – and more *fardée* – than in *A Gust of Wind* (c. 1883-5, private collection).
- <sup>xii</sup> Lee, *In Memoriam*, reproduced in extenso in Charteris, pp. 252-3.
- <sup>xiii</sup> My translation. Baudelaire, 'Exposition Universelle, 1855', *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol.2, p. 241.
- <sup>xiv</sup> On Swinburne and France see Ribeyrol, 'A Channel Passage : Swinburne and France' (2010).
- <sup>xv</sup> Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 189.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Lee wrote to her mother on 21 June 1881: 'John is extremely serious, a great maker of theories ; he goes in for art for art's sake, says that the subject of a picture is something not always in the way etc. he is quite emancipated from all religious ideas. He speaks English without accent but has to help himself out with French words'. Quoted in Ormond, 'John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee', p. 170.
- <sup>xvii</sup> 'Your book Belcaro has at last arrived. I have been expecting it for weeks and it only came yesterday. I am going to read it at once. Tell me what you think of Pater's Essays. I like one or two of them very much' Quoted in Ormond, 'John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee', p. 168.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Sargent, then residing in Paris, wrote Henry James the following collective letter of introduction on June 29 1885: 'Dear James, I remember that you once said that an occasional Frenchman was not an unpleasurable diversion to you in London, and I have been so bold as to give a card of introduction to you to two friends of mine. One is Dr. S. Pozzi the man in the red gown (not always), a very brilliant creature ! and the other is the unique extrahuman Montesquiou of whom you may have heard Bourget speak with bitterness, but who was to Bourget to a certain extent what Whistler is to Oscar Wilde. (Take warning and do not bring them together). They are going to spend a week in London and I fancy Montesquiou will be anxious to see as much as Rossetti's and Burne-Jones's work as he can. I have given him a card to B.J., to the Comyns Carrs and to Tadema.' Quoted in Munhall, *Whistler and Montesquiou*, p. 58.
- <sup>xix</sup> My translation. 13 May 1880, quoted in CP, 4: 303.
- <sup>xx</sup> My translation. Mantz, 'Le Salon VII', *Le Temps* 20 June 1880.
- <sup>xxi</sup> The expression is Sargent's, quoted in CP, 5: 46.
- <sup>xxii</sup> 'Fine Art. The Royal Academy II' 16 May 1891, p. 471, quoted in CP, 2: 13.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Delevoy, *Symbolism*, p.45 et sq.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Beer, *The mauve decade*, p.119.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Mauve and marshmallow.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> My translation. Morand, *1900*, p. 5.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Robertson, *Time Was*, p. 241.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Emily Sargent's letter to Robertson, dated 8 November 1931 (The Graham Robertson Correspondence, mssWR 512).
- <sup>xxix</sup> Robertson, *Time Was*, p. 121.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Sarah Bernardt's tastes may have been influenced by Montesquiou whose enthusiasm for modern chromatic harmonies in clothing as well as in interior decoration he shared with most of his friends. On mauve as the colour for mourning see Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, pp. 146-7.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Pastoureau, *Bleu*, p. 8 : 'la couleur se définit d'abord comme un fait de société. C'est la société qui 'fait' la couleur'.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> This translation of Gautier's essay on Baudelaire appears in the English version of Nordau's *Degeneration*, p. 299.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Blashfield, 'John Singer Sargent – recollections', p. 648.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> This emphasis on the suggestiveness of colour echoes Mallarmé's symbolist credo: 'suggérer voilà le rêve'. The chemical composition of Sargent's mauve pigments is unknown, as noted by Shelley in her analysis of Sargent's materials found at his death: 'Two colors that must be presumed missing from this collection are mauve and Chinese white. The former, for which Sargent showed a marked proclivity – and which since its introduction in 1856 had become widely popular – was available in various purples and violets', p. 21.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Letter to Mrs Gardner, 1st January 1889, quoted in Charteris, pp. 100-1.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> The chemical process is described in *The Artist*, 1st April 1892, pp. 114-5. I wish to thank Catherine Maxwell for this reference.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Hichens, *The Green Carnation*, p. 18.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Hichens, *The Green Carnation*, p. 27.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *Intentions*, p. 48.

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- xl My translation. Butor, *Répertoire II : 1959-1963*, p. 259.
- xli Carré, 'Notes sur Renoir', pp. 408-410.
- xlii Letter from Whistler to Beatrix Whistler [11 June 1891?] Glasgow University Library, MS Whistler W584.
- xliii Quoted in Elaine Kilmurray, 'Sargent, Monet...and Manet' (no page number).
- xliv Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent: The Sensualist*, p. 126.
- xlvi See Meynell's introduction to *The Work of John Singer Sargent* (1903).
- xlvii Jean-Pierre Richard, *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1961, 155.
- xlviii Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, p. 64.
- xlviii Monet, *Lettres de la Tamise, 1901* (2004).
- lix My translation. Tout-Paris, 'La Journée parisienne: Les Impressionnistes' *Le Gaulois*, 2 April 1880, quoted in *The New Painting, Impressionism 1874-1886*, vol.1, pp. 311-312.
- <sup>1</sup> See Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892) and Oskar Reutersvard 'The violettomania of the impressionists', (1950).
- li My translation. Huysmans, 'L'Exposition des indépendants en 1880', pp. 103-104.
- lii Huysmans would, however, change his mind about Pissarro and Monet and eventually embrace the colour 'mauve'. In *À Rebours* (1884), he particularly singles out the colour as the sign of aesthetic refinement in the following description inspired by the aesthetic tastes of Robert de Montesquiou who was the model for his decadent hero, Des Esseintes:
- ...en ne conservant plus alors que les gens aux pupilles raffinées, exercées par la littérature et par l'art, il lui semblait certain que l'œil de celui d'entre eux qui rêve d'idéal, qui réclame des illusions, sollicite des voiles dans le coucher, est généralement caressé par le bleu et ses dérivés, tels que le mauve, le lilas, le gris de perle. (p. 16)
- liii In his autobiographical novel *Aymeris* (1922), Blanche uses this colour extensively, referring to the 'revue mauve' as being famous amongst *fin de siècle* 'littérateurs'. A 'revue mauve' actually existed at the time which published prominent *fin de siècle* authors such as Mallarmé, Verlaine, Montesquiou. The 'Revue mauve' was also the nickname of *Le Mercure de France* due to the colour of its cover which Rachilde, another key decadent figure, claimed to have been chosen in her honour.
- liiv Huysmans, 'Le Salon de 1884', *La Revue indépendante*, vol. 1, 1884, p. 123.
- lv Ralph Curtis's letter to his mother quoted in Charteris, p. 61.
- lvi The letter, dated 10 February 1883, is quoted in Ormond 'John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee', p. 174.
- lvii Sidlauskas, 'Painting skin', p. 23.
- lviii Blanche, 'Un Grand Américain à Paris', p. 61.
- lix Wygant, *Medea, Magic and Modernity*, pp. 41-2.
- lx My translation. Blanche, 'Un Grand Américain à Paris', p. 76.
- lxi In particular *La Carmencita* and *Mme Gautreau*.
- lxii See the Robert de Montesquiou papers in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, in particular NAF 15141-5 F79-82.
- lxiii Montesquiou, *Le Pavé Rouge*, p. 342.
- lxiv Montesquiou also dedicated a poem to Sargent's portrait of Mme Paul Escudier (1882), a blue portrait matching the French poet's own 'fleurs d'azur' in *Les Paroles Diapnées* (1910).
- lxv Montesquiou, *Le Pavé Rouge*, p. 342.
- lxvi In 1901 Montesquiou wrote a volume of poems entitled *Paons*.
- lxvii Noël, *Parisiana*, p. 103.
- lxviii This poem is translated in Davis's *Strapless*, p. 212:
- Since she has pink tendrils, a nose that knows no limit,  
The portrait by Sargent, the unicorn's profile,  
And at night, she sleeps beneath the high four-poster canopy,  
With a resounding pillow in Marocco leather,  
In order to be warned in time, of a mauve hair  
Just getting ready to come through, on her temple, and it is saved  
Since she has the golden trowel, decorated with enamel  
To coat her face, with exquisite workmanship,  
Of scented and smooth mortars,  
She still walks around, a fine-looking wreck,  
And her famous curves leave each night,  
Gaining in Caran d'Ache and losing some of their Canova.

<sup>lxi</sup> The image of the unicorn and the Moroccan leather may well also be an allusion to his friend Judith Gautier's enthusiastic response to Sargent's portrait, here described in terms of both texture and textuality:

Is it a woman? a chimera, the figure of a unicorn rearing up as on a heraldic coat of arms or perhaps the work of some oriental decorative artist to whom the human form is forbidden and who, wishing to be reminded of woman, has drawn this delicious arabesque? (...) If the blue breast, the serpentine arms, the complexion where the heliotrope is blended with the rose, the slender profile, the purple lip, the half-closed eyes, the velvety shadows have indeed something chimeric about them, it is only because of the chimeric beauty which the painting conjures up...(Sargent) has here written a page of a charming strangeness (*d'une étrangeté charmante*). My translation. Gautier, *Le Salon*, 1st May 1884, *Le Rappel*.

Sargent's watercolour *Zuleika* (1906-7), another *fardée* beauty, may have been named after *La Femme de Potiphar* (1885) or 'Zuleika' in Gautier's *Fleurs d'Orient* (1893).

<sup>lxx</sup> This poem is quoted in the appendix to Montera and Tosi, *D'Annunzio, Montesquiou, Matilde Serao*, p.152. It is introduced by Serao in the following terms: 'Et voici que, du volume Chauves-Souris, pour quelques jours dans le salon d'une belle muse, d'une belle personne sidérale, je cueille une petite poésie, quelque chose de léger, de fugace et de subtil de Robert de Montesquiou. C'est une poésie sur la couleur mauve.'

<sup>lxxi</sup> On the fin de siècle predilection for artificial blue hydrangeas (a sterile flower, also celebrated by Théophile Gautier), see Syme, *A Touch of Blossom*, p. 175 et sq.

<sup>lxxii</sup> 26 August 1887: 'On m'a vanté le tableau de Sargent: des petites filles accrochant des lanternes japonaises dans des lys.' (The Graham Robertson Correspondence)

<sup>lxxiii</sup> Sargent also admired Flaubert's depiction of the blue manes Herod's horses as this letter to Mrs Gardner 7th Jan 1907 suggests: 'It is very kind of you to have written me of the comfortableness of the horses in their new abode. I feel that to be worthy of this promotion they ought to have had blue ribands plaited into their tails and manes, like Herod's horses in Flaubert's beautiful *Herodiade*' (quoted in Mount, p. 306). In Flaubert's text, the horses's manes are painted blue ('la crinière peinte en bleu').

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Baudelaire, 'La Chevelure', *Les Fleurs du Mal, Œuvres Complètes*, vol.1, p. 119:

Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendues,  
Vous me rendez l'azur du ciel immense et rond ;  
Sur les bords duvetés de vos mèches tordues  
Je m'enivre ardemment des senteurs confondues  
De l'huile de coco, du musc et du goudron.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Lee, *In Memoriam*, p. 251.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> In *En Rade* (1887), Huysmans refers twice to mauve hair (p. 28): 'Elle avait la tête nue et ses cheveux très blonds pâlis par des sels et nuancés par des artifices de reflets mauves coiffaient son visage'.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Teresa Gosse quoted in Lomax and Ormond, *John Singer and the Edwardian age*, p. 40.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Gosse quoted in Charteris, pp. 77-78.

<sup>lxxix</sup> CP, 1: 171.

<sup>lxxx</sup> CP, 1: 146. Both paintings are in private collections.

<sup>lxxxi</sup> Nabokov, *Ada*, p. 50. I would like to thank Emily Eells for pointing out this reference to me.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Proust, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, p. 208.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Butor, *Répertoire II: 1959-1963*, p. 286. On the use of mauve and violet in Proust see Bailey, 'Symbolisme et Composition dans l'œuvre de Proust,' (1966) and more recently Vago, *Proust en couleur* (2012).

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*, p. 85.

<sup>lxxxv</sup> Chapter nine of Jullian's 1965 biography of Montesquiou is entitled 'le péril mauve': 'les troubles couleurs de 1900 viennent tout droit de Sodome' (p. 145).

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> See Eells, 'Elstir à l'anglaise: Proust et la peinture de l'ambiguïté', pp. 37-47.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> This is C.K. Scott Moncrieff's 1922 translation (p. 188) which I have slightly modified, replacing 'purple' by 'mauve' (which is in the original French version) at the end of the quotation:

...le peintre jetait au hasard des couleurs sur ses toiles. Quand, dans celles-ci, ils pouvaient reconnaître une forme, ils la trouvaient alourdie et vulgarisée (...), et sans vérité, comme si M. Biche n'eût pas su comment était construite une épaule et que les femmes n'ont pas les cheveux *mauves*.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> 'As for what is personal to Sargent, we know it all, as you have shown us all, as you draw over each painting and repaint it better' My translation. Proust quoted in Jullian, p. 217.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> See the title of the first chapter of Blaszczyk's book on *The Color revolution*.

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<sup>xc</sup> Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, p. 29.