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FIQWS Literacy Narrative

“A picture is worth a thousand words”. Different works of literature can trigger emotions in you that seem unexplainable. It opens up an infinite amount of ways to express those emotions. When I first looked at the image “*A Clinical Lesson at the Salpetriere*” by Andre Brouillet , I instantly noticed the conditions of the woman, which made me feel disturbed and uncomfortable at once.

What instantly disturbed me and made me feel uncomfortable is the health state of the woman. She seems to be unconscious, passed out, and her body looks jerked and she doesn’t seem like she’s receiving the proper care she deserves; she looks helpless. There seems to be only two female nurses in a room full of male doctors, but they seem to appear as if they aren’t needed. This frustrated me because the woman clearly requires medical attention, yet she is not being catered to, according to the facial expression and body posture of the nurses.

In addition to the health state of the woman, the audience bothered me even more. The people watching her consisted of predominantly men. White, wealthy looking, educated men.They seem fascinated by what is going on, which is the unconscious woman in the image. The men seem to be watching her, observing her, as if waiting for something to happen. I felt most uncomfortable with this because they are objectifying the woman. They are taking advantage of the fact that she is weak and vulnerable for their own research purposes. It induced to some questions within myself as well. Questions like “why are there *only* men?”, “why are they watching her so closely with such interest?”. I felt highly uncomfortable because one woman in a room full of men, staring deeply into her, is absurd. Well at least that’s how I see it. The man beside her appears to be presenting her, objectifying her for the entertainment and interest of the fellow audience, which are students. The title of the painting states “A Clinical Lesson”, so a comparison between the woman and what today we call “lab rats”, which are subjects used for different experiments and research, mainly in the medical field, can be made. The fact that the woman was most likely being used as a test subject to prove a certain hypothesis, one can assume, in an obvious frail state, is just absurd and disturbing.

The setting of the picture resembles that of a lecture hall, so I am assuming that the man is giving a lecture to the students, on hysteria, and the subject is the woman due to the fact that the only people capable to suffer of such illnesses was women. In addition, based on the way the characters in the image are dressed, and the year dated on the caption (1887), I reckon that the historical context around this painting was made at a time in which women were often dehumanized and treated the less because of their gender. This was in an era in which men were believed to be “superior” to women. This would help explain the ignorance of the men towards the woman in a fragile state. They are viewing her as an object, and because she is a woman and is “inferior”, they’d rather use her for research and scientific purpose than to get her the proper help she needs.

Overall, this image sparked a feeling of disturbance and frustration in me. The context of the image, the people, subject, and the message it was portraying just made me feel highly uneasy. What makes me feel the most disturbed, is that this was probably not the first nor the only woman who was taken advantage at a vulnerable state, just to be used as a presentation or research. “*A Clinical Lesson at the Salpetriere*” was an image that provoked the most negative feelings out of me, especially with the dehumanization towards the woman.