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“ Looking Back on the Lesson at the Salpêtrière “

The painting “A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière” by Pierre Aristide André Brouille shows a whole lot of men and evokes different emotions. Emotions such as disgust and anger. The story behind the painting can be thought to be as follows. The painting had been created in the year of 1887, during this time doctors had been figuring out ways to deal with women and their mental state. As portrayed in the painting we can see two men in front of the rest of the male audience and one is holding a woman. The woman looks as though she is fainting. Then there are also men that look like they are very focused while others look to be disturbed by what is currently going on. Lastly one can notice that there is some sort of stretcher and finally two women looking to help her or aid her. All these details in the picture made me feel as though this is all cruel and actually brought about some anger.

At a glance one can easily see that the doctors were using the female whom was wearing a black skirt and white top as an example to explain their scientific findings. However, if so, would you agree that it is absolutely cruel to use her as though she is some sort of project? By the looks of some of the men in the audience it is safe to say that this was normal to them. This had just been another one of their lessons. Through which it can be noted that in the 1880’s women were treated as if they were less human than men. To prove this, one can see that they were trying to “fix” the woman although there were plenty of men in the audience alone that could have been said to need help because they are really comfortable with the use of a woman as a doll to practice on.

Stepping away from the obvious, the feelings brought on by such painting are inevitable. They are inevitable because it does not take someone to be a girl to feel for someone being used for an experiment. Feelings and emotions such as sadness and frustration are all brought on by this painting. Looking at it from the perspective of a woman, the painting is absolutely disappointing. Realizing that women were seen to be crazy and looked at as though they needed

to be fixed after a simple misunderstanding. In these days they had been researching the idea of hysteria which in those days had a super bad connotation. However it is not clear if the woman had fainted after being used as an example or before but it is clear that she had not been comfortable with what had been going on here.

The two women in the back though also happen to show no emotions or even the least bit of worry. The question is why not? Was this normal in those times or were they specifically forced to stay neutral under all circumstances. Whatever the case may have been, it is visually disturbing to see a women held at the front of a conference regardless of what they had been saying about her or not. A piece that can connect or relate to this painting well is the writing piece "The Yellow Wallpaper" written by Charlotte Perkins Gillman. In this piece the character talks about her experience under the mental facility which wasn't really a mental facility it was actually a nursery in those times and of course it was under male surveillance which says a lot about what the times were like. When you put both pieces together you come to find out the saddening truth that men controlled women in every way possible in the 1800's. Putting it into perspective now, it shows how much change there has been in the way women govern themselves which is pretty surprising considering the cruel past that women were put through.