FEMINIZING AESTHETICISM:
TASTE, VISUAL LITERACY, AND THE LATE-VICTORIAN PERIODICAL PRESS

by

Petra Clark

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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by

Petra Clark

Approved: __________________________
John Ernest, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of English

Approved: __________________________
John A. Pelesko, Ph.D.
Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: __________________________
Douglas Doren, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Provost for Graduate & Professional Education
I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Margaret D. Stetz, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Iain Crawford, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Nicholas Frankel, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Ann Ardis, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee
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ABSTRACT

The late-nineteenth century is characterized by a massive expansion in the volume and variety of printed texts, which in turn nurtured new strains of literature and art and provided space for radical experiments in genre and gender. This project focuses on Victorian women’s writing on Aestheticism in order to explore how the movement’s ideas were distributed in late-nineteenth-century illustrated periodicals geared towards British and American female audiences. It forges new connections between the famous male proponents and craftsmen of Aestheticism, such as Oscar Wilde, John Ruskin, and William Morris, and the work of influential yet now little-known women writers, critics, editors, and artists who actually popularized it, including Mary Eliza Haweis, Lucy Cecil Lillie, and Mary Mapes Dodge. Periodicals provided particularly important venues for such women to convey new interpretations of Aesthetic art, literature, and philosophy to middlebrow, transatlantic female audiences, and were therefore not merely entertainment, but instead significant sources of cultural capital. I argue that illustrated periodicals such as Woman’s World, Harper’s Monthly, and Atalanta were sites where visual literacy and taste were cultivated, both through textual contributions and accompanying illustrations by artists and illustrators whose Aesthetic images were important to how the movement was interpreted. By examining manuals of taste, articles, lectures, fiction, poetry, correspondence, illustration, and design, I recover the work of once-popular women writers on art and show that they were crucial to the transatlantic spread and democratization of Aesthetic ideals. Ultimately, in considering the multiple print
incarnations of the Aesthetic movement, this study offers a more complete understanding of gendered learning and taste-formation through late-Victorian print culture. I contend that Aestheticism cannot be understood properly, except in the context of the popular journalism through which many Victorian readers first encountered it—much of it created by and intended for women.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION:
AESTHETICISM, WOMEN, AND VICTORIAN PERIODICALS

In a backwards-glancing 1895 article in the Pall Mall Magazine titled “The Aesthetes: The Story of a Nineteenth-Century Cult,” Thomas F. Plowman outlines the traditional understanding of the male aesthete’s role in determining taste: “The aesthetes considered that they were qualified to be the arbiters of what constituted beauty on the ground that they had educated themselves up to a higher point, artistically, than the rest of the world had attained to, and that their perceptions were acuter and their tastes more refined in consequence.” 1 At the end of his article, however, Plowman seems to take this exclusive power away from the aesthetes, assuring his readers that “We must think for ourselves in Art, as in all else, if we are to derive any real satisfaction from it” and must bring “our own perceptions into play.” 2 This focus on “perception” refers most obviously to the viewer of art, but in the late-Victorian period, when art and text mingled freely in illustrated books and periodicals, the sort of “perception” Plowman advocates for might be applied to “reading” images in those contexts as well. This view is certainly representative of the reading strategies encouraged by many of the growing number of periodicals aimed at women and girls


2 Ibid., 44.
in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which put female readers in charge of educating themselves on art matters and thereby determining and asserting their own taste. Of course, this proved especially true of those periodicals that gave accounts of the new movements in literature and art associated with Aestheticism.

As a movement or school, Aestheticism is notoriously difficult to define, in part because it is often used as an umbrella term to cover a great diversity of approaches. Michèle Mendelssohn remarks that, “Unlike most ‘Movements,’ the aesthetes were not a clique or a band pursuing a common goal, but a heterogeneous aggregate of loosely connected people whose accumulated efforts moulded the culture of the day.” At different times, Aestheticism has been tied, however tangentially, to other movements as diverse as Pre-Raphaelitism, Arts and Crafts, Decadence, and French Symbolism. Jonathan Freedman offers one of the best attempts to pin down a definition in his in-depth examination of the term in the first chapter of *Professions of Taste* (1990); yet even he concludes that “the defining quality of British aestheticism—the only way these various and distinctive writers and artists may be seen to share any characteristic at all—is the desire to embrace contradictions, indeed the desire to seek them out the better to play with the possibilities they afford.”

To be more historically precise, and to link the movement with the earlier aesthetics of Ruskin, Rossetti, Morris, and other Victorian artists and thinkers, “Beginning in the 1870s, the word aestheticism came to be used to indicate not only a certain style of

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painting, or way of writing, or set of ideas but also the popular manifestations of a belief in art’s ability to make life more beautiful and to allow the beholder to achieve transcendence.”

Aestheticism’s motto, “art for art’s sake,” was popularized by celebrity aesthetes like Oscar Wilde, yet the doctrine was also deployed more generally “in opposition to the utilitarian doctrine of moral and practical usefulness,” even as aesthetes argued that art ought to infuse everyday life. Aestheticism has therefore been understood as a late nineteenth-century philosophy that sought to divorce art from moral and socio-political implications and to emphasize its necessity for its own sake; as the principle loosely holding together an elitist clique centered on standards of supposedly “superior” taste; and as an assemblage of popular decorative elements and ideas about beauty that suffused transatlantic visual arts, literature, fashion, and home décor.

Aestheticism became normalized by the 1880s and 1890s, its more eccentric aspects softened by its increased presence in domestic settings and in British and American print culture. Indeed, Aestheticism assumed a highly visible position in late-Victorian society, as both a style whose symbols were well-known—sunflowers, lilies, peacock feathers, blue and white china, and Japanese *objets d’art*—and as a more abstract philosophy of art, design, and interior decoration. Jamie Horrocks notes that “Scholars, period-film buffs, and AP English students know what late Victorian aestheticism looks like: it looks like Oscar Wilde dressed in the silk stockings and

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6 Mendelssohn, 5.
velvet knee breeches.” Yet Aestheticism also “looks like” the spare, modernist lines of an E. W. Godwin side table or a James McNeill Whistler interior; the busy, historically-inspired wallpaper and fabric patterns of Christopher Dresser and William Morris; the pastel-toned idylls of Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane; and the poetry of A. C. Swinburne and the prose of Walter Pater. Because of this multiplicity, Aestheticism remains a fruitful area of interdisciplinary and cross-generic study—even especially for contributors outside of this mostly-male list of exemplars. Discussions of the movement and visual representations of its style infiltrated the popular press not only through journalism regarding famous aesthetes like Wilde, but also through caricatures, illustrations, art criticism and commentary, and fiction intended for the general reader, whose class was often of the middle but whose aspirations were high.

In the chapters that follow, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital” undergirds my arguments about the ways in which art knowledge came to be understood as a way to improve or refine one’s class status in the highly-stratified societies of late nineteenth-century Britain and America. Bourdieu asserts that one aspect of cultural capital is “objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc.,” whose value lies not only in their materiality, but in the consumption of them by the reader/viewer/user. Unlike more rigorously-guarded


9 Ibid., 246.
class-based privileges and inherited wealth, an enjoyment and understanding of art movements like Aestheticism was therefore a more democratic form of “cultural competence,” attainable by middle-class readers and consumers due to its liberal dissemination in Victorian visual culture and the popular press.  

Aestheticism’s duality as high/popular culture has only recently begun to be discussed in relation to women. Despite the movement’s theoretical investment in the diffusion of art into all aspects of life, Aestheticism is often portrayed as having an inherent gender bias, and even a streak of misogyny, favoring men and their artistic relationships and thereby relegating women to the sidelines. Some scholarly interpretations reproduce the inclination of certain contemporaneous male proponents of Aestheticism, which Margaret Stetz has described: “As the male aesthetes moved, during the 1880s and 1890s, into positions as editors of magazines, manuscript readers at publishing firms, critics and reviewers for newspapers, and members of ‘hanging’ committees for art exhibitions, they consolidated their power and controlled portals of admission for women with ambitions in the arts.”

Important feminist scholarship by Stetz and others, however, has begun to recover the contributions of women artists, writers, and critics involved in Aestheticism, which necessarily alters the understanding of the movement as a largely male-dominated one, even as it changes whose definition of Aestheticism is being privileged and promoted. Particularly notable contributions to this recovery effort include Talia Schaffer’s The Forgotten

\[\text{10} \text{ Ibid., 245.} \]

\[\text{11} \text{ Margaret D. Stetz, “Debating Aestheticism from a Feminist Perspective,” in Women and British Aestheticism, eds. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 29.} \]
Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England (2000) and the collection Women and British Aestheticism (1999) co-edited by Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades. Schaffer and Psomiades argue that as writers, critics, and artists, women were just as involved in the discourses of Aesthetic culture as their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{12} Even so, Linda Hughes explains, such a position was a precarious one:

\begin{quote}
The term “female aesthete” […] is riddled with tensions and contradictions given middle class ideologies of gender. If “aesthete” implies a commitment to the unity of the arts, cultural authority (in the form of taste), and, as with Wilde, “advanced” political and artistic views superior to those of the bourgeois herd, “female” invokes domestic duties and cultural marginality, as well as the internal contradictions that constituted Victorian feminine subjectivity.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

In general, women approached Aesthetic practice in a variety of ways on both a large and small scale, but that multifarious approach rendered them subject to ridicule by male aesthetes and to being viewed with suspicion by more mainstream cultural commentators. Despite such attempts by men to dominate artistic, literary, and domestic spheres of influence, female aesthetes not only existed, but performed much of the substantive work to democratize and spread Aestheticism in print and popular culture throughout the English-speaking world on both sides of the Atlantic.

Like all aspects of Aestheticism, the “female aesthete” was not a clearly-defined category, but one that might include writers, artists, critics, designers, and taste-makers from the prominent to the obscure, and from the professional to the amateur. In The Forgotten Female Aesthetes, Schaffer elegantly presents these

\textsuperscript{12} Schaffer and Psomiades, 3.

complexities, particularly as they relate to women and the variety of cultural products they produced that contributed to the Aesthetic movement:

If aestheticism was a philosophical movement indebted to Ruskin and Pater, it was also a fashion inspired by Mary Eliza Haweis and Rosamund Marriott Watson. If aestheticism was a serious literary movement tailored to an elite audience, with authors like Henry James, it was also a popular literary movement designed for mass readers, with authors like Ouida. If aestheticism was a celebration of light literature like Max Beerbohm’s, it was also the genre that produces Lucas Malet’s enormous novels. The high-culture aspirations of the *Yellow Book* can be matched with popular counterparts from the *Woman's World*. [...] The recovery of this missing half of aestheticism, this world of women, necessarily alters our view of the movement.¹⁴

Women’s involvement in Aestheticism shows the competing threads of the movement as a serious philosophy and a fashion that was at once a high-culture and a popular literary movement, which produced both belletristic essays and behemoth novels, as well as all manner of art, decorative items, dress, and design.¹⁵ Aestheticism’s shift from the avant-garde to the middlebrow played out in a variety of late-Victorian texts and contexts, in both Britain and the United States, but for the purposes of this dissertation, my interest is particularly in periodicals, and in periodical audiences outside of the exclusive, and often homosocial masculine circles with which Aestheticism is most often associated.

The term middlebrow is important here, particularly when considering the popular form of Aestheticism that was most readily available to late-Victorian readers and consumers. In *Middlebrow and Gender, 1890-1945*, Christoph Ehland and


¹⁵ Ibid., 2.
Cornelia Wächter explain that “The term was (and often still is) deployed in purely derogatory terms, as both an aesthetic judgement and as the kind of literature produced and consumed by the (often upward-aspiring) middle classes.”¹⁶ For the purposes of this study, my use of middlebrow reiterates the aspirant nature of much of the writing on art and aesthetics published in middle-class magazines, but emphasizes the ways in which this was presented and perceived as a positive aim by many Victorian writers of such texts. As such, my approach aligns with Ehland’s and Wächter’s observation that such “middlebrow writing may at the same time be conductive to escapist consumption and include challenges to the established order.”¹⁷ This balance between entertainment and critique, I would argue, is what many treatments of Aestheticism in the popular press did, particularly when presented by and for women readers. In A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914 (1996), Margaret Beetham declares that the periodical is “the characteristic modern form of print.”¹⁸ As such, periodical publications are crucial resources for understanding the time and culture that produced them. Whether longstanding generalist quarterlies or limited-run coterie publications, periodicals encompass the varied types of and approaches to literature, art, and popular culture in nineteenth-century Britain and America. Laurel Brake notes that each portion of a periodical “is

¹⁶ Christoph Ehland and Cornelia Wächter, “Introduction: ‘…All Granite, Fog and Female Fiction’,” in Middlebrow and Gender, 1890-1945, eds. Christoph Ehland and Cornelia Wächter (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 2.¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

instantly and always contextualized, embedded in a matrix of other pieces which make up the issue in which it appears, and extend to the issues before and after. Periodical texts, by virtue of the format in which they appear, are self-confessedly historical, contingent, looking backward and forward.”

Periodicals therefore do much more than simply provide a “window” onto a “mirror” of the period: they offer in themselves an invaluable slice of Victorian life and suggest the ways in which Victorians were representing, reading, temporalizing, and conceptualizing their world.

While it may be difficult now to document the real-life effect that readers experienced when consuming Victorian periodicals, quite specific modes of critical reading were being suggested and modeled by magazines. The prose and visual contents of late-nineteenth-century illustrated periodicals worked, in some cases, to advocate for and, in others, to condemn particular aspects of visual/material culture, but often did so in ways that encouraged readers to examine both the surface and symbolism of the text and images they “read.” Such implicit strategies placed these periodicals at a juncture—a shifting and unstable point between prescriptive mass-market magazines that endorsed conservative standards of “good taste,” and those avant-garde fin de siècle magazines whose contents may not always have been subversive in themselves, but which offered the possibility of more radical forms of reading and interpretation.


20 Beetham, A Magazine of Her Own?, 20.
Current approaches to Victorian women’s and girls’ periodicals and reading—and my own approach to these topics—owe much to the groundbreaking scholarship of Margaret Beetham, Kate Flint, and Linda K. Hughes, among others. In *A Magazine of Her Own?*, Beetham provides a chronological and thematic overview of women’s periodicals in the nineteenth century, examining not only an array of publications that feature her two themes, but also the perceived audiences and reading practices these periodicals engendered. Hilary Fraser, Judith Johnston, and Stephanie Green’s important study, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (2003), builds upon Beetham’s work and announces its aim to explore “the role of the periodical press in mediating gender ideologies.” While they discuss gender more broadly, Fraser, Johnston, and Green’s treatment of late-Victorian women’s magazines and their readers is particularly salient: they pinpoint these magazines’ “multivocality, […] the capacity to encompass ideology and difference within the same textual space,” as a key trait that allowed women’s magazines both to “unsettle and affirm prevailing social values,” depending on context and reader interpretation. Meanwhile, Jennifer Phegley’s *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation* (2004) looks at family magazines as a theoretically non-gendered genre which could accommodate women as “intellectually competent” “consumers and producers of literary culture,” thereby combating contemporary

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22 Ibid., 177.
literary critics’ casting of women as “dangerous” and “improper” readers. Kathryn Ledbetter’s *British Victorian Women’s Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetry* (2009) focuses on the place of poetry in periodicals of this era, but her expansive research into women’s periodicals also touches on the ways in which contemporary art movements more broadly were dealt with in magazines. Ledbetter states that women’s periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s “demonstrate a trend toward new sensibilities about art and culture encoded by the Aesthetic movement, and evident in design aspects, as well as in the notion that women’s dress, behavior, and female form were mediums for beauty and art.” Beetham similarly notes that among the “aesthetic and intellectual pleasures” illustrated Victorian women’s periodicals offered their readers was “the potential for a discourse of high art to interrogate the meanings offered elsewhere in the paper.” These statements encapsulate my own approach to the ways in which Aesthetic “sensibilities” and “discourse” were being propagated in British and American periodicals.

In the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the rise of mass-market, illustrated periodicals for women and girls brought increased concern not only with what, but with how these audiences were actually reading, and the effects of those reading practices. Kate Flint’s *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (1993) explains how, between


the seventeenth- and nineteenth-centuries, women’s reading had been characterized in
one of two ways: “Either the woman is improved and educated through access to
approved knowledge […] or the reading of the forbidden leads to her downfall.”26 The
“paradoxical grounds” of this binary “serves above all to heighten the importance that
woman’s reading has held, historically, as a site on which one may see a variety of
cultural and sexual anxieties displayed.”27 Girls’ reading in particular was treated with
interest due to their supposed impressionability, and subject to various surveys such as
Edward G. Salmon’s “What Girls Read ”(1886) and Florence Low’s somewhat later
“The Reading of the Modern Girl” (1906), both published in the Nineteenth Century.28
Hotly argued about by Victorian commentators, women’s and girls’ periodicals also
became both the arenas for this debate and the sources of contention. In his famous
1864 lecture, “Of Queen’s Gardens,” John Ruskin adamantly insisted upon the
parameters of what girls “should” read: “Keep the modern magazine and novel out of
your girl’s way: turn her loose into the old library every wet day, and let her alone.
She will find what is good for her; you cannot.”29 Such suspicion of “the modern
magazine and novel” would not wholly disappear in the decades that followed, but for
the most part, these texts increasingly were understood to be important channels by
which to reach—and teach—a growing audience of girl readers.

27 Ibid., 22.
28 Ibid., 158-159.
29 John Ruskin, “Of Queens’ Gardens,” in Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered
at Manchester in 1864 (New York: J. Wiley & Son, 1865), 101.
Alongside concern about female reading practices, the ways in which the “reading” of images was being discussed and suggested during the period are also of vital importance to understanding Victorian approaches to print culture. David Peters Corbett’s *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914* (2004) defines “visuality” as “the ways in which meaning is attributed in culture both to vision and to the visual character of objects,” as well as “the visual assemblage of the material object” outside of any discursive meaning that may be assigned to it.\(^{30}\) Corbett claims that, by the mid-nineteenth century, “the status of knowledge was under question,” and so beginning with the Pre-Raphaelites, “Victorian artists were preoccupied with the obligation to find a new visual language to match the new conditions of experience that accompanied modernity.”\(^{31}\) The resulting “visual literacy” that was cultivated might seemingly have become natural to Victorian viewers of art, but relied a great deal on the pervasiveness of Victorian art criticism and commentary as well. These genres have been insightfully covered in *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (2009), in which Rachel Teukolsky explores the Victorian interest in aesthetic education as well as the subjective assessment and enjoyment of art.\(^{32}\) The rapid advances in new media technologies in nineteenth-century Britain resulted in a “pictorial turn” marked by “new visual cultures [which] necessitated that viewers discriminate in the visual field


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 23; 26.

and hierarchize certain types of visual experience.”\textsuperscript{33} Teukolsky asserts that art critics like Anna Jameson celebrated “the mass reproduction of visual images” in popular print “as a kind of democratic victory for aesthetics.”\textsuperscript{34}

Commentators such as James McNeill Whistler derided the conventional Victorian preference for art that conveyed a clear narrative, but the fact remains that Victorians were accustomed to “reading” images in this way. The pure-Aesthetic practice of considering a picture as a representation of ineffable ideals, and the analytical “reading” of pictures, are not necessarily incompatible. Even if some Aesthetic artworks did not have a “story” they were meant to tell, the situations, symbols, and allusions of late-Victorian art still required deciphering. So, whether a narrative painting or an illustration in a novel or popular magazine, both genres shared “the union between ‘pen and pencil’ that Gerard Curtis has identified as a key feature of mid-nineteenth-century culture.”\textsuperscript{35} Consequently, Stuart Sillars asserts in \textit{Visualisation in Popular Fiction, 1860-1960} (1995) that in late-Victorian and Edwardian illustrated magazines, “the images all perform important functions in expanding the reader’s awareness, so that they work with the verbal text to produce a single mixed discourse which in some cases is of not inconsiderable complexity and social or moral function.”\textsuperscript{36} This places illustration on a level of equal importance with

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 19-20.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 19.
\end{quote}
text for the reader, and renders it for Sillars a worthy object of study. Sillars’s ultimate assertion is that despite the complex modes of reading illustrated periodicals required, Victorians and Edwardians would have been able to interpret them easily, as these skills “would have been acquired by contemporary readers trained by practice through reading illustrated narratives,” both periodic and monographic. While Sillars focuses on the “single mixed discourse” that results from the directly-invoked relationships between paired texts and images, Margaret Beetham cautions that the periodical “may offer its readers scope to construct their own version of the text by selective reading, but against that flexibility has to be put the tendency in the form to close off alternative readings by creating a dominant position from which to read.” Her approach quite rightly takes into account the fact that the periodical genre encourages non-linear and even incomplete reading from story to story and from issue to issue, and hints that the inherently intertextual nature of periodicals may enable the sorts of reading Sillars discusses, as well as elide it. Illustrated periodicals assumed a readership attuned to visual culture and visuality, and therefore adept at interpreting visual tropes as well as genre. Late-Victorian (and particularly Symbolist-influenced) illustrations encouraged multi-layered readings, as well as helping to define the visual “genre” of Aestheticism. Periodical illustrations functioned both as markers of Aesthetic ideals and as complex texts that were just as important as the verbal discourse around the movement.

37 Ibid., 91.
While Aestheticism arguably infused many aspects of women’s media, there were few overtly “Aesthetic” magazines run by and for women, at least compared to the numbers of male-dominated Aesthetic publications. Nonetheless, Aesthetic ideas, illustrations, and writing appear across a variety of periodicals that women were reading, though these intersections have yet to be fully explored by modern scholarship. This dissertation attempts to begin this important work by weaving together the study of Aestheticism as a transatlantic cultural movement on the one hand, and women’s and girls’ cultures on the other, and subsequently maps the ways in which the Aesthetic movement and its ideas were promulgated in late-nineteenth-century illustrated periodicals geared towards female audiences. By the end of the century, many periodicals for girls and women overtly emphasized critical and visual reading as an important pursuit that would not only promote intellectual stimulation and satisfaction, but also the formation of a discerning taste, and thus promote the class-specific ambitions of their audiences. The essential hybridity of many late-nineteenth-century literary magazines, in which visual and verbal elements vied for readers’ attention, naturally lent themselves to discussions of art and aesthetics, while also encouraging complex reader engagement with all facets of the periodical.

By actively and critically reading such texts, Victorian women and girl readers developed an understanding of the visual “genre” of Aestheticism, and of how they were meant to be adapting their attitudes and tastes in relation to the principles of the movement. I therefore contend that certain late-Victorian illustrated magazines were sites where a peculiarly “aesthetic” visual literacy was cultivated, especially in middle-class female audiences, both as general editorial policy and as a result of the individual contributions by Aesthetic and Symbolist artists such as Charles Ricketts,
Walter Crane, and Kate Greenaway, as well as George du Maurier, whose anti-aesthetic illustrations were nonetheless highly influential. Furthermore, I forge new connections between the famous male proponents and craftsmen of Aestheticism, like Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and William Morris, and the influential yet now little-known women writers, critics, and artists who actually popularized it, including Mary Eliza Haweis, Lucy C. Lillie, and L.T.Meade. By examining editorials, articles, lectures, fiction, poetry, illustration, and design, I show that women were crucial to, and largely responsible for, the transatlantic spread of Aestheticism. Periodicals provided particularly important venues for such authors to convey new interpretations of Aesthetic art, literature, and philosophy to middlebrow, transatlantic female audiences, thus complicating Aestheticism’s reputation as an elite, male-centered movement.

Because this dissertation takes a transatlantic approach, I have necessarily had to narrow my scope in order to tell a cohesive story about the production and reception of Aesthetic ideas by certain demographics. I have therefore chosen to focus my attentions on a select number of periodicals catering to the British and American middle classes, since those publications represent a large portion of the new periodicals that came into being during the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the populations whose attention was being most assiduously courted and cultivated. The rise of the educated middles classes is indicative of the breakdown of the distinction between popular and high-aesthetic culture, as well as of the possible tensions between woman as aesthetic object versus woman as worker (whether as a producer of artistic products or not). My study covers a range of British and American periodicals, including generalist magazines such as *Harper’s Monthly*, women’s
magazines such as the *Woman’s World*, and magazines designed for children such as *St. Nicholas* and *Atalanta*. The varied and complex “encodings” of Aestheticism in these periodicals reveal how female engagement with this culturally significant movement—and female education and connoisseurship in general—was negotiated in the late-nineteenth century.

**Chapter Outline**

The chapters that will follow explore the intersections between nineteenth-century women’s writing and reading, and transatlantic print and visual culture. Three out of the four chapters use a periodical or two each as case studies to examine how these publications represented Aestheticism in their pages, and how they sought to engage female readers in these texts. I will begin by addressing the ways in which Aestheticism and its ideals were discussed in texts written by and for women in Britain in the 1870s and 1880s. Oscar Wilde’s 1882 lecture tour will form the starting point for the two chapters that follow, the first dealing with Aestheticism’s reception and (re)interpretation in American periodicals that sought to reach female audiences, followed by a chapter that covers Wilde’s more hands-on dissemination of the movement during his editorship of a women’s magazine several years later. The last chapter examines the transatlantic interchanges of ideas about Aestheticism in periodicals for the youth market. To conclude, I will suggest how this project contributes to recovery work and to Victorian studies in general.

Following this introduction, the first chapter lays the groundwork for these periodical strategies by outlining their predecessors: manuals of taste. I first give an overview of how aesthetics was being thought about and taught in the 1860s and 1870s, then examine influential male-authored manuals such as Charles Eastlake’s
Hints on Household Taste (1868). The bulk of the chapter focuses on Mary Eliza Haweis’s The Art of Beauty (1878) and Lucy Crane’s Art and the Formation of Taste: Six Lectures (1882), two important handbooks which sought to teach women and girls about art and design history and cultivate aesthetic taste, while diverging significantly from patronizing models like Eastlake’s. I examine these guides in conjunction with earlier handbooks and periodical publications, as well as with subsequent monographs and periodical reviews, in order to show how popular texts such as these pushed back against prevailing ideas about the uses of art and decoration, and about women’s abilities to discern “good taste” in such matters. This chapter also begins to explore how women writers particularly reached out to girl readers in order to encourage these audiences to read and apply art education through the extra-academic means of popular print culture.

In the next chapter, I focus on the spread of Aestheticism across the Atlantic to America, during the period that the movement’s most famous ambassador, Oscar Wilde, was visiting and lecturing there. Besides the movement’s spokespeople, I also examine the ways in which the periodical publishing principles of American magazines such as Harper’s Monthly influenced the release and dissemination of texts dealing with Aestheticism. I consider broadly how the movement was presented to female audiences in American magazines, and use Lucy Cecil Lillie’s now little-known novella, Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London (1882) as a case study. First serialized in Harper’s, Prudence represents not only one of the first substantial American treatments of the Aesthetic movement, but one by a transatlantic woman writer who lived for many years in Britain and wrote about it for a variety of American periodicals. While relatively little is known about Lillie, the illustrator of
Prudence, George du Maurier, would have been familiar to transatlantic audiences as an illustrator of fiction as well as through his caricatures of aesthetes in the comic journal Punch, which played a vital part in forming the popular image of Aestheticism in both Britain and America.

The British Woman’s World magazine serves as a case study in my next chapter, in which I analyze the approaches of male aesthetes who created magazines for female readers. I concentrate on Oscar Wilde’s editorial policies and Charles Ricketts’s illustrative strategies and uncover their shared work in reimagining a women’s magazine as a visual manifesto of Aestheticism, as well as an artistic primer for female readers. As editor of the Woman’s World, Wilde acted as validator of women’s culture, arbiter of taste, and cultivator of women’s already-established artistic sensibilities. By extension, the art contents of Woman's World implicitly urged readers to engage more earnestly in the interpretation of visual images in relation to words, even as it playfully tested readers’ abilities to interpret historical, symbolical, and sartorial allusions. The challenges presented by such visual “reading” supported Wilde’s aesthetic aims for the magazine as a whole: to elevate its content (and by extension, its readers) to a higher state of art and erudition.

The fourth chapter addresses how British and American periodicals aimed at a younger set of female readers dealt with Aestheticism. My two case studies are juvenile magazines edited by prominent women writers, the American St. Nicholas Magazine (edited from 1873-1905 by Mary Mapes Dodge), and the British Atalanta (edited from 1887-1893 by “L.T. Meade,” the pseudonym of Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Smith). The former, designed for younger readers, playfully presented Aestheticism in a variety of contexts, while the latter, which was targeted at older girls
and young women, took an earnest approach to the topic, and assumed that its readers would be more deeply immersed and invested in the wider art world. Both magazines reflect the interests and opportunities that were becoming open to girls by the 1880s, particularly in the ways they represented artistic knowledge as cultural currency and as a key to class-conscious social mobility.

In the final chapter, a coda, I use the writer, publisher, editor, and art-educator Florence I. Duncan as a case study on Anglo-American women’s roles in turn-of-the-century art movements, culture, and class-formation. Duncan showed a steady commitment to creating media about art—and Aestheticism in particular—that both entertained and informed, and her work specifically aimed to benefit middle-class women and children. As a truly transatlantic, transnational woman writer, she had an influence that was widespread, yet her work is practically unknown today. This section finishes with a call to action for scholars to continue the ongoing work of recovering neglected British and American women writers, especially those working in the fields of journalism, editing, and art-writing.

Taken together, these chapters serve as an intervention in the still-developing field of periodical and illustration studies, even as they build on the work already undertaken to reveal women’s participation in and interpretations of Aestheticism. Both women’s own writings on Aestheticism and the inclusion of Aesthetic visual images in women’s and girls’ periodicals had profound effects on the ways in which the movement was presented to and received by transatlantic female audiences. By discussing not only the reception of Aestheticism in the periodical press, but also the reading practices encouraged by the circulation of certain Victorian texts and images, this study offers a new and more complete understanding of gendered learning through
late-Victorian print culture. Ultimately, by considering the multiple print incarnations of Aestheticism, I argue that Victorian periodicals targeted at, edited by, and contributed to by women were not merely entertainment, but instead significant sources of cultural capital. While the oeuvres of more prominent male figures like Oscar Wilde and Edward Burne-Jones are now touchstones of the movement, I believe Aestheticism cannot be understood properly, except in the context of the popular journalism through which many Victorian readers first encountered it—much of it created by and intended for women.
Chapter 2

“WE MUST DO AS WE LIKE”: WOMEN ART CRITICS AND THE TEACHING OF TASTE

In the April 1885 issue of the London and Paris Ladies’ Magazine of Fashion, the front page featured an article titled “Observations on London Fashions,” which informed the periodical’s female readers about the latest styles, while also cautioning them about how to ensure they were acting and dressing in “good taste.” The article stresses that in all decorative endeavors, but particularly in dress, “good taste, by which we mean artistic taste, educated taste, refined taste, and above all, quiet taste, must reign supreme.” As demonstrated by articles such as this one, the wedded concerns of good design and good taste had thoroughly permeated Victorian print culture by the latter half of the nineteenth century. A marked increase in the number of books, lectures, and periodical articles about interior decoration, dress, and aesthetics reflected a growing interest in properly applying principles of design and a foreshadowing of the tenets of Aestheticism. Unlike the design manuals of the early- and mid-nineteenth century, these texts were less often geared towards artists, designers, and manufacturers of decorative items, but instead towards consumers and art “amateurs.” In his essay “Gender and Design in the Victorian Period,” Colin Cunningham states, “Just as Owen Jones had set out to produce a Grammar of

Ornament for designers, so there were authors who set out to provide manuals of taste to educate the general, and generally female, public.”

This emphasis on improving the taste of women exposed period anxieties about authority—both about who had the power to arbitrate artistic taste, as well as who had the expertise to enact it. While taste was a topic copiously covered in women’s magazines like the London and Paris Ladies’ Magazine of Fashion throughout the nineteenth century, many (male) authors assumed that their own eager female readers badly needed instruction in the tenets of proper taste at both a practical and a theoretical level. While the scope of such male-authored texts may have differed, the tone was often quite contemptuous about the characters and abilities of the women they hoped to educate.

Such attitudes reflected a trend that Talia Schaffer has identified in her 2000 book, The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England: “The emergence of the male artistic professionals in the 1870s constituted a significant historic shift, not only within domestic arts, but also within gender relations.”

Schaffer explains that, during this time, male writers not only maintained authority over fields in which they historically had held precedence, but also began infiltrating traditionally female spheres, such as home décor and fashion. “Male-aesthetic writing functioned as a method of justifying the men’s occupancy of female space,” Schaffer adds, “For once esoteric knowledge of art history became a prerequisite for domestic work, women could not compete with new male connoisseurs, who had far greater opportunities for university training, extensive travels, and social contact with


41 Schaffer, 85.
experts.” However, the varied and abundant amount of media about art, decoration, and design by and for women in the 1870s-1880s proves that they were not so easily ousted, nor as lacking in knowledge as male critics would have liked to believe. Women writers added greatly to contemporary thought about these topics, and they often utilized the popular press in doing so. Their contributions are particularly important in how they address the rise of popular Aestheticism, which blurred the boundaries between highbrow, abstract aesthetics and the more-down-to-earth concerns of middle-class Victorians attempting to apparel their homes and bodies in “good taste.”

Among the women who supplied the reading public with articles and books on art, aesthetics, and taste, two writers of particular note who are Mary Eliza Haweis (1848-1898) and Lucy Crane (1842-1882). Haweis and Crane might be considered among those Deborah Cohen has described as the now forgotten “‘lady art advisors,’” who “led the way to self-expression in the home.” Cohen explains how this larger group of women, who were often journalists, “counselled their readers to ignore design reform’s fixed notions of ‘right and wrong,’ and to express instead their own individual sensibilities.” While Haweis and Crane’s work certainly did encourage the rejection of prescribed notions of taste, their approach to the development of taste was not, as Cohen claimed, primarily about “sensibility.” Instead, Haweis and Crane more

42 Ibid., 85.
44 Ibid., xv.
strongly advocated for taste developed through immersive study of art objects and texts. Both wrote highly scholarly periodical essays and books on art and decoration that informed their readers about the precepts of good taste versus false principles, but they emphasized that such discrimination could only be cultivated through careful observation and thought, rather than simply by following a feeling or listening to the “right” authorities (themselves included). I argue that these shared qualities, as well as their similar female audiences, are what set Haweis and Crane apart from both “Henry Cole’s disciples” as well as the masses of less-academic “lady art advisors.”

Haweis was an artist, critic, journalist, novelist, Chaucerian scholar, and advocate for women’s suffrage; in Schaffer’s words, she was “a kind of female William Morris” who “illustrated and designed all her own books.” She is perhaps best known today for her influential trio of manuals of taste, *The Art of Beauty* (1878), *The Art of Dress* (1879), and *The Art of Decoration* (1881). These texts often appear listed alongside the work of Morris, Owen Jones, Charles Eastlake, and Christopher Dresser as touchstones of Victorian design theory, and it is rare to find scholarship dealing with artistic dress and dress reform that does not credit Haweis. As John Cooper has reported, even Oscar Wilde drew a good deal from Haweis’s work in developing his own philosophy of dress, *The Art of Dress* being “the only book on dress that Wilde specifically requested as reference material during his American lecture tour of 1882.”

Along with her manuals, some of Haweis’s other monographs

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45 Ibid., xv.

46 Schaffer, 108.

include *Chaucer for Children: A Golden Key* (1877), *Beautiful Houses: Being a Description of Certain Well-known Artistic Houses* (1882), *Rus in Urbe: Flowers that Thrive in London Gardens* (1886), *The Art of Housekeeping: A Bridal Garland* (1889), and a novel about divorce titled *A Flame of Fire* (1897). Despite her lack of formal schooling, Haweis commonly displayed in her work careful research and a great depth of knowledge about dress, design, and architecture from many periods and cultures. Her father, the fashionable portrait painter Thomas Musgrave Joy, was likely also an influence on her early artistic education and development, as well as the facilitator of her earliest forays into artistic circles. For instance, Royal Academician W. P. Frith was a friend of the Joys, and offered to help Haweis in her art career following her father’s death. According to Bea Howe, Haweis’s biographer, it was at Frith’s suggestion that Haweis exhibited a painting at the Royal Academy in the summer of 1866, at just eighteen.\(^48\) For the next twenty years, Haweis also contributed many reviews, articles, and illustrations to various British and American periodicals including *Saint Paul’s Magazine*, *Cassell’s Family Magazine*, *Belgravia*, the *Woman’s Herald*, the *Art Journal*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*. In addition to her own books, she illustrated and designed those of her husband, the popular Anglican minister and writer Hugh Reginald Haweis. Howe’s biography, *Arbiter of Elegance* (1967), remained for several decades the only significant work about Haweis, but in the last twenty years, scholars including Talia Schaffer, Kathy Alexis Psomiades, Colin Cunningham, and Charlotte Gere have written more extensively about her work, and the publication of Mary Flowers Braswell’s book *The Forgotten Chaucer Scholarship*

of Mary Eliza Haweis in 2016 indicates a further renewed scholarly interest in Haweis and her career.⁴⁹

Lucy Crane has more recently been rescued from relative obscurity by her inclusion in the three-volume anthology, The Women Aesthetes, published by Pickering & Chatto in 2013, and by Paola Spinozzi’s 2014 article, “Accurate reproduction, ingenious representation: Lucy and Walter Crane’s Household Stories, from the Collection of the Bros. Grimm (1882).” Crane was an accomplished writer and translator best known for her collaborations with her brother, Walter Crane, one of the most famous British illustrators of the late-nineteenth century; along with him, Lucy was thoroughly “immersed in the culture of the aesthetic movement.”⁵⁰ Walter illustrated his sister’s important translation of the Grimm brothers’ Household Stories


(1882), and she also worked with him on many of his popular children’s books, most notably writing the verses for books such as Annie and Jack in London (1869) and How Jessie was Lost (1868), and collecting and arranging the music for The Baby’s Opera: a Book of Old Rhymes with New Dresses (1877) and The Baby’s Bouquet: a Fresh Bunch of Old Rhymes and Tunes (1878). Like her brothers, Walter and Thomas, Lucy was allegedly also an artist herself, though no specimens of her work are known to be extant. However, her keen interest in art and taste was apparent in the series of lectures she gave in London and Eastbourne, and later in the north of England. She was just forty-one when she unexpectedly died in 1882, and little evidence remains about Crane’s life besides the fond remembrances of her brothers, who memorialized her in the preface to her lectures, which they also edited, illustrated, and published within a year of her death as the monograph Art and the Formation of Taste: Six Lectures (1882). Sarah Hyde notes that despite Crane’s relatively short career, she had “the distinction of being the only woman to be described as an art critic in the Dictionary of National Biography.” However, Pamela Gerrish Nunn argues that in comparison to women like Elizabeth Eastlake, Anna Jameson, Emilia Dilke, and Alice Meynell, Crane had “only really an honorary claim to the identity of art critic” and that her “activities in this field were, indeed, very little


52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.
known by her contemporaries.” Presumably, it was the quality of Crane’s lectures as well as the wish to posthumously honor her that resulted in this categorization in the first installment of the Dictionary in 1887. Yet the real value and impact of her work has been largely overlooked by modern scholarship, particularly, as Nunn points out, because of how it seemingly fails to measure up against the work of other women critics—including Haweis.

In Howe’s biography, Haweis and her work are presented primarily through the lens of family life and letters, though Howe occasionally includes some tantalizing comments on Haweis’s wide and diverse circle of friends and acquaintances. In one section of narrative between transcribed letters, Howe writes,

In March, [1882], sad news came from Yorkshire while M. E. H. [Mary Eliza Haweis] worked on her book to provide the much needed ‘filthy lucre’. Walter Crane’s charming sister, Lucy, had died from a heart attack during a lecturing tour. M. E. H. was much downcast. With her, Lucy Crane had been a pioneer in trying to educate women on art matters, though her medium had taken the form of the spoken, rather than the written word.

I had begun studying Haweis and Crane separately—and had decided to write about them jointly—long before I fortuitously stumbled upon Howe’s passing remark that neatly tied them together. This chapter, then, centers upon these two women, who exemplify not only a certain milieu of literary and artistic society in England in the 1870s and early 1880s, but also individually sought to democratize high art principles.


55 Howe, Arbiter of Elegance, 162. Howe mistakenly notes the year of Lucy Crane’s death as 1883, though Crane actually died on 31 March 1882.
through their lectures, articles, and monographs, particularly by addressing middlebrow female audiences who were untutored in art and art history. I focus on Haweis’s *The Art of Beauty* (1878) and Crane’s *Art and the Formation of Taste* (1882), both of which, as Howe succinctly states, explicitly attempted “to educate women on art matters,” and emphasized reader engagement rather than aiming for originality or comprehensiveness. The accessible language, profuse illustrations, and Aesthetic bent of these two books were meant to render them attractive to middle-class female readers, and these very traits also made them remarkable among the masses of other books published on the topic or art and taste at this time. While Crane’s book posthumously collected six of her lectures, Haweis drew from and expanded a series of articles on beauty, dress, and decoration that she had published in *Saint Paul’s Magazine* in 1872-1873. It is therefore useful to consider the original publication/presentation context alongside the finished product, as well as the intended audiences for each format. These contexts also highlight the importance of the visual accompaniment to each writer’s words: I argue that the illustrations provided by Crane (in the book, via her brothers) and Haweis (from her own drawings), helped to guide the reader not only toward “good taste” in general, but specifically toward Aesthetic taste.

Since the intended audiences for Haweis and Crane’s ideas were chiefly girls and women, their work demonstrated the wider reach of art culture and art education in the late-nineteenth century, especially through popular print media. Both authors used vivid visual analogy and profuse illustration as an explicit means to engage

56 Howe, *Arbiter of Elegance*, 162.
female audiences that were perhaps ignored or underserved by other types of media and teaching. In doing so, Haweis and Crane’s texts also acted as primers for how to read visually, a skill that was crucial for understanding the nuanced and layered meanings of illustrated books and periodicals in the age of Aestheticism. In their hands, periodical essays and manuals of taste became at once textbooks on beauty and aesthetics, seminars in art history and design, and interactive guides to dress and decoration; in short, they were invaluable tools for female readers to develop the cultural currency associated with Aestheticism and with late-Victorian “good taste” more broadly writ. As the wave of Aesthetic fervor swept over Britain and America in the late 1870s and early 1880s, both writers advocated for and challenged different aspects of Aestheticism, thereby also illustrating some of the complex relationships among art, taste, and gender during this time.

**Victorian Aesthetics and Taste**

For Victorian writers and critics, the term “taste” was notoriously unstable; it smacked of aristocratic elitism on the one hand, and grubby commercialism on the other. Long before the craze of Aestheticism, aesthetics was considered a branch of science and a philosophy, and thereby assumed to be the province of men. Meanwhile, taste was more difficult to define, but seemingly relied more on the caprices of fashion. The latter concern was one that appeared again and again in late-Victorian periodicals and taste manuals. In *Hints on Household Taste* (p. 8-10), Charles Eastlake famously complained about the “problem” of fashion- and furniture-retailers making a tidy profit off the gullible public by setting ever-changing and often ridiculous fashions in dress and decor that consumers would allow themselves to be persuaded to buy. Mary Eliza Haweis also warned about using caution when faced with various retailers’ suggestions but seemed less inclined to lump all dressmakers and upholsterers under one nefarious umbrella.

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and its various, often female, arbiters rather than on supposed scientific fact. In the autumn of 1883, the prestigious weekly journal Notes and Queries ran a four-part “Bibliography of Beauty Theories” by Frederick W. Foster, which encompassed monographs, articles, lectures, and reviews from 830 BC to the present—one of many examples of attention to such matters in the late-Victorian periodical press, if one of the most comprehensive. In his foreword to the first installment, Foster claimed that he had perused “Wellnigh a thousand volumes” while compiling his list, in which “Works of about one hundred and forty authors are noted,” yet acknowledged that “Many more authors have probably written on the subject. Several works on taste, not here noted, probably belong to this list.”\(^{58}\) This admission, particularly in light of the list it prefaced, laid out the distinction that was at that point being drawn between aesthetics and taste, and pointed to larger cultural conversations about who had the power to differentiate between these two categories—and about how the gender of any such connoisseur affected his or her perceived authority. In fact, Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck’s 1815 Theory on the Classification of Beauty and Deformity was the only work written by a woman included in Foster’s bibliography.\(^{59}\) Taste, then, did not find a place on Foster’s list, and neither did Haweis, Crane, or the many other women writers who had covered this topic in the nineteenth century.

The gendered distinction between works on high aesthetics and popular taste is even more clearly laid out by Grant Allen’s scathing review of The Science of Taste:


Being a Treatise on its Principles by ‘G.-L.’ (later revealed to be Edward Fraser Gladstone-Lingham), which appeared in the October 13, 1879 issue of the Examiner.

In this review, Allen suggested that Gladstone-Lingham “is one of those writers to whom science mean dogma, and good taste means the inculcation of personal fads. He does not attempt to explain facts; he only attempts to preach an aesthetic creed.”

Allen therefore concluded that Gladstone-Lingham’s book was disqualified from being considered seriously as an aesthetic treatise and should instead be viewed from a “humbler platform, as a work essentially on a level with the ‘Art at Home’ series.”

Here, Allen referred to Macmillan & Co.’s popular series of domestic advice manuals, which were published between 1876 and 1883, and which included volumes by influential designers and critics such as Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, Andrew Lang, Mrs. W. J. Loftie, and Lucy Orrinsmith. While Gladstone-Lingham’s book was almost universally panned, it is telling that Allen, himself having written two scientific treatises on aesthetics, chose to denigrate The Science of Taste by aligning it with texts written in large part by women and aimed at lower- and middle-class female readers.

Like Foster’s bibliography, Allen’s critique seemed to imply that few women writers had anything of value to add to “serious” conversations about art and aesthetics, and that the work that they did produce was inferior in its range and rigor.

60 “The Science of Taste,” Examiner 3747 (22 Nov. 1879), 1515.


62 Ibid., 1348.

While Allen critiques Gladstone-Lingham for not “explaining facts” but rather attempting “to preach an aesthetic creed” in his book, even the most respected male-authored works on taste still did both—even if under the guise of unimpeachable authority. One of the most famous of these was Charles Eastlake’s seminal treatise, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and other Details* (1868), which was first published as a series of essays in the influential progressive women’s magazine, the *Queen*, from 1865-1866. The original publication context, as well as the highly-directive language Eastlake used to address his readers, clearly established women as the intended audience for his *Hints on Household Taste*. Early in the book, Eastlake lamented that “there seems to be a great want of popular information for the guidance of those who have neither time nor inclination to study the abstruse works on various departments of decorative art which have from time to time appeared in this country,” so his aim was “to suggest some fixed principles of taste for the popular guidance of those who are not accustomed to hear such principles defined.” The repeated use of “popular” here indicates at once a level of egalitarianism in making such subjects more available to a greater number of people, but also a patronizing undertone about this populace. “Those” he meant to edify were assumed to be not merely ignorant, but willfully so, and Eastlake implied that the only solution was to

64 Allen, 1348.


Here, Psomiades also notes that “By 1878, a fourth revised and enlarged edition was published,” the same year Haweis’s *The Art of Beauty* was first published.

assign them “fixed principles” that essentially provided a simplified version of conclusions drawn from his own erudition. Eastlake’s distrust of independently-formed opinions on taste was apparent throughout *Hints on Household Taste*, but it was especially evident when he defined the group of people whose impulses were allegedly most in need of checking:

> The faculty of distinguishing good from bad design in the familiar objects of domestic life is a faculty which most educated people—and women especially—conceive that they possess. How it has been acquired, few would be able to explain. The general impression seems to be that it is the peculiar inheritance of gentle blood, and independent of all training; that while a young lady is devoting at school, or under a governess, so many hours a day to music, so many to languages, and so many to general science, she is all this time unconsciously forming that sense of the beautiful, which we call taste—that this sense, once developed, will enable her, unassisted by special study or experience, not only to appreciate the charms of nature in every aspect, but to form a correct estimate of the merits of art-manufacture.67

Eastlake addressed the erroneous assumption that “good taste” develops naturally in the feminine character, and argued that women were especially and irrefutably ill-equipped to assess beauty and taste for themselves without (proper) guidance. He groused that bad taste ran rampant when women allowed improper authorities—or, worse yet, their own feelings—to determine what constitutes beauty. On the one hand, he worried about good taste becoming coopted by consumerism: “It is scarcely too much to say that ninety-nine out of every hundred English gentlewomen who have the credit of dressing well depend entirely upon their milliners for advice as to what they may, and what they may not, wear.”68 On the other hand, Eastlake, repeatedly

67 Ibid., 7.
68 Ibid., 8.
complained about “a class of young ladies,” who have the audacity to hold faulty ideas about what constitutes “elegant” furniture, and “who are in the habit of anticipating all differences in a picture-gallery or concert-room by saying that they ‘know what they like’”—an irrelevant and inane metric by his reckoning.\(^{69}\) Eastlake claimed that women—that “infamous group of aesthetic criminals,” as Schaffer jokingly calls them—lacked both trustworthy intuition and instruction in good principles, so that “the majority of the public, being left completely uninformed of them, is content to be guided by a few people who are themselves not only uninformed but misinformed on the subject.”\(^{70}\) Through the very writing of the periodical essays that made up his handbook, Eastlake established himself as an apparently credible and informed arbiter, thereby asserting his authority over his subject as well as over his (female) readers. The Aesthetic movement, with its privileging of feeling in delineating the beautiful, complicated this notion of the need for external authority. In Beauty’s Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism, Kathy A. Psomiades describes how Aestheticism carved out new spaces for female engagement and expertise, transcending the academy to reach the domestic and commercial realms of women. She explains that critics like Eastlake “suggest that feminine desire needs a code of selection to control it, to bring it under the sway of law and order. But aestheticism itself suggests that desires should be given free rein,” contributing to the “scandalous nature” of the female consumer/aesthete in the late-nineteenth century.\(^{71}\) Yet, there is a

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 13, 147.

\(^{70}\) Schaffer, 189; Eastlake, 8.

\(^{71}\) Psomiades, 149.
happy medium between blindly following the dogma of authorities and the possession of what Walter Pater called “a certain kind of temperament” that renders a person capable “of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects.”\textsuperscript{72} I argue that the work of Mary Eliza Haweis and Lucy Crane represents such a middle ground in how to approach taste and connoisseurship. Combining the descriptive approach of the “Art at Home” series with nuanced discourse on the history of art and fashion and on theories of beauty, Haweis and Crane aimed to elevate their readers’ discrimination beyond the mere whims of fancy or reliance on cut-and-dried templates.

\textbf{“Think—Think—Think”}

Haweis’s \textit{The Art of Beauty} (1878) represents her first and most pointed foray into a practical theory of beauty and the means of cultivating a proper appreciation of it. Her “Author’s Forewords” explains the book’s origins and aims:

\begin{quote}
The basis of the present book is a series of articles which appeared some years ago in ‘St. Paul’s Magazine,’ and which I have often been asked to reprint. I have considerably re-arranged and amplified the subject matter; but whilst I have traversed a wide field, I can lay claim to neither a fixed scheme nor a scientific method. Still I cannot but hope that the following pages may be helpful to some who have never thought much about the influence or the art of Beauty; and I may perhaps add that among the portraits derived from nature there are no photographs from life.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

This short statement is dense with implications: it suggests the popularity of Haweis’s writing based on the site of original publication and on the frequent reprint requests.


\textsuperscript{73} Mary Eliza Haweis (Mrs. H. R. Haweis), \textit{The Art of Beauty}, Second Edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), v.
thereafter, and it revelas the way in which she distinguished herself and her approach from writers who promised to deliver “a fixed scheme” or “a scientific method.” Like Eastlake, Haweis wished to speak to those “who have never thought much about influence or the art of Beauty,” and divided these topics into manageable segments—in this case, four books. The First Book of *The Art of Beauty* covered “Beauty and Dress,” the Second Book discussed “Beauty and Head-Dresses,” the Third addressed “Beauty and Surroundings,” and the Fourth is ambiguously titled “A Garden of Girls.” Schaffer astutely points out that “Haweis comes out of two traditions simultaneously, the Ruskinian-Eastlakean intellectual tradition, to which she consciously and continuously refers, and the women’s fashion magazine tradition, which she unconsciously assumes.” To Schaffer’s observation I would add that Haweis’s invocation of the style and tone of a (women’s) magazine article was far from accidental, but instead was very *consciously* assumed for the female audience she expected. After all, as Cunningham notes, “it is difficult to imagine that the readership was anything other than female.”

In the “Author’s Forewords” Haweis also acknowledged that the content of *The Art of Beauty* was based on her previously published periodical articles (which was also true, if to a lesser extent, of *The Art of Dress* and *The Art of Decoration*)—in this case, she drew almost exclusively from the five articles she published in *Saint*

74 Schaffer, 110.

Paul’s between January 1872 and January 1873. Saint Paul’s (1867-1874) was a shilling monthly launched by the printer James Virtue and “aimed at a wide, general, middle-class readership.” Anthony Trollope served as the magazine’s editor until 1870, shortly after the magazine was sold to Alexander Strahan. While it had always published the work of “high-quality writers,” Saint Paul’s “never brought in sufficient numbers to make it pay.” Mark W. Turner speculates that part of the reason for Saint Paul’s failure to achieve long-term success was its alienation of “a more conventional, female reader of shilling monthlies”: “The lack of women readers was perceived as one of the magazine’s weaknesses by Strahan, after he had taken over as publisher.” Haweis’s articles, then, could have been part of the magazine’s efforts to shift its target market more toward female readers in the early 1870s. Contributions like hers likely also served to counteract the downright misogynistic opinions towards women’s abilities in previous articles such as an article by the artist Henry Nelson O’Neil in the first issue titled “Taste,” which argued that women “have all the feeling necessary for the possession of taste, but they want judgement […] they lack the discrimination to select what is really beautiful.” Haweis’s articles for Saint Paul’s easily read as a


77 Ibid., 553.


79 Henry Nelson O’Neil quoted in Turner, 236.
rebuttal to opinions like O’Neil’s, while they may also have been commissioned to further feminize the contents of the magazine in general.

Haweis’s prose in *The Art of Beauty* still sounded very much like that in the original articles in *Saint Paul’s*, which was no accident: about three-quarters of *The Art of Beauty* was taken word-for-word from these articles. The first, an article in two parts also called “The Art of Beauty,” was completely recycled in chapters of all four books within the monograph. The next, another two-part article titled “Head-Dresses,” formed half of the chapters in the Second Book, and the last, “Dress: Hints to Ladies,” accounted for almost half of First Book. The five chapters wholly new to *The Art of Beauty* are perhaps the most intriguing of all, especially First Book, Chapter 8, “The Reason Why”; Third Book, Chapter 2, “Why ‘Old Things are Best’,” and Fourth Book, Chapter 2, which was left untitled but was part of the almost entirely new Book, “A Garden of Girls.” Out of these new chapters came the sections of Haweis’s text where she most directly tackled the current state of aesthetic education within the larger context of artistic society and addressed these topics most pointedly to her female readers in a way that strongly recalled the language of an advice columnist for a popular periodical, even after having left that context behind.

In an early evaluation of *The Art of Beauty* in the *Contemporary Review*, the anonymous critic praised Haweis’s work, but expressed the opinion that “a more painstaking arrangement of the miscellaneous gathering of learning, and mass of what is, in the main, sound criticism and suggestion, would have made the book a kind of compendium on dress and household furnishing.”\(^{80}\) While it is true that Haweis’s

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organization and coverage were somewhat haphazard, her aim was never to write a
“compendium” like the one the reviewer had wished for—and which might have been
more readily found in Macmillan & Co.’s more practical “Art at Home” series.
Instead, her book sought to give some coverage to the history of dress, some to interior
design, some to art criticism, and some to self-improvement, but altogether to provide
only a sampling of each topic, in order to spur further inquiry and thought. Unlike
Eastlake’s, Haweis’s means of instructing her readers were thoroughly Socratic; she
repeatedly asked them rhetorical questions and encouraged them to be critical and
creative in their responses. Only in this way, she averred, could true taste be cultivated
to take the place of regurgitated maxims and uninformed impulses. Throughout The
Art of Beauty, what Cunningham calls Haweis’s “passion for learning and
scholarship” and her “concern for education” were always at the forefront. 81 Near the
end of the book, Haweis asserted that “The eye so easily becomes educated, the mind
so soon grows alive to harmonies and incongruities, after a short time of devotion to
art-studies,” but she also insisted that her role was secondary to the active engagement
of the reader: “My department is rather to suggest aesthetic interests than to exhaust
the subject, and I claim rather to urge people to use their own eyes and to form their
own taste than to offer mine as a substitute.” 82 While Haweis cannot by any means be
called impartial—with subsection titles such as “Imbecile Ornament” and “Sham
Delicacy,” it was clear most of the time where she stood—she explicitly told the
reader that her taste was not to be merely substituted for the reader’s own and her

81 Cunningham, “Hints on Household Taste and The Art of Decoration,” 165.
book not to be used as a formula to copy. Haweis went to far as to archly add, “Moreover, for those who wish to be led, Mr. C. L. Eastlake has provided a work, ‘Hints on Household Taste,’ which is so extremely good, practical, and interesting, that I cannot do better than recommend it to my readers.” While supposedly recommending Eastlake’s work, she also clearly set herself apart from him and his methods of “instruction.”

In defining herself against critics like Eastlake, Haweis also pushed back against his assumption that female readers—and consumers—needed to be dictated to in order to successfully curb their impulses toward vulgarity. Instead, Haweis urged her readers to consult their own innate preferences in a particularly powerful section titled “What Are We To Do?,” which directly followed “Why ‘Old Things are Best’” in Book Three, Chapter 2. In “Why ‘Old Things are Best’,” Haweis addressed the inclination of design reform to look to the past for better models, but carefully explained that age is not necessarily an indicator of superiority. Having a purpose for making something, Haweis claimed, “is what makes the old work better than the new. Not because it is old merely, not because it is rare, or the fashion, not that there was no bad art in the olden time, for there was then as now every degree of technical skill and knowledge, but because the spirit gave it utterance.” Haweis lamented that in the current age, many artists had lost this most important of purposes and it was therefore no wonder that the general public was ill-equipped to understand what was good or

83 Ibid., vii, ix.
84 Ibid., 242.
85 Ibid., 217-218.
bad about the art that was produced. This disconnect in turn widened the divide
between original art/decoration and refined viewers/consumers, with “the Artists on
one side and the People on the other.” 86 In “What Are We To Do?,” Haweis addressed
this problem, answering the question posed in the title by insisting, “We must educate
ourselves,” and then spending the next few pages answering the subsequent question,
“But how?” 87 Finally, she arrived at her triumphant conclusion:

After all, it is the People that must originate, that must discriminate,
that must encourage Art. It is from the outside world and not from the
schools that originality will arise—an outside world that rejects cut-
and-dried rules. We cannot all hope to develop into Turners, Burne
Joneses, Wagners—nor will ‘kicking over the traces’ make us—yet the
mother of originality is freedom, to think for ourselves and to do as we
like.

What are we to do? In dress, in home-adornment, in every department
of art—regardless of derision, censure, and ‘advice ’—WE MUST DO
AS WE LIKE. 88

Psomiades has parsed this rather radical motto, which she says “reads like Eastlake’s
worst nightmare,” and for Matthew Arnold, “describes the uncultured, unthinking
bluster of the Philistine.” 89 Psomiades counters that, “For Mrs. Haweis, doing what
one likes, within certain limits, is a principle of taste. Even Haweis’s manuals are
meant to function as suggestions, not prescriptions, since each woman who reads them
can combine the information in them with her own impressions to form a taste unique

86 Ibid., 221.
87 Ibid., 221.
88 Ibid., 224.
89 Psomiades, 151.
to her and in defiance to external authorities.\textsuperscript{90} This individuality, in both the creation of art and a viewer/reader’s interpretation of it, lay at the heart of Haweis’s project. She emphatically argued that trusting one’s instincts and daring “to defy precedent and strike out a wholly new line” is not just a privilege reserved for great artists, but a mission that any person who cares for art should take seriously.\textsuperscript{91}

In forming one’s own taste, Haweis suggested that formal schooling is not necessarily any better than independent study, and in fact had a far greater probability of hindering a student’s aesthetic development. She consequently had some comments for the (male) teachers of art who were supposedly instructing the next generation of artists, designers, and decorators:

The Schools of Art in London are useful, but not useful as they might be. Their principle is wrong. Their principle is to instil [sic] into the learner's mind rules, methods, standards. […] I do not believe that original geniuses will spring, or could be expected to spring, from, e.g. the Art Schools of Kensington and Gower Street, though good and careful workers may and do. The pupils are taught too much, not educated enough—for the system rather strives to put in than to draw out what is already there.\textsuperscript{92}

Despite her argument that more study was always a good thing when it comes to art and design, Haweis criticized contemporary art schools for their methods, which supposedly restricted originality as well as good taste in the students’ productions. Haweis’s specific reference to “the Art Schools of Kensington and Gower Street” was therefore not unimportant, given the likely audience for her book. The former referred

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 151-152.

\textsuperscript{91} Haweis, \textit{The Art of Beauty}, 223.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 222.
to the National Art-Training School of South Kensington, which was established in 1863 as part of the South Kensington Museum and described by American critics Clara Erskine Clement and Laurence Hutton in 1879 as “the finest industrial art college in the world” in which “More than a thousand students (women predominating) are fitted annually in all branches of art,--painters, sculptors, engravers, lithographers, architects, and designers, as well as public instructors.”

Meanwhile, Gower Street had an even longer history as a site of female art education: Henry Cole established the Female School of Design (later the Metropolitan School of Art for Females) there in 1852, and in 1871 it became the location of the now-famous Slade School, established in that year and associated with University College London.

Stuart Macdonald reasons that “The demand for art education for the better-class females was so great, especially in London,” and that the prestige associated with the Slade School meant “persons of the middle and upper classes, especially ladies, would prefer to attend the Slade rather than the South Kensington schools where the course was tedious and some of the pupils of rather humble origins.”

Macdonald goes on to describe the range of candidates that entered the Slade in the late-nineteenth-century:

…aesthetic dandies, foreign immigrants, retired officers, debutantes, blue stockings, intellectuals, Bohemians, and, above all, plenty of

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beautiful and decorative Slade girls, in the seventies sporting brightly embroidered pinafores, in the aesthetic eighties and early nineties ‘very variegated in faint-coloured costumes, limply at variance with their high spirits – in greenery, yallery, Grosvenor Gallery tints and hues’, according to one student.95

Reading such descriptions, one might assume that Haweis would have been thrilled that these schools seemed to admit students of her own bent, or that they existed at all. But, as usual, her argument was that the artistic sense is something that must be cultivated from a person’s preexisting abilities and tastes rather than externally foisted upon her. Haweis therefore was not merely criticizing art schools in general, but specifically calling on ones that predominantly admitted women to do better by their female students. The Art of Beauty ostensibly was meant to fill in for such students the gaps left by their formal schooling, as well as to educate (rather than simply teach) other girls and women with no prior training.

If “to think for ourselves and to do as we like” is Haweis’s battle-cry in The Art of Beauty, she was just as adamant that the individual taste thus formed should only be the result of concerted study. For many women, rigorous art education was unattainable, but Haweis insisted that they could endeavor to improve by degrees. Her book not only imparted valuable information, but also modeled various strategies for its women readers to engage with it. In a chapter titled “Practical Hints,” she outlined such a strategic approach.

In the foregoing remarks I do not intend to imply that the Beautiful will be attained by everybody rashly falling foul of everybody else, and by ignorant persons outraging the laws of good taste and feeling in Art more than in other things. Only good taste has a wider margin than some would allow. I have said, educate yourself before you act, and

95 Ibid., 269-270.
this may be best done by studying and comparing various styles, and determining one’s own by careful judgment. Read the hosts of books on art and colour that are published, question nature, study the ‘why’ and ‘how’ which celebrated pictures teach, and think—think—think.96

Her claim that “good taste has a wider margin than some would allow” echoed Pater’s in his Preface to Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873), that “Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative” and “beauty exists in many forms.”97 As with Pater, the crucial point for Haweis was that the assessment and application of beauty must reflect an educated perspective. Her emphasis on “careful judgment” derived from education was clear in the repetition of words such as “studying,” “comparing,” “determining,” and perhaps most important of all, thinking. These words placed the power to judge beauty in the hands (and head) of the reader, emphasizing intellect rather than untutored intuition. Of course, such actions assumed a certain amount of privilege on the part of her readers, and access to resources that would allow them to further cultivate their taste. Cunningham notes that as the daughter of an artist and the wife of a well-known clergyman, Haweis benefited from exceptional access to national museums and libraries, great houses, and private collections; all of these helped to underpin her academic interests, for “Although the field was a relatively new one, this sort of study involved some scholarly activity.”98 Haweis surely knew that many of her readers would not be able to attend the Slade School or to reach the level of self-taught expertise she had, but she insisted nonetheless that they would reap the benefits of better taste after just “a short time of

96 Haweis, The Art of Beauty, 225.

97 Pater, vii, x.

devotion to art-studies.” She did not say that these “art-studies” must be undertaken through studying at a design school, but suggested they might be accomplished by reading some of the books she recommended, viewing the work of the artists she discussed, and visiting the museums she referenced.

“Observe and Decide”

Even if her readers were not able to have direct contact with these other texts and experiences, Haweis’s numerous illustrations offered a serviceable substitute. Some of these illustrations made her own ideas visible, but still more reproduced images from other texts as well as objects and art from the British Museum, the Kensington Museum, Hampton Court Palace, and other public and private collections. Haweis’s illustrations were therefore a mix of her own vision as well as detailed reproductions of the work of others. Each of the line drawings carefully imitated the look of the original medium, whether a woodcut, sketch, painting, or three-dimensional object. This sort of illustrative differentiation was not uncommon in Victorian illustration, and in print culture more broadly, as Rachel Teukolsky has noted. She argues that the writings of progressive Victorian art critics “point to the double valance of visual literacy espoused” by Victorian magazines, which aimed “to tutor the audience in both the canon of art history and in the ability to interpret visual reproduction as ‘beautiful.’”

The Art of Beauty (and Haweis’s other works on art)


100 Teukolsky, 3.

101 Ibid., 19.
certainly accomplished both these ends, particularly by encouraging her female readers to learn about the interpretation of art and decoration from her own varied illustrative examples.

The meticulousness with which Haweis differentiated her illustration styles and identified their references was therefore not merely part of her artistic method but was also invaluable in helping to lend added authority to her views. Indeed, the strategy of citing images to assure historical accuracy was one that Haweis had already deployed in her illustrations for *Chaucer for Children* in 1877, just a year before the publication of *The Art of Beauty*. On the front endpaper of *Chaucer for Children*, Haweis offered a “Key to the Cover,” which parsed each of the Chaucerian vignettes on the purple and gold cover she had designed. Similarly, Haweis included “Notes on the Pictures” and “Notes on the Woodcuts” in the Appendices, in which she explained in detail the historical precedents and inspirations for her illustrations. As Cunningham rightly claims, Haweis’s “expertise gave her the confidence to make authoritative statements […] she was careful to support these with historical justification.”

For instance, in her remarks on her vibrant frontispiece depicting Chaucer’s pilgrims, Haweis commented on the costume of each figure in the following manner:

> Priories and nuns are often depicted in violet, in the contemporary MSS.; I therefore preferred that colour as more agreeable than black. Gloves such as the Nun’s were occasionally worn in the fourteenth century; the present example is taken from the effigy of William of Colchester, Abbot of Westminster, d. 1420. Gloves of fur, for winter wear, were common in the reign of Henry III. The harness of the horses, bells and saddles, the Nun’s chest, the Summoner’s cake

102 Cunningham, “*Hints on Household Taste and The Art of Decoration,*” 164.
(probably ornamental gingerbread), and other details, have also been carefully studied from MSS. and tapestries of the time.  

Mary Flowers Braswell notes that “Haweis’s illustrations are as carefully documented as her scholarship […] a fact which sets her apart from her contemporaries,” as she drew on manuscripts, tapestries, and effigies of the period. In her description of the Prioress and the Nun, and throughout the Appendices, Haweis anecdotally cited such antique and archival materials, as well as the scholarly books and articles she used as references, which were compiled in a list of the “Principle Authorities Consulted in this Book” at the end of the Appendixes. However, Haweis’s drawings themselves were far from amateurish; instead, they successfully evoked both the medieval manuscripts which she had studied as well as the vivid Pre-Raphaelite-inspired illustrations with which Walter Crane so famously furnished his own children’s books, as seen in her illustration of Dorigen and Aurelius from “The Franklin’s Tale” (Figure I).

103 Mary Eliza Haweis (Mrs. H. R. Haweis), Chaucer for Children: A Golden Key (London: Chatto & Windus, 1877), 107.

104 Mary Flowers Braswell, The Forgotten Chaucer Scholarship of Mary Eliza Haweis (New York: Routledge, 2016), 32.
Apart from its colored frontispiece, *The Art of Beauty* lacked both the colored images and the detailed Appendices of *Chaucer for Children*, but it was no less strategic in its use of illustrations and sources. After the table of contents, Haweis...
included a four-page-long index with a description of each of her illustrations, as well as an indication of the collection to which the original belonged, most from the British Museum. In the body of the book, Haweis replicated this information in her image captions, as well as in her discussion of each picture in the text of each chapter. Her motivations in doing so seem clear—she wished to make the book (in the words of William Morris) both useful and beautiful, and able to lend her pronouncements greater authority—yet she remained oddly modest about her own artistic accomplishments as an illustrator. Directly following a full page of sketches reproducing jewelry designs, she averred that “The great difference between Greek and Etruscan work, is not well shown in the present very inadequate drawings. The spirit is always lost in copying, and at no time am I a good copyist; but they will serve to indicate the forms to look for in the British Museum collection, where the varieties should be carefully studied.” Her modesty belies the precision and intricacy evident in her drawings, many of which would not have been out of place in an art magazine of the period. Yet, regardless of the alleged deficiencies of her own visual work, the uses to which Haweis put it were quite evident: she wanted these illustrations to guide her readers in what they should “look for” and “carefully study” at cultural institutions like the British Museum. In doing so, she trusted that she had rendered the basic forms and designs clearly enough that there would be no doubt as to the beauty and good taste of the originals, even if readers were never able to see and study them in person.

105 Haweis, The Art of Beauty, xi-xiv.
106 Ibid., 112.
107 Ibid., 112.
In her discussions of modern dress and design Haweis employed a similar strategy of providing visual exemplars and encouraging her readers to study them,
while still asserting her expertise in historical terms. Haweis frequently provided side-by-side illustrations for comparison, either to juxtapose good design with bad, or to show a visual timeline of the evolution of a certain element of dress. In some cases, she invited the reader to look at several examples, as in her section on “Dresses of Our Day” (Figure 2): “The sketches, given on p. 68, of the ordinary tight bodice, I submit to my readers, that they may decide this question for themselves (See figs. 1 and 2).”

Yet, after urging her readers to differentiate for themselves between an “unpicturesque” bodice and less contrived ones, Haweis stepped in as the expert to comment and to compare each in detail. In other cases, Haweis simply presented a collection of drawings with little or no commentary, as she did later in this chapter (Figure 3), remarking only:

I must leave it to the intelligent student of the proprieties and consistencies of dress to observe and decide between the merits and demerits of the thousand and one other forms of sleeve and bodice that space forbids us to enlarge upon here. When one has once begun to apply to costume the principles whose presence or absence is instantly detected in any other department of art, it is easy to see where there is a falling short or a contradiction, or a manifest impossibility. […] Meanwhile, here are a few distinguishing marks of dresses worn now or very recently, exhibiting some of the best and worst qualities that can belong to a costume.

At this point in the book, Haweis had already explained basic elements of style, women’s natural body shape, and historical fashion trends, so it was now left to the reader to apply Haweis’s teachings. These illustrations represented a visual quiz of sorts, which asked the reader to reflect on what she had learned, and to draw her own

108 Ibid., 67-69.

109 Ibid., 81.
conclusions about which of the dresses displayed the “best and worst qualities.”¹¹⁰ Not only, then, would the reader be able to benefit from Haweis’s own opinions about this dress or that chair, but she could apply these distinctions in judging the images Haweis provided—and, perhaps, when encountering the originals in museums as well as when looking at clothes and furniture in daily life.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 81.
Besides being essential for *The Art of Beauty*’s aims, the quality and quantity of Haweis’s illustrations contributed greatly to its marketability. In her “Forewords” to *The Art of Beauty*, Haweis made sure specifically to “add that among the portraits
derived from nature there are no photographs from life.”¹¹¹ This detail may seem innocuous to readers now, but it actually carried a great deal of meaning in this period. By the mid-nineteenth century, photographic reproduction was commonly used in illustrated magazines, but photographs in their own right were also beginning to vie with engravings and lithographs for visual attention. It is possible that Haweis drew attention to this to account for any potential errors in image-identification, but emphasizing that all the illustrations were drawn by her own hand perhaps also lent the book a decidedly more elevated and “artistic” air. In any case, many reviews particularly praised the illustrations and design of Haweis’s book, including the *Contemporary Review*:

> As the work stands, three hundred pages of letter-press on these subjects, accompanied by nearly a hundred illustrations, cannot be set down as trivial achievement. […] A word ought to be said in praise of the illustrations, which are by Mrs. Haweis herself. Some of those giving examples of past fashions are highly funny. The volume itself is a dainty one in several respects. Its silver binding, delicately-tinted frontispiece, good printing, and thick paper, make it a not bad exemplification of its own title.¹¹²

As this reviewer rightly pointed out, the illustrations in the book not only had a practical application, but have a great capacity to entertain. While Haweis was a devotee of beauty, she seems to have taken great delight in humorous drawing from the time she was a girl, if some of the sketches of her family and strangers in her

¹¹¹ Ibid., v.

surviving papers are any indication. That love of caricature was on display in many of her articles and monographs as well, including *The Art of Beauty*. Illustrations the reviewer in the *Contemporary Review* found “highly funny” certainly would have included some of the more outlandish historical costumes Haweis depicted in Figure 3 and elsewhere, but perhaps also her drawings of follies in current fashion. These include sketches such as the dress style she called “a very ill-shaped wineglass upside down,” which Haweis used both in her first article in *Saint Paul’s* (Figure 4) and in *The Art of Beauty* (Figure 5).

![Image](image_url)


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113 The bulk of Haweis’s papers reside in the Haweis Family fonds in the University of British Columbia Archives, but a significant portion of her juvenilia and select other materials are held by the Women’s Library at the London School of Economics.

Haweis’s strategy of modeling interpretation for her readers took a similar if more direct course in the sections “Why ‘Old Things are Best’,” “What Are We To Do,” and “The Reason Why.” As discussed earlier, these sections addressed several broad and specific questions, some of which seemed merely like rhetorical ones that Haweis created to make her arguments more easily, and some of which she probably had been asked at some point. For example, in “The Reason Why” she combined implied questions with a Socratic approach, beginning by giving two answers to one of these unspoken “whys”: on the one hand, she explained, “The reason why the present tied-in style of petticoat, which recalls, without imitating, the Japanese costume, is good, and when not overdone, pretty—is because it does pretend to follow the natural lines,” but on the other hand, “The reason why the same dress, too tightly tied, is bad, is because when the limbs are deprived of comfort, grace is immediately lost, elasticity of carriage checked, the lines of the legs destroyed, and divers [sic]
uglinesses result.” She once again drove this point home through an illustration of a “good” petticoat and a “bad” one. Haweis went on in the same fashion to show the good and the bad of a naturally small waist versus a tight-laced one, as well as the (de)merits of certain types of hats, coiffeurs, and high heels, often accompanied by images that illustrated the difference. In doing so, Haweis clearly took a stand, but also showed her readers the subjectivity of design and fashion rather than just telling them what was “right” and what was “wrong”; she showed that almost anything that decorates the home or body can be tastefully or vulgarly applied. The key element Haweis repeatedly emphasized was the reader’s ability to know the difference between taste and vulgarity, but she did acknowledge that this was a challenge. After all, “some people instinctively surround themselves with the right colors and appropriate forms” and “the appropriate comes naturally to them,” but she reassured the reader that “Others must study it.” Through study, even a reader without “natural” taste or deep knowledge of aesthetics could confidently come down on the side of good taste, guided by Haweis’s well-informed and good-natured hand.

“A Garden of Girls”

This latter category of girls was Haweis’s particular bugbear, and she took it up in the curious fourth and final section of her book, “A Garden of Girls.” Haweis’s articles on art and beauty in the general interest periodical, Saint Paul’s Magazine, were not terribly partisan in their appeals. Yet, when deciding to adapt them to book form, she fleshed out the parts that specifically invoked female audiences, and she

115 Ibid., 118-120.
116 Ibid., 115.
added this section that explicitly addressed girls: “But after reading the foregoing voluminous advice, my young lady friends may still ask the pointed and practical question—‘How am I to make the best of myself?’ I can only offer a few closing suggestions and episodes in the hope of applying my general rules to particular cases.”117 To do so, Haweis defined two classes of girls, “Class I. Visible,” which is made up of “the handsome, the talented, the brilliant, the learned, and the indispensable in any way,” and “Class II. Invisible,” which included the subdivisions of “The Nonentity,” “The Ill-Educated,” “The Stupid,” “The Ordinary or Plain,” and “The Discouraged.”118 To this second class Haweis’s comments were largely addressed, and she gave an unsparing summary of what each type of girl was like and what (if anything) she could do to improve herself—particularly with an eye towards marriageability. Cunningham briefly covers this “final section of advice to young girls that goes beyond mere clothing” in his essay in the collection Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge c.1790-1900. However, his assessment is limited to what feels like unkind speculation about this section’s possible bearing on Haweis’s difficult relationship with her own daughter, and the remark that “She was several generations too early for the science of child psychiatry and the study of interpersonal relations.”119 I do agree with him that “it seems she is talking like a

117 Ibid., 259.

118 Ibid., 260.

119 Cunningham, “Hints on Household Taste and The Art of Decoration,” 165. Cunningham’s speculation that Haweis may have been using this segment of The Art of Beauty to work out some issues with her daughter, Hugolin, seems unlikely as Hugolin was born in 1873 and would have only been about five years old the time of the book’s publication. They were only later estranged, once Hugolin reached her teens.
mother” in this section, and that, perhaps contradictorily, she “deals with her subjects by character.”120 This combined approach may indeed be “unacademic and prone to oversimplification,” as Cunningham states, but the voice Haweis assumed was actually one that would have been very familiar to any reader of Victorian girls’ or women’s magazines: that of the advice columnist.

Here, again, Haweis mixed genres to bring herself closer to her intended audience, combining fictionalized character studies with the type of advice dispensed in periodicals by so-called “agony aunts” throughout the nineteenth century. In her seminal book, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914*, Margaret Beetham examines the crucial role played by advice columnists, especially pertaining to “chat,” the friendly, confidential tone these columnists adopted towards their readers. Beetham explains that for mid-century periodicals like *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* and *Home Chat*, “the creation of journalistic and editorial personae who addressed the reader as an intimate” helped to further the idea that advice was not just being dispensed from on high, but that the columnist “was involved in an exchange of views and that the reader was a ‘friend’. “121 Haweis too took on this role “as the reader’s alter ego or friend” throughout *The Art of Beauty*, perhaps as a holdover from the tone she used in the periodical articles from which the book derived.122 In fact, significant sections of her discussion of “Pretty and Ugly Women” in “A Garden of Girls” were taken directly

120 Ibid., 165.

121 Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 197.

122 Ibid., 78.
from the first article she had published in *Saint Paul’s Magazine* in 1872, including this very pointed address to the reader: “But it is especially to the plain and to the generally ill-favoured that I address these words of advice and warning, and should Beauty’s self find a few useful hints, I see no reason why she should not avail herself of them.” In the later book, she expanded upon her advice to this type of “Invisible,” and went so far as to claim that “THE PLAIN GIRL is the most promising of the group. People can’t make themselves witty if they were born with a sluggish circulation of blood to the brain; they can’t be clever if the cerebral works have been left out of their composition; but they can by the aid of dress make themselves ornamental if they are plain. In light of Haweis’s extensive discussions of historical dress and illustrations of contemporary fashions (as in Figures 2 and 3) earlier in the book, her advice here seemed to tacitly endorse the study of magazine fashion pages as well as high art paintings.

Such a conclusion thus thoroughly tethered “A Garden of Girls” to *The Art of Beauty* as a whole, and also conveniently aligned with her admiration for elements of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic art and style. After having assured the Plain Girl that there is hope for her, Haweis enthusiastically proclaimed, “Morris, Burne Jones, and others, have made certain types of face and figure once literally hated, actually the fashion.” The features prized by Pre-Raphaelite painters—“Red hair […] a pallid

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125 Ibid., 274.
face with a protruding lip […] Green eyes, a squint, square eyebrows, whitey-brown complexions”—created a new category of mid- and late-nineteenth century beauty that Haweis embraced.126 Along with the immeasurable quality of “character,” these now-fashionable features might be considered more alluring than the long-held ideal of “pink-cheeked dolls.”127 She explained this shift by giving a rousing defense of “those dear and much abused ‘præ-Raphaelite’ [sic] painters, whom it is still in some circles the fashion to decry,” but whom she insists “are the plain girls’ best friends” because they taught the British public to widen its accepted definition of beauty.128

All the ugly flowers, all the ugly buildings, all the ugly faces, they have shown us have a certain crooked beauty of their own, entirely apart from the oddness which supplies the place of actual beauty sometimes, and is almost as attractive. There is a charm in low colouring, in straight or irregular lines, in restful tame faces per se. The præ-Raphaelites [sic] have taught us that there is no ugliness in fact, except deformity—nay, even that sometimes is not ugly, cela dépend, for things are all comparative. Do not some people admire a cast in the eye, a slight goitre, even a limp? There is a 'beauté du diable,' stricken with imperfection, but with its own charm.129

Here, Haweis elaborates on the ways in which visual culture had turned the tide of opinion to favor the kinds of faces, designs, and colors associated with Pre-Raphaelitism and with its successor, Aestheticism. As a result, she proclaimed that “Now is the time for plain women,” and that such women should take advantage of the

126 Ibid., 274.
127 Ibid., 274.
128 Ibid., 273.
129 Ibid., 273-274.
newfound recognition of their “comparative” beauty.\footnote{Ibid., 274.} She argued that by judicious styling, a woman can evolve “from being an ‘ugly duck’” to “a full fledged swan!”\footnote{Ibid., 274.} Her celebration of “ugly faces,” “crooked beauty,” and features “stricken with imperfection” seems remarkable for the era, as is her belief in the radically transformative power of good taste and tasteful dress.\footnote{Ibid., 274.} Her implication is that art, and a thorough understanding of how to implement it in personal styling, could be a major factor in the social mobility of a young woman.

Haweis went on in a similar fashion about each of the other types of “Invisible” girl, counseling them on how to look more agreeable to others and to be happier in themselves. Schaffer proposes that “this language comes straight out of the advice columns in women’s magazines”—only adopt Pre-Raphaelite or Aesthetic dress and be transformed!\footnote{Schaffer, 110.} However, Haweis was not always so prescriptive, instead choosing to show the reader the many different options available to her, in addition to the one for which Haweis had been advocating all along. Haweis gave her justification for this stylistic choice: “Alas, one can never tell a girl what to do if she lack the instinct. It will be perhaps better to demonstrate in pictures of Invisible women what qualities render a woman Visible, by a sort of reflective system akin to that of Pepper's Ghost.”\footnote{Haweis, \textit{The Art of Beauty}, 265.} While Haweis promised to “demonstrate in pictures” how each type of girl

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  \item \footnote{Ibid., 274.}
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  \item \footnote{Schaffer, 110.}
  \item \footnote{Haweis, \textit{The Art of Beauty}, 265.}
\end{itemize}
could be improved, there were no prescriptive illustrations in this section. Instead, Haweis offered a projection of what could be, as Pepper’s Ghost did. Developed in 1862 for a stage adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain*, this theatrical illusion used light and mirrors to make a ghostly figure appear on stage.\(^\text{135}\) So too did Haweis conjure up images of each type of “Invisible” girl, as evidenced by the aforementioned advice to “The Plain Girl.” After defining them, she set these “types” loose in two settings, “An ‘At Home’” and “A Garden Party” (from which the title of Book Four was presumably taken).

As in her reference to Pepper’s Ghost, Haweis once again emphasized the importance of sight, and of judging from what one sees, in her invitation to the reader: “We must, as I promised, demonstrate by the test of comparison, we may see demonstrated at every ball, tea fight, or other garden of girls, how the Visible girls obliterate the Invisible ones, and how the Invisibles only serve to set off the Visibles. Come with me to a couple of very ordinary parties, in-door and out-door, where both may be seen *in extenso*, and you can prefer which you please.”\(^\text{136}\) In each scenario, Haweis assumed a sort of gossipy voice and a fly-on-the-wall position to enumerate the various ways in which each girl in the scene embarrasses herself, whether in dress or demeanor, or in conversation. In “A Garden Party,” Haweis appeared more or less as herself, a lady guest invited into the home, but in “An ‘At Home’,” she began, “Suppose me to be an eligible suitor. I go one evening to visit a family of sisters…”\(^\text{137}\)


\(^{137}\) Ibid., 276.
The (female) reader is therefore prompted to consider the imaginary girls’ appearance and behavior (along with her own) through the eyes of two different audiences—one, a leader of tasteful society, and the other, a potential matrimonial partner—whom she would do well to impress. Kirby-Jane Hallum has argued in *Aestheticism and the Marriage Market in Victorian Popular Fiction* (2015), that a middle-class woman’s desirability as a potential wife depended in large part on her ability to appropriately cultivate her beauty. Haweis’s advice in *The Art of Beauty* in its entirety, and in “A Garden of Girls” in particular, seems to support Hallum’s assertion that “nineteenth-century society encouraged unmarried women to develop domestic and artistic talents in order to market themselves as understatedly attractive wives and home-makers.”

These traits, taken together, would allow a wife to serve “as evidence of [her husband’s] tastes or his cultural and social capital.” In this way, Haweis’s advice supported both that of the “agony aunt” in contemporary periodical literature and of the etiquette manual, even as the majority of her book worked in a different genre altogether.

While most of “A Garden of Girls” was addressed to the girls themselves, Haweis did include “One word to mothers,” warning them that “If there be one who seems to recognise in one of these pictures a daughter of her own, let her conceal it from that daughter.” Haweis noted the distinct damage that such a “taunt” could do

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139 Ibid., 9.

140 Haweis, *The Art of Beauty*, 293.
to a sensitive child, and claimed “It is the mother who can best cover the child’s
deficiencies, take her part, help her to shine in some way or other, encourage her to
make the best of herself, and dress her well—or, better, let her dress herself after the
impulse of her own character.” Haweis proposed that “Every girl has her points, but
they must be found” and this could only be accomplished “if she would make an effort
to improve, or if someone would take the trouble to develop her.” In these
statements, Haweis placed the responsibility for improvement squarely in the hands of
girls themselves—the perceived “shrewd reader”—and only afterwards enlisted
mothers as possible aids.

While the identity of the average reader of The Art of Beauty may only be
conjectured, Haweis’s book had many admirers in artistic and literary circles. One of
these was M. H. Towry, the pen-name of Mary Helen White (1849-1923), whose
Spenser for Children (1878) was part of the same Chatto & Windus Children’s Library
as Haweis’s Chaucer for Children. In a 10 January 1879 letter to Haweis, White
wrote:

I have been wishing to tell you that among my friends and
acquaintances I found the ‘Art of Beauty’ eagerly read and appreciated
and a desire expressed for ‘more.’ May I venture to suggest that a
‘Manual on Dress’ from your pen would meet with a welcome, and I
am sure a wide circulation if published in an inexpensive form for I
observe that the price of ‘The Art of Beauty’ causes it, in many cases,
rather to be lent from one to another + consequently read more hastily
than if purchased. My sister and I after studying it, designed and

141 Ibid., 294.
142 Ibid., 292.
143 Ibid., 291.
ordered a dress in which we endeavored to carry out your principles, + the result was most successful—the garment is made of slate colored velveteen and satin.\textsuperscript{144}

In this response from a specific reader, White not only confirmed that Haweis’s book was received with interest and that its advice was actually applied, but also suggested something significant about the book’s circulation through and among audiences of women. As White noted, the initial run of \textit{The Art of Beauty} was not as large as it might have been, and the numerous illustrations meant the book had to be priced at the not inconsiderable sum of ten shillings and sixpence.\textsuperscript{145} Both these factors necessitated exchange among families and groups of friends, but also seemed to prove that the networks of women dedicated to female improvement and taste-making for which Haweis had advocated actually existed—and that they were facilitated by popular print culture. Despite the potential obstacles in terms of its in availability and price, \textit{The Art of Beauty} was popular enough to go into a second edition by 1883, probably in response to the success of Haweis’s \textit{The Art of Dress} and \textit{The Art of Decoration}, and perhaps to compete in the marketplaces with newer volumes, such as Lucy Crane’s \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste: Six Lectures} in 1882.

\textsuperscript{144} MS letter, M. H. White to Mary Eliza Haweis, 10 January 1879, Haweis Family Fonds, Mary Eliza Haweis sous-fonds, Box 4, Folder 7 (4-7), University of British Columbia Archives.

\textsuperscript{145} This pricing information appears on page 11 of the List of Books published and sold by Chatto & Windus included at the end of the 1883 edition of \textit{The Art of Beauty}. Notably, the list indicates that \textit{The Art of Decoration} was the same price as \textit{The Art of Beauty}, but Haweis seems to have taken White’s advice to heart regarding \textit{The Art of Dress} as it was sold in two much cheaper formats: the small version with an illustrated cover sold for just one shilling, while the cloth limp version was priced at one shilling sixpence.
High Art vs. “High-and-dry Art”

Unlike Haweis, who had built a readership for her books by first circulating some of her ideas about aesthetic matters in popular periodicals, Lucy Crane had the more difficult task of attracting to her public lectures an audience that knew neither her nor her perspectives in advance. Crane opened her introductory lecture in *Art and the Formation of Taste* with a similar rationale to Haweis’s: “I am sensible that the title of my lectures will have been likely to produce a variety of expectations in the minds of my intending hearers, and perhaps will lead in the end to a corresponding number of disappointments; for the lavish use of the word Art in these days has given rise to such a number of false impressions, that the word seems to need defining afresh.”¹⁴⁶ This redefinition was the challenge that Crane set for herself in her lecture series, in which she offered an overview of decorative and fine arts, and of the ways in which one might come to an appropriate understanding and appreciation of each, while drawing from a range of art critics and historians, including William Morris, John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Johann Joachim Winckelmann. On the whole, her work was much more focused and firmly grounded in aesthetic theory than Haweis’s, which was just as likely to reference a Worth advertisement as Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species*. As the only woman listed as an art critic in the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1887, Crane’s legacy was cemented by her final, scholarly lectures, rather than by any of the other art or writing she produced over the course of her life.¹⁴⁷ Even so, her work only really became somewhat known


¹⁴⁷ Hyde.
after her death, at which point her brothers published her lectures and periodical reviews of the collection did much to ensure that Crane’s ideas reached a broader reading audience. Yet Crane was heralded as “one of our latest teachers on art” in a highly positive December 1882 review of *Art and the Formation of Taste* in the *Academy*, and the collection of her lectures did present a valuable contribution to these discourses on art—one that has just recently begun to be explored in modern scholarship.

Crane’s previous work, and her various readerships, sheds light on her project for the lectures included in *Art and the Formation of Taste*, and how these lectures sought to engage adolescent female audiences in particular. In the introduction to *Art and the Formation of Taste*, Crane’s brothers described her as having “showed considerable taste and skill in drawing and colouring,” studied and performed music with great proficiency, and “cultivated herself, too, in literature, and practised, both in prose and verse.” However, they also note that “her fastidious taste and devotion to her professional work prevented her from completing much in this direction.” It is only through a passing reference in the introduction to “early work” she contributed to the *Argosy*, that two periodical publications may even be located and attributed. The


149 Besides Nunn’s essay, notable studies of Crane include Linda Cluckie’s *The Rise and Fall of Art Needlework: Its Socio-Economic and Cultural Aspects* (2008) and Kimberly Wahl’s *Dressed As in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (2013).

150 Lucy Crane, *Art and the Formation of Taste*, x.

151 Ibid., x-xi.
first, excerpted in the introduction to *Art and the Formation of Taste*, was a Chaucer-inspired poem called “Margaret,” which appeared in the 2 March 1868 issue of the *Argosy*, and was accompanied by an illustration of a medieval lady and her lover done by Walter Crane.\(^{152}\) The second is identified by Crane’s brothers only as an essay published in the *Argosy*, but I believe it may be an article titled “The Art of Listening” attributed to “L. C.” in the 1 June 1868 issue.\(^{153}\) This article offers guidance to young women on how and when to best practice the different “styles” of listening, on phrases and facial expressions that may be tastefully employed, and on a hostess’s role in managing conversations among her guests. The article recalls Crane’s matter-of-fact yet good-humored voice, her frequent literary examples, and her particular interest in reaching out to the young—all traits that were on full display in her lectures, as well as in some of her other work. In a 2014 article addressing Lucy Crane’s important translation of the Grimm brothers’ *Household Stories* (1882), Paola Spinozzi remarks

\(^{152}\) [Lucy Crane], “Margaret,” *Argosy* Vol. 5 (2 March 1868): 280-281.

On page 97 of his memoir, *An Artist’s Reminiscences* (1907), Walter Crane explains that Mrs. Henry Wood (who acquired the *Argosy* in 1867) asked him to design the wrapper for the magazine’s revival, and to provide the frontispiece for each installment of its first serial, Wood’s novel *Anne Hereford*. Walter Crane’s illustration for Lucy Crane’s poem was unusual as issues of the *Argosy* usually contained only one illustration per issue: the frontispiece accompanying the serial. It is possible that Walter Crane used his clout as the magazine’s then-primary illustrator to make an exception for his beloved sister. After 1868, neither Walter nor Lucy Crane seem to have contributed to the *Argosy* again.

that “A gift for fluency […] stands out as Crane’s main quality.”\footnote{Paola Spinozzi, “Accurate reproduction, ingenious representation: Lucy and Walter Crane’s \textit{Household Stories, from the Collection of the Bros. Grimm} (1882),” \textit{Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry}, 30.3 (July–Sept. 2014): 262.} Crane had carefully tailored her translation of these selected fairytales to retain as much as possible the meaning from the original German and to be easily understood by children, all the while ensuring that her translation was also well-suited to being read aloud—no mean linguistic feat. Lucy had also collaborated with Walter Crane on several children’s books, writing verses and music to accompany his colorful illustrations. Morna O’Neill notes that these and the other widely popular “Toy Books” illustrated by Walter Crane in the mid-1860s through 1880s “infused traditional tales with a new elegance and introduced the young reader to the Aesthetic movement.”\footnote{Morna O’Neill, “Walter Crane,” \textit{The Yellow Nineties Online}, ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Toronto: Ryerson University, 2013), accessed 17 June 2015, <http://1890s.ca/HTML.aspx?s=crane_bio.html>.

With the lectures that became \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste}, Lucy Crane took a similar approach: she carefully considered her somewhat older audience’s level of knowledge as well as how these readers would use her lectures in navigating both classic art and the newest trends, all the while developing their own sense of aesthetic judgment.

By the time Crane began preparing her lecture series, treatments of art and aesthetics were popular and plentiful on both sides of the Atlantic. A February 1883 review of \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste} in the American periodical the \textit{Critic} lauded Crane’s book as “one of the best of several excellent books by women on the same general subject that have recently appeared. Perhaps it is, for a general reader, the
This is high praise considering that Crane’s book followed closely on the heels of influential texts such as Emilia Dilke’s 1879 *The Renaissance of Art in France* and Haweis’s 1881 *The Art of Decoration*, the third in the latter’s series of books on style. Yet, in the review from the *Critic*, what was most interesting was not the overall evaluation of the book’s merit, but the reviewer’s specification that it was best suited for a “general reader”—thus, for someone without a prior background in art. The earlier review in the British periodical, the *Academy*, emphasized that Crane’s “aim, seemingly, is to preach high art, and yet show that it is not necessarily high-and-dry art.” These and many other articles commented repeatedly on the practicality and approachability of Crane’s prose, praising “her rare mixture of simplicity and earnestness” in these “easy lectures on art and taste.” Pamela Gerrish Nunn suggests that, in the Victorian era, “art had a cultural status which, at its highest, presumed a level of education and experience precious few women could claim.” Because Crane came from a family of artists and moved in contemporary art circles, she was perhaps one of the few women writers who had achieved this elevated standard in both art instruction and theory. So, even though her lectures might have appealed to a “general reader,” Crane was not the type of “generalist” critic that Elizabeth Prettejohn

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159 Nunn, 108.
has described, who would have aligned herself with the “uninformed spectator” to draw purely emotional or moral conclusions about art.¹⁶⁰

Like Haweis’s *The Art of Beauty*, Crane’s *Art and the Formation of Taste* had a firm scholarly grounding, but nonetheless, Crane seemed uninterested in speaking exclusively to her educated peers, instead seeking explicitly to impart her knowledge to novices. A 24 May 1883 review in the American periodical the *Independent* makes this point strongly:

Miss Crane was a lady whose tastes reached out in various directions. [...] Her enthusiasm, however, was mainly expended in her chosen work of teaching, and these lectures everywhere betray the true born schoolmistress. It is this ability to project herself, her theories or principles of art into the minds of her pupils or hearers that gives this volume its value as a text-book.¹⁶¹

While the claim that Crane was ever a “schoolmistress” is not substantiated, Crane did work as a governess starting in her late teens, a choice that initially seems to have stemmed from the family’s straitened circumstances following the death of her father in 1859.¹⁶² However, as the reviewer suggests, teaching became a calling for Crane, beyond the homes and boarding schools in London where she likely performed most of her formal pedagogical work. In a 1965 article on Crane in *Country Life*, Bea Howe claims, “She gave up school-teaching and became a lecturer—and a pioneer one at that—on art matters for women. There was no one better qualified, one feels, than


Lucy.” 163 This generous estimation of Crane’s skill and influence may be somewhat inflated, while Howe downplays the fact that the two professions of teaching and lecturing were never truly divorced for Crane. Crane’s collected lectures, even more so than Haweis’s articles and books, were first and foremost teaching texts. Consequently it should come as no surprise that Crane’s original audience was comprised of female students, as her lessons were specifically crafted for that group.

The lectures eventually published as *Art and the Formation of Taste* had their origins in several talks that Crane gave in the classrooms of her friend, Elizabeth Janion, who ran a school for young ladies in Kensington. 164 Unlike John Ruskin’s 1866 *The Ethics of the Dust*, in which he collected a series of fictionalized dialogues based on his visits to Margaret Alexis Bell’s school for girls in Winnington, Crane’s lectures remained more or less in the form heard originally by actual audience members, many of whom are identifiable today with the help of historical records. The 1881 census record reveals that, in that year, Janion’s school at 3 Lansdowne Road housed (in addition to herself), at least two assistant teachers, a half dozen staff and servants, and some two dozen girls, most in their mid- to late-teens. 165 From the information available, it seems that Janion’s school was one of those “small private boarding schools” run by “widowed and orphaned gentlewomen,” as described by


164 Crane, *Art and the Formation of Taste*, xii. It is unclear whether Crane herself ever taught at Janion’s school in a formal capacity, or whether she was simply invited as a guest lecturer.

Sally Mitchell, “where middle-class girls often spent a year or two in their teens.” This supposition is reinforced by the girls being listed as residents with the occupations of “scholar” or “pupil,” while their places of birth are mostly outside of London—many hail from northern England and one even from “A Philippine Island.” These details firmly mark Janion’s students as middle-class, since working-class girls at this point were unlikely to receive secondary schooling—in fact, elementary education up to age ten only became compulsory in 1880—and upper-class girls were still often taught at home by private tutors and governesses. That Crane’s ideas on taste and art were first presented to this small and identifiable cohort of middle-class adolescent girls and young women (and their teachers) gives credence to the notion that these lectures were welcomed by the pupils’ parents for reasons involving class-based aspirations, since training in art was seen to be a part of a lady’s education.

Like Haweis’s The Art of Beauty, Crane’s lectures did not intend to impart a complete or even unique theory of art—something with which certain reviewers took issue—but instead had three aims in helping audiences grapple with the idea of art in general: first, to name and discuss some exemplary works of painting, sculpture, and architecture to illustrate her points; second, to make difficult critical texts, including visual ones, more accessible to young audiences; and third, to encourage these


168 Mitchell, 78.
audiences to use both observation and study to develop their “Artistic sense” since “it is not enough to know what [one] likes, but what is \textit{worth liking}.”\textsuperscript{169} Near the beginning of her fifth lecture, titled “Sculpture and Architecture,” Crane confessed that her thoughts on these and other topics were necessarily meager: “my aim is merely to make a beginning of knowledge and interest in these things in the minds of those in whom it is not already made; to construct a framework, however slight, into which those who are beginning to care for and to study Art may fit what they learn and observe.”\textsuperscript{170} Crane reiterated this point in regards to her sources in “Lecture II: Decorative Art—Form”:

In spite of all that is written and spoken in these days about Taste and Art, there is very little authoritative teaching on the subject, and this must be my apology for so constantly quoting from Mr. Morris and Mr. Ruskin. We indeed owe everything we learn and know about Art to them [….] The opinions and views of each on the points we have been considering are, however, not very accessible. Until the other day, of Mr. Morris’s few lectures only one has been printed under his superintendence (though a book of them is shortly to be published), and Mr. Ruskin’s writings can never appeal to the world at large, their real worth and excellence being, at least for the majority of readers, obscured by much that is visionary and unpractical.\textsuperscript{171}

Crane went on to say that in referencing Morris and Ruskin so often, “I seem to be helping clear up their meaning, and at the same time to enforce my own.”\textsuperscript{172} She represented herself as a mediator, a vital role that was not and could not be filled by

\textsuperscript{169} Lucy Crane, \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste}, 5; 41.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 197-198.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 93-94.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 94.
either the “original genius” of Morris or the “life-long study” of Ruskin.\textsuperscript{173} While such traits made these men “qualified to tell us what the Arts really are, and how we are to think and feel about them,”\textsuperscript{174} she recognized that most readers—and perhaps most young women readers, in particular—required help in parsing key passages of their work in order to understand and appreciate its significance, as well as to apply it to their daily lives. Crane certainly did not market her lectures—as Charles Eastlake did in his own writings on art—as substitutes for firsthand encounters with the texts on which she drew, but instead as vehicles for a sort of crash-course on the principles of beauty, art, and taste, while nevertheless urging her listeners to delve into the originals, whether by Virgil, Goethe, or more contemporary theorists.

“A complete & consecutive form”

Had she lived longer, it is possible that Crane might have transformed her lectures into a series of articles for a general-interest or women’s periodical—as many other writers, including Haweis, did—through which her ideas would have reached a far greater number of people. However, it is perhaps just as likely that she might have never have published them at all, either in article or book form, instead limiting the audience just to the women and girls for whom her lectures were particularly prepared. Nevertheless, even without publishing her ideas on art in a magazine herself, the periodical press did play a significant role in disseminating them. Books such as Crane’s often generated an immediate response from reviewers, who in many cases used the authors’ ideas to heighten their own role in educating the public. Crane’s

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 93-94.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 94.
aims might seem fairly unobjectionable, but some of the reviews of her book in the year or so after its publication blatantly ignored her stated intention to reach a particular kind of audience and, perhaps somewhat unfairly, assessed Crane’s efforts by standards that were not reflective of her actual project. These reviewers focused on what was lost in translating lectures to the printed page, even though this was a posthumous publication, and the author had no role in its production. An April 1883 review in the Art Journal voiced reservations about Art and the Formation of Taste, as well as about the hasty publication of these lectures so soon after Crane’s death:

It is clear that the writer was gifted with a refined sense of beauty, and that she was earnest in her pursuit of Art. But we could wish that this pious memorial of her had taken some more enduring form. The lectures, when copiously illustrated, as they appear to have been, and addressed to provincial audiences, were not without certain value; but the expediency of publishing them in their present shape may well be doubted; they are not in any sense original, nor is the form into which they are thrown one which is likely to secure the public ear.¹⁷⁵

By the time she undertook her northern lecture tour in the final years of her life, Crane was indeed seeking “to elaborate her scheme, and to appeal to larger audiences,”¹⁷⁶ but she did little to reframe her language or material. She continued to refer to examples that student listeners would have learned from “history books” at school and scarcely needed be reminded of, while also acknowledging the current limits of their knowledge; she urged them to consider photographic reproductions of paintings or samples of embroidery she had brought with her, and also asked them for feedback: “I will beg my audience to help me in the clear expression of my meaning by taking note


¹⁷⁶ Lucy Crane, Art and the Formation of Taste, xii.
of anything I may seem to leave obscure or otherwise unsatisfactory.” These sorts of vestiges of the lecture platform left her book vulnerable to criticism from reviewers, especially from those who might have been engaged themselves in writing about aesthetic matters for the press and looking to affirm their own authority.

Perhaps the seemingly clumsy references, throughout the book, to the original audience were the result of hasty editing on the part of her brothers, but perhaps they were purposefully left intact. A letter of 20 April 1882 from Walter Crane to George Lillie Craik, a partner in the publishing house of Macmillan and Company, strongly indicates the latter:

I was on the point of writing to you with reference to the lectures on which my sister was engaged. It occurred to me that it would be very desirable to publish them not only for their own intrinsic value & interest, but as the best & most permanent memorial of their author.

The MS appears to be left in a complete & consecutive form, & I thought it would [be] well to engrave some of the illustrations my sister was in the habit of using to accompany each lecture, as they add to the attractiveness of the book, & also to give a portrait as a frontispiece.

Written just weeks after Lucy’s death, this letter shows that the Crane brothers had essentially decided to publish her lectures as she left them, while also attempting, as much as possible, to replicate her original audiences’ experience for the book’s readers. Walter Crane therefore suggested that “It would be well to have, at least, one illustration to each lecture, or perhaps a heading & tailpiece. My brother & I would

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supply what was necessary in this way, & I could write a few words of preface.”

In doing so, he presumed that the “intrinsic value & interest” of the lectures would translate well to a printed volume, in direct opposition to the *Art Journal* review’s complaints about “the form into which they are thrown.”

As evidenced by Lucy Crane’s choice to embark on a lecture tour on aesthetic topics, she too clearly had assumed that the lectures could appeal to a larger audience, even though they had originally been designed for a narrower one. In an article describing one of Crane’s final lectures in Leeds, the reporter noted that the event had been sponsored by the Yorkshire Ladies’ Council of Education and that the composition of the audience was “principally ladies.” In addition to public audiences such as this one and Janion’s female pupils, Crane had also presented her lectures to private audiences like those that assembled to hear Crane speak at the houses of friends such as Dinah and George Craik. In each case, those Crane called her “intending hearers” in the first lines of her introductory lecture were likely to be primarily women and girls. They remained her intended listeners throughout and were the only “public ear” she was truly interested in securing. As the reviewer for the *Art Journal* noted somewhat disapprovingly, the lectures only really worked as lectures, given in person to what he called “provincial audiences,” when Crane could show

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid.; “Reviews,” 132.

181 “Art in the Homes: Miss Lucy Crane’s Lecture,” *Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 2.17 (1 May 1882): 149.

182 “Reviews”: 132.
and point to the images and objects alluded to in the book (many of which were not illustrated by Walter and Thomas Crane). Crane’s repeated direction to her audience was to pay earnest attention to art, studying it and what others have written about it, and thereby to form one’s own educated opinion. Lucy Crane was then, not simply an art critic—indeed, she offered little in the way of original analysis (as the reviewer for the Art Journal correctly stated). Nonetheless, her lectures did represent a significant accomplishment: they reached an audience that had not often been singled out for attention at public events by other contemporary educators on aesthetics, although it was one often addressed in periodical literature. In the lectures that later became Art and the Formation of Taste, Crane devoted herself not to establishing a monolithic standard of taste, but to assembling a variety of thoughts on art and its purpose, and to laying them out for her audience to hear, and in many cases, to see.

**Lucy Crane’s American Legacy**

While Haweis followed The Art of Beauty with scores of additional articles on decoration and dress, as well as three additional books on those subjects, Crane’s work obviously did not continue. However, that did not mean that it ceased to be important and influential, both in Britain and America in the years following Crane’s death. In fact, several years after the 1882 Macmillan edition published in England and America, another edition was published in 1885 by the Chautauqua Press, the publishing arm of the then-flourishing Chautauqua movement. Chautauqua was a program that originated in upstate New York in 1874 and which combined adult education with entertainment through lectures, retreats, and reading courses. In 1885, the Chautauqua Press inaugurated the first of its yearly Garnet Series, which included Crane’s book and three others, Michael Angelo Buonarroti, Sculptor, Painter,
Architect. The Story of his Life and Labours by Charles Christopher Black, Readings from Ruskin: Italy, and Readings from Macaulay: Italy. This Garnet Series was meant to “form an able and interesting history of art and artistic matters and men, with special reference to Italy,” according to one review. An article in the July 1885 issue of the Chautauquan magazine noted that this first series was “a special course, for the reading of which the Garnet Seal (a new one) will be given to all graduates, and may be won by those undergraduates who are able to do more than the Required Reading for each year.” The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, “a four-year course of study culminating in a diploma,” was structured around “a required four-book annual reading list [like the Garnet Series] supplemented by the organization’s publication, the Chautauquan.” This structure subsequently became the inspiration for the British program, the National Home Reading Union, which was founded in 1889 and aimed to replicate Chautauqua’s success in guided reading and popular education. Both programs particularly hoped to serve uneducated working people and young people just out of school—who were seen as the most vulnerable to “the corrupting influence of cheap literature”—by offering them educational opportunities


that aspired to impart “the college student’s general outlook upon the world and life.”\textsuperscript{188} Such educative aims were also mirrored in progressive periodicals such as the British \textit{Atalanta} (1887-1898), whose “Scholarship and Reading Union” was similarly designed to encourage self-culture and independent scholarship in its young women readers. The \textit{Chautauquan}’s review of the first Garnet Series, which suggested that Crane’s book “may be won” by high-achieving students of the current course, confirmed the supposition made by an 1883 article that \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste} had “a future as a prize-book.”\textsuperscript{189} Prize books were often awarded in scholarly competitions such as those sponsored by the aforementioned programs or periodicals, as well as in schools. In this way, Crane’s book fit well into its new publication and reading context, and seemed to have once again found her intended audience.

Considering her short life and little-known career outside of London, Crane’s name and reputation do not seem to have been the most important factors in the marketing of her book, yet they were significant to its adoption into the canon of art manuals. Following the release of the 1882 Macmillan edition of \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste} in America, a reviewer for the \textit{Art Interchange} began his review of the book not with a discussion of its worth but with a description of Crane’s qualifications. This reviewer reasoned that, “In the case of Miss Crane these personal particulars are of value, inasmuch as to the American public, at least, she is a stranger, and readers have a right to demand that would-be instructors shall present their

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{189} Vincent, 592; Philip Gilbert Hamerton, “Art Chronicle,” \textit{Portfolio: An Artistic Periodical} 14 ([April?] 1883): 86.
Meanwhile, the 1885 Chautauqua Press edition of Crane’s book preserved all six of her lectures, but omitted the introduction by her brothers which had provided such context and qualifications. Instead this edition substituted a preface by Charles Goodrich Whiting, whose own credentials were identified on the title page simply as “Springfield (Mass.) Republican.” Rather than suggesting a purely geographical or political allegiance, this note actually referred to the newspaper, the Springfield Republican, and to Whiting’s role as its long-time and highly-respected literary editor. In his five-page introduction, Whiting spends a page or two praising Crane’s approach, but uses the remaining pages for his own ruminations on the nature of art. In fact, his introduction was so vague about Crane herself that some readers wrote to Whiting asking for more information. In an article titled “Miss Crane on Art,” published in the Chicago-based University magazine on 5 December 1885, one ‘M. E. B.’ included an excerpt from Whiting’s response to such a query. In it, Whiting stated, “I regret that in publishing Lucy Crane’s lectures in the ‘Garnet Series’, the Chautauqua people should have left out the interesting biographical sketch of Miss Crane which was prefixed to the English edition,” and then supplied those facts from his own copy. ‘M. E. B.’ added his or her own summary and positive assessment of

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190 “The Library,” Art Interchange 10.7 (29 March 1883): 78.

191 According to the article “Talk About Books” in the October 1885 issue of the Chautauquan, Whiting also wrote the introduction to Black’s Michael Angelo Buonarroti (1885). In addition to such introductions and his work as an editor, Whiting was a respected nature writer and poet, but in current scholarship, his name is most often invoked as the author of many detailed reviews of the work of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American writers including Emily Dickinson, Henry James, and Herman Melville.

Crane’s book, and concluded by quoting first Crane and then Whiting: “‘The true artist raises the age up to his level.’ And what she says of the true artist may well we said of her own writings—for pages are indeed ‘worthy of Ruskin and more consistent.’” Nearly a decade after Art and the Formation of Taste was first published, Crane seems to have fulfilled this promise and had become a recognized name in North America. In an 1892 article titled “Our Attitude Toward Art” in the American magazine Belford’s Monthly and Democratic Review, the prolific Canadian art critic, Bernard McEvoy, gave the following advice to anyone hoping to improve their artistic sense:

> Read poetry, read Ruskin, read William Morris and Lucy Crane. Look at beautiful things, and let us talk together in a friendly way […] For it is only by patiently following out the lessons which are to be learned in such company as this and amid the lavish grace of nature that, step by step, we can come to understand the inspiring spirit of beauty, of which all true art is the development and the flower.  

McEvoy echoes Crane’s ideas about what to do and read to form good taste, while also ranking her as the equal of the (male) authorities she had recommended in her lectures. Whether many readers really did care about the Chautauqua Press edition’s lack of biographical information, or whether Crane’s name was actually widely recognized by 1892, is debatable. Yet, the afterlife of Crane’s text was undoubtedly more widespread and significant than has been previously acknowledged. Through its promotion by journalists in American and British periodicals, and its re-release under

the Chautauqua banner, Art and the Formation of Taste extended its reach to many would-be amateur art students across the Atlantic.

In keeping with the independent study touted by the Chautauqua movement, Crane’s text did not so much teach taste as encourage her audience to develop it. Her initial audiences in Britain were composed largely of middle-class women and girls, and there is reason to believe that they also comprised a good number of those who read the American editions of her lectures. Crane’s common-sense approach to “a proper cultivation of the artistic sense” and her trust in her untutored readers’ intelligence and discernment were considered “something unusual and noteworthy” about her book, which many others on the subject lacked.195 Nevertheless, the reviewer for the Art Journal complained that by the end of Crane’s book, “we are not furnished with what we chiefly want—some clear guidance towards better things. ‘The hungry sheep look up and are not fed’.”196 This criticism, of course, missed the point. Art and the Formation of Taste was neither a work of original criticism nor a prescriptive how-to guide, and any pupil hoping to have her opinions fed to her would have been sorely disappointed: the “sheep” were not to look not up, but to stand up, to become fully human and autonomous, and ruminate on what they saw. As Crane herself put it, only by carefully questioning our own reactions and feelings “can we learn a true appreciation of the excellent in works of Art: their greatness cannot be expected to descend to us,—we must rise to it.”197 Mary Eliza Haweis, writing just a

196 “Reviews”: 132.
197 Lucy Crane, Art and the Formation of Taste, 159.
year earlier, makes a strikingly similar statement near the beginning of her third manual of taste, *The Art of Decoration* (1881):

> There is nothing so foolish, nothing so destructive to the germination of real taste and art-feeling in England, as the sheeplike English inclination to run in a flock. Instead of using their brains and eyes, people cry out, ‘What shall I do?’ or worse, ‘What do other people do?’ and directly they find out they do it too, like babies. […] Why will not people use their own faculties, and judge for themselves what looks best here or there, and so contribute something new and individual to society?" \(^{198}\)

At the end of this book, Haweis likewise “prepared for the inevitable cry: ‘We have not been told what to do’, ” with the arch reply “Would not such dogmatism be in total contradiction to my first principles, most indolent lambs?” \(^{199}\) Here, Haweis almost seemed to predict the response to Crane’s work by the reviewer for the *Art Journal*. With his poor choice of allusion, this reviewer had rather haplessly embodied the very lack of independent thinking that Haweis—and Crane—battled against.

While Haweis and Crane’s books were undoubtedly popular, the articles that the former drew from, and the reviews that both books engendered, helped to spread their ideas and teachings much further than the monographs alone could have done. Their work inspired and influenced many of the discussions about the nature of art and taste that proliferated in the popular press of the late 1870s into the 1880s. Perhaps more importantly, though, Haweis and Crane gave their readers a common vocabulary and a set of analytical tools with which to assess the artistic elements and principles


\(^{199}\) Ibid., 362.
that would become increasingly relevant in the dawning age of transatlantic Aestheticism.
Chapter 3

AESTHETICISM ACROSS THE POND:
PATIENCE, PRUDENCE, AND OTHER VIRTUES

In the years that followed the publication of Haweis’s *The Art of...* trilogy and Crane’s *Art and the Formation of Taste*, the signs of Aestheticism—both as markers of excess and good taste—would proliferate across the pages of periodicals in Britain and American, where women and girls were increasingly encouraged to “read” them and to distinguish among them. Arguably, one event that spurred much of this transatlantic exchange was Oscar Wilde’s American lecture tour of 1882, but the art and philosophy that had inspired the Aesthetic movement and Wilde’s own ideas had a longer and steadier flow of influence than the flamboyant version he represented at the time. Writing nearly a decade after his visit to America, Wilde reflected in “The Decay of Lying”:

Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life. We have all seen in our own day in England how a certain curious and fascinating type of beauty, invented and emphasised by two imaginative painters, has so influenced Life that whenever one goes to a private view or to an artistic salon one sees, here the mystic eyes of Rossetti’s dream, the long ivory throat, the strange square-cut jaw, the loosened shadowy hair that he so ardently loved, there the sweet maidenhood of ‘The Golden Stair’, the blossom-like mouth and weary loveliness of the ‘Laus Amoris’, the passion-pale face of Andromeda, the thin hands and lithe beauty of the Vivian in ‘Merlin’s Dream’. And it has always been
so. A great artist invents a type and Life tries to copy it, to reproduce it in a popular form, like an enterprising publisher.200

The “two imaginative painters” were, of course, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, and the Pre-Raphaelite-infused Aestheticism (and aesthetic types) that Wilde helped to “bring” to America was indeed eagerly reproduced “in a popular form” by many enterprising publishers on both sides of the Atlantic. Jonathan Freedman notes that Aestheticism was already a topic of discussion for Americans long before Wilde’s visit, partly through the republishing (or pirating) of British works in American periodicals and partly through the writing of American writers with ties to Britain.201 As thoroughly as Aestheticism was exploited and mocked by many in transatlantic periodicals in the 1870s and 1880s, it was also embraced and promoted by numerous writers who contributed to these magazines.

This chapter examines the ways in which Aestheticism was characterized and employed by female fiction writers for American audiences in the year leading up to Wilde’s 1882 lecture tour, and in the year that followed. In addition to drawing on the work of Mary Warner Blanchard, Jonathan Freedman, Kathy Alexis Psomiades, Talia Schaffer, and Margaret Stetz, this chapter particularly builds upon Sigrid Anderson Cordell’s Fictions of Dissent: Reclaiming Authority in Transatlantic Women’s Writing of the Late Nineteenth Century (2010), which bridges the gap in scholarship between


studies of British female aesthetes’ critiques and revisions of mainstream aestheticism, and the concurrent aesthetic discourses conducted by American women writers. While Cordell’s book focuses on the genre of the short story, I focus on serialized novels and novellas, and their reception in the periodical press. The fiction of women who might be classified as “forgotten female aesthetes” (to use Shaffer’s term), as well as prolific writers who contributed to popular magazines—Margaret Hunt, Mary Rose Godfrey, Lucy C. Lillie, Josephine Pollard, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, among others—forces us to reconsider the prevailing ideas about how American readers were introduced to and asked to respond to British Aestheticism. Furthermore, these authors’ interpretations of aesthetic women in their fictions complicate the assumption that Aestheticism was largely approached with satire or scorn throughout the 1880s, and instead show these women writers imagining, sometimes quite seriously, alternative forms of aesthetic femininity and national identity.

British Aestheticism began to make its way to America soon after it sprang up in London, but once it arrived, it developed slightly differently. Michèle Mendelssohn remarks that the British and American versions of Aestheticism both “responded to late nineteenth-century realignments in gender and class, and that Aestheticism itself was an agent for social change”; yet “American Aestheticism held a much wider appeal and was proposed in a more popular, smilingly consumerist form.” American Aestheticism’s alignment with consumption seemed to run counter to the high-minded


203 Mendelssohn, 13.
version of Aestheticism, but those features also made it more approachable. In this way, Kathy Alexis Psomiades claims that “aestheticism becomes a media phenomenon and a lifestyle choice to which the ‘serious’ or ‘high art’ aspects of the movement become a kind of authoritative credential, a sign of authenticity, a substance to which the surfaces might refer,”\(^{204}\) while the consumerist aspects assured that aesthetic items and ideas were not just limited to artist’s studios and exclusive galleries, but were also readily to be had by anyone with an interest and some pocket change. Psomiades furthermore argues that “The figure of the female consumer of aestheticism becomes a standby in the popular press as aestheticism makes inroads into fashion. […] Femininity itself can still in this period represent both high art and mass culture, both the privacy of art and its sensationally public commodification, both the beautiful inviolate art object and the rapacious female consumer.”\(^{205}\) These two models of Aestheticism (and aesthetic women)—one associated with high art, and one with mass culture—therefore developed almost simultaneously, rather than purely as a “trickle-down” effect, just as British Aestheticism rarely outstripped Americans’ engagement with it.

While Wilde’s lecture tour alone might make 1882 seem a pivotal year for Aestheticism, the two years before were when its momentum truly built. A rage for blue and white china had gained traction in the early 1870s and by the end of that decade, the walls of the Grosvenor Gallery were hung with aesthetic paintings and its halls were traversed by “intense” men and women—and George du Maurier’s

\(^{204}\) Psomiades, 13.

\(^{205}\) Ibid., 13.
caricatures of them had been splashed across the pages of *Punch* for almost as long. Charles Algernon Swinburne composed aesthetic poetry, John Ruskin and Walter Pater published treatises on aesthetics, Mary Eliza Haweis wrote handbooks of taste and dress, and lectures on decoration were given in cities across Britain—all years before Wilde set foot on American soil and declared his genius. Yet 1881 was arguably the year that Aestheticism came to a head and began to make a distinct mark in the transatlantic popular press, not just in cartoons and art criticism, but in fiction and drama. Most notably, in London, F. C. Burnand’s farce *The Colonel* opened at the Prince of Wales Theatre in February 1881, and Gilbert and Sullivan’s immensely popular comic opera *Patience* followed in April 1881 at the Opera Comique. Christopher Breward explains that like du Maurier’s drawings, these plays took on what were seen as the follies of Aestheticism: “Both productions went to some lengths to capture an authentic sense of artistic clothing and interiors, which, while intending to lampoon, did much to circulate and popularize a minority taste.” Meanwhile, Henry James’s novel *The Portrait of a Lady* began simultaneous serialization (October 1880-November 1881) in the British *Macmillan’s Magazine* and the American *Atlantic Monthly* and was soon followed by the book publication in late 1881. James’s novel is perhaps not as overt about its Aestheticism as the aforementioned plays, but James certainly does toy with some of the movement’s tenets and characteristics through the progress of his heroine, Isabel Archer.

In her 1976 article in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* titled “The Aesthetic Movement and *The Portrait of a Lady*,” Sara Stambaugh notes that “the debt which *The Portrait of a Lady* owes to the Aesthetic Movement has not generally been recognized,” even though “The proper attitude toward art is sometimes cited as the central lesson Isabel Archer must learn.”

Stambaugh claims that many critics have rightly identified the depraved Gilbert Osmond as the primary aesthete in the novel, but argues that other aesthete characters like Ralph Touchett and Fred Rosier are presented positively, because they are also kind and generous in addition to being cultured and discerning. His cold nature aside, Osmond’s aesthetic leanings are not what make him a villain, but rather that his connoisseurship is all a pose; for this reason, it has been more than once suggested that James intended Osmond to be a jab at Wilde. Stambaugh concludes, “It would appear that [James] intended his ‘great novel’ as a study of false aestheticism, not as a vulgar and ephemeral attack upon the Aesthetic Movement.”

James’s novel was famously the inspiration for Vernon Lee’s 1884 aesthetic satire *Miss Brown* (which she dedicated to him, quite against his own wishes), and perhaps served to influence some of the other (satiric) treatments of the movement in the years following the publication of *The Portrait of a Lady*; one of these, Lucy Cecil Lillie’s *Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London* (1882), will form the basis for this chapter’s case study.

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208 Ibid., 500.

209 Ibid., 502.
In James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, Aestheticism adds an additional layer to Isabel’s choice between her artistic British cousin Ralph Touchett and the cosmopolitan American expatriate Gilbert Osmond, each of which represents a different model of masculinity and morality—and a different strain of aesthetic engagement. As Stambaugh asserts, part of Isabel’s task in choosing between the two men is also to learn “to discriminate among varieties of aestheticism.” Isabel herself is not presented as an aesthete, as her actions do not necessarily involve her personal aesthetic beliefs and style in ways that female aesthete characters generally do. However, stories involving such women were fairly plentiful in periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic in the early 1880s, despite being often overshadowed by their more well-known male counterparts. While Schaffer and Psomiades have made groundbreaking recoveries in their work on British female aesthetes, and Cordell’s study of transatlantic women writing on aesthetics and Aestheticism has made significant inroads into American conceptions of the movement, the cultural contributions of *fin-de-siècle* woman writers deserve additional study. Future scholarship must therefore further delve into aesthetic fiction, specifically in American contexts, as this chapter aims to do. After all, almost all short stories and novels that dealt heavily with aesthetic topics were set in London, yet the physical printings of these texts often had origins and destinations elsewhere. Accounting for the workings of the periodical publishing industry at this time therefore allows for a richer understanding of the transatlantic transfer and exchange of aesthetic ideas and reveals the types of texts commonly encountered by Victorian readers, but less often covered by scholarship on this era.

210 Ibid., 500
In order to understand why specifically the female art-devotee was such a figure of fascination in American popular print, even before *Patience* and Wilde arrived stateside, I believe it is important to recover and consider lesser-known fictions of Aestheticism that were being written and published at this time, particularly by women writers who may have aligned themselves with the artistic principles of their heroines. Such texts present a movement that was quickly proliferating across national and class borders, and thus out of the circles of men like James’s and du Maurier’s aesthetes and into various complex feminine spaces. This chapter will particularly focus on the character of the female aesthete in popular fiction published in American periodicals, both in the selective reprinting of works by British authors, as well as in stories by native writers. The frequent use of dual female protagonists in such fiction let authors compare and contrast the personalities, predilections, and fates of each woman against a shared aesthetic backdrop. In some cases, there is a clear indication on the part of the author as to which heroine’s outcome is preferable, but when assessing her attitude towards Aestheticism, the judgment is not always as clear. Like “the proper attitude toward art” that Isabel is tasked with learning in *The Portrait of a Lady*, these serialized novels and novellas perhaps also aimed to teach artistic distinction, not through the choice of a suitor, but through the heroines’ own relationships with Aestheticism and artistic culture. Written by women authors, with aesthetic women as protagonists, and largely for women readers, many of these texts take a surprisingly refreshing approach to female relationships; relatively untrammeled by male aesthetic objectification, they explore feminine and perhaps even proto-feminist approaches to art. The (re)publication of such fiction sheds new light on the
parts of Aestheticism (and aesthetic womanhood) that presumably appealed to American audiences, and subsequently influenced the movement’s wider reception.

**Fictions of Aestheticism and Female Aesthetes**

In order to trace the appearances and circulation of fictional female aesthetes, one must examine the different networks of reviewing and approval at work in American periodical culture, as well as how demand shaped what sorts of British texts and topics—including Aestheticism—made it into print. Stories and essays published in British periodicals, both for general and specifically for female audiences, were often reprinted in American periodicals, often with little lag-time—and sometimes without the author’s or initial publisher’s consent. By 1880, works of fiction dealing with Aestheticism that first appeared in London-based magazines like the *Pall Mall Gazette, Temple Bar, and Belgravia* were within several months republished in widely-read American periodicals like *Appleton’s Journal, Littell’s Living Age,* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. However, due to the lack of copyright protection during this time, the most popular American magazines usually relied on pirated British fiction to fill their pages. One example of such transatlantic “borrowing” is *The Beautiful Miss Roche* by Mrs. G. W. Godfrey (Mary Rose Godfrey) (1843/44-1888), a novella first published in three parts in *Temple Bar* over March, April, and May 1881. The first part reappeared in the Boston-based *Littell’s Living Age* on 14 May 1881, presumably overlapping with the last part becoming available in Britain, or mere weeks thereafter. Godfrey was a prolific author of sentimental fiction, whose stories often featured independent, pure women who were ruined by the folly and faithlessness of their
fathers or husbands. Godfrey’s earlier novel *Auld Robin Gray* (1879) was praised by the London-based *Morning Post* in the 3 February 1879 issue: “Her style is excellent, and reminds one in its humorous and pathetic touches of some of the best efforts of George Eliot.” Most of her novels were first published in the respected literary magazine *Temple Bar* and then also picked up illegally by American periodicals; several were also part of American publisher George Munro’s popular Seaside Library series, which issued bootleg novels “in cheap, newspaperlike format.” Despite being successful enough to be published in British periodicals and pirated by American periodicals and book series, Godfrey’s work was not often reviewed by contemporaneous newspapers or magazines, and has been wholly ignored by modern scholarship. Yet her fiction may serve as an illustration of the ways in which British Aestheticism was beginning to enter the Anglo-American consciousness as an influential presence, even if by less-than-legal means.

*The Beautiful Miss Roche* revolves around Dorothy, a simple, pretty girl who befriends the dangerously beautiful Theo (Theodora) Roche. That friendship, however, causes problems with Dorothy’s stiff fiancé Raymond, who despises Theo as much as he is fascinated by her. *The Beautiful Miss Roche* ultimately is a story of

211 Godfrey’s husband, George W. Godfrey (often also listed as G. W. Godfrey) was a playwright of some moderate success.

212 “The Magazines,” *Morning Post* (London) (3 February 1879): 7. This snippet of praise was also used to accompany advertisements for Godfrey’s 1883 novel *Unspotted from the World* in London periodicals including the *Athenaeum, Academy and Literature*, and *Literary World.*

female friendship, with Raymond rounding out the love triangle, but mostly he seems to serve as a catalyst and canvas for Dorothy and Theo’s changing relationship.

Notably, both women are aesthetic types: Dorothy is the fashionable woman who surrounds herself with aesthetic environments and people, while Theo is an aesthetic painting come to life. Dorothy counts among her friends Octavia Seton, who is “given to the reading of poetry and the adoration of art,” and Stracey Jones, “a young man, with long hair and a poetical talent, who is given to a somewhat rhapsodical form of conversation—to talking of music as if it were painting, and painting as if it were music, in a way that is a little confusing to people who are not accustomed to the South Kensington school of modern art-jargon.”

In case her companions were not enough of an indication, Dorothy clearly has aesthetic leanings based on the description of her parlor, which Stracey Jones notes that “he superintended the transformation of”:

It was a fantastic little room, adorned—as Dorothy devoutly believes—according to the very strictest principles of high art. The prevailing tint is of peacock-green, the dado indeed is an artistic arrangement of real peacock feathers. The furniture is mainly composed of old-fashioned chairs, tables, cabinets, and convex mirrors, long ago condemned by Dorothy’s grandmothers as useless rubbish, and relegated to a lumber room, but—as Dorothy has been assured by many connoisseurs—of undoubted antiquity and priceless value.

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215 Ibid., 408.

216 Ibid., 405.
Dorothy’s room is consummately Aesthetic, and Godfrey only omits the otherwise ubiquitous sunflower and blue china in her comprehensive summary of aesthetic decorative motifs. Despite the supposed goodness of Godfrey’s heroine, there is a significant amount of tongue-in-cheek tone in the pronouncement that these items are “of undoubted antiquity and priceless value,” and a knowing sarcasm towards Dorothy’s devout belief in the assurances of supposed connoisseurs, which Mary Eliza Haweis would likely also regard with suspicion.

In her 1880 novella A Little Bohemian, Godfrey is similarly critical of the new trends in decoration and taste, and spends several pages on the topic in a conversation between her young hero, Captain Cecil Annesley, and his elderly mentor, Lady Belminster. First, the narrator mocks Annesley’s allegiance “with the modern mania which they who partake of it call aesthetic” due to his perfunctory admiration of what he calls Belminster’s “beautiful old plate.” Godfrey’s narrator quickly undercuts Annesley’s assessment:

It is of a dingy and indefinable blue and white pattern; its very cracks are yellow with age. But Annesley, like some other young men of his time, thinks he knows all about china, and having given half an hour’s study to a book about it, and picked up a few old bits when he was abroad, knows at least enough to be certain that he cannot be very wrong in being sure that whatever looks very old and very ugly is a remarkably beautiful specimen of its kind.

Lady Belminster’s sitting room is described as “the ghost of one of those rooms of which modern rooms are but the burlesque”; she herself claims it is “old and worn-out,

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217 Mrs. G. W. Godfrey, A Little Bohemian (Part II), Temple Bar 60 (October 1880): 205, 204.

218 Ibid., 204.
and I am old a worn-out, so we match,” instead of a new aesthetic room made to look old. Belminster argues that the “modernization” of old houses to include anachronistic details “would be like paint on an old woman’s face,” and fumes over a neighbor’s newly-built Queen Anne house, which she calls “a wretched imitation of the follies and ignorance of my ancestors.” The fact that Lady Belminster’s room looks the same as it did hundreds of years ago is not a stylistic choice but an economic necessity:

…sometimes, when I come home from visiting my fashionable aesthetic friends in Kensington, with their blue plates from Tottenham Court Road—three-and-sixpence apiece—their dingy-coloured walls and rugs, their spindle-legged chairs—also from Tottenham Court Road—I think if it were not that my grandmother hung those plates with her own hands, and that if the tapestry and the chairs were gone there would be no money to replace them, I’d pull down the plates and smash them myself, and burn the rest.

The mocking attitude of Godfrey’s narrator towards Aestheticism, coupled with the outright scornful tone of Lady Belminster, is perhaps a commentary on her generation’s general mistrust of the tastes of the young: it may even parallel the paradigm shift represented by the eligible Anneseley’s courtship of Daisy Browne—the “Little Bohemian” of the title—the charming daughter of an itinerant tradesman. Besides Daisy’s roots, the specter of commerce certainly hovers over this scene: Lady Belminster invokes shops on Tottenham Court Road, perhaps referring to Maple & Co., James Shoolbred & Co., or Heal’s, some of the largest retailers of home

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219 Ibid., 205.

220 Ibid., 205.

221 Ibid., 205.
furnishings for the middle classes by the 1870s. Lady Belminster furthermore mentions her friends having paid specific and not insignificant amounts for these various “artistic” items, which seems to further highlight the disdain towards the purchase of what she perceived as frivolous and inauthentic objects.

This sentiment is paralleled by George du Maurier’s cartoon *Aesthetic Love in a Cottage*, published in *Punch* in early 1880, at the height of the artist’s series of aesthetic satires. In this particular cartoon, an aging aesthete tells her friend Mrs. Cimabue Brown that she and her young artistic fiancé will live in “dear old Kensington” after they are married since “everything is so cheap there you know—peacock feathers only a *penny a-piece*!” Appearing frequently in the company of Maudle or Postlethwaite, Mrs. Cimabue Brown seems to have been du Maurier’s favorite female aesthete character; in this image, her gawky figure and prematurely lined face are played for even greater comedy against the legitimately elderly Miss Bilderbogie. Such portrayals of female aesthetes made them not only seem foolish and vapid, but also made them *look* ridiculous and unattractive, in much the same way that Aesthetic objects and practices were often ungenerously evaluated and represented in the popular press during the early 1880s.

Dorothy’s Aesthetic room seems to contain many of the type of antiques that Lady Belminster owns as well as the types of fashionably Aesthetic items that would thrill Mrs. Cimabue Brown and Miss Bilderbogie. Yet Dorothy’s admiration of them is not as severely chastised; it only serves to suggest that she might be a bit naïve, both

222Cohen, 51.

in her taste and her trust in other people. While Dorothy’s use of Aestheticism seems more decorative than anything else, Theo seems to exist as an aesthetic object, a Pre-Raphaelite stunner in all but name. Godfrey’s narrator assures the reader that “Artists and sculptors have agreed in pronouncing her one of the most beautiful women of her time,” but goes on to describe her as a very specific type of beauty:

Her rare pale skin, of the colour and texture of a cream rose-leaf [...]
Her mouth and throat and chin moulded on the grand old lines that the Greeks gave to their goddesses [...] Her eyes—long and soft, seldom smiling, never brilliant—yet held beneath their heavy lids a dangerous fascination [...] And her hair—there were people in the world who maintained that her hair was her chief beauty—thick and rich in quantity, growing from a low broad brow that ought to have betokened a noble nature, and of a colour that is rarely seen on the head of a living woman [...] a rich madder-brown, most like the colour of a chestnut newly burst from its pod, and the best of all settings for a grand fair face.224

The woman who emerges from this description is a dead ringer for Alexa Wilding, a favorite model of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s, who was featured in some of his most famous paintings, including Lady Lilith (1864-1868), Venus Verticordia (1864-1868), Sibylla Palmifera (1866-1870), Veronica Veronese (1872), and La Ghirlandata (1873). Godfrey surely had these paintings in mind when she wrote her description of Theo, who embodies the Pre-Raphaelite strain of Aestheticism without having to make any further effort to align herself with it: she exists as “Beauty’s body,” admired for her looks as much as she is mistrusted for her motives. Even so, Theo also very conspicuously styles herself as aesthetic: “her costly tea-gown of some rich oriental silk and rare confusion of laces is strikingly different from the sober winter gowns of

the other women.” The narrator insists that “above and beyond all this, she is peculiar. There is something about her, indefinite, intangible, which sets her apart from all the other women in the room,” yet this insistence on difference and apartness serves less to reinforce Theo’s mesmeric beauty and more to emphasize her loneliness.

In a pivotal conversation near the beginning of the story, the women meet in Dorothy’s aesthetic parlor to discuss why Theo cannot seem to garner respect and affection from anyone but Dorothy, particularly from Raymond. Theo bitterly states that she has always been subjected to “misinterpretation,” that the only thing anyone sees is her appearance, and so they never think anything else of her than that she is using it to seduce the unsuspecting. She is unwillingly and simultaneously cast as both muse and femme-fatale, no matter what she does or thinks or feels. In the end, she plays that role in order to save Dorothy’s marriage to Raymond, throwing away her chance at happiness with him and tying herself to the brutish Lord Aveling instead. Ultimately, the fashionable aesthete is able to live happily, even if hers is a somewhat tarnished happiness, while the aesthetic stunner sacrifices herself to ensure another’s domestic bliss.

The appearances of female aesthetes in more mass culture settings, particularly when transplanted from London society, leave open new possibilities for behavior and representation. Yet Godfrey’s take on the different types of aesthetic women is a rather bleak one, particularly in view of the extreme peculiarity of Theo: she can only

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225 Ibid., 407.

226 Ibid., 407.
do good by pretending to do bad, and even then, can do no good for herself. Anne Anderson outlines the paradox of aesthetic femininity: “For some, the High Art Maiden represented the highest evolutionary type, a woman perfected by art or culture, while for others the process of acculturation resulted in a mental and physical breakdown, affecting female sexuality and reproductivity and even threatening social stability.” Anderson goes on to argue that it was the material trappings of Aestheticism that lent the female aesthete her identity, but which also rendered her as a powerful consumer and taste-maker—and, therefore, a threat to patriarchal dictates. The stereotype that emerged of the women who aligned themselves with Aestheticism was that they were diametrically opposed to the “normal” progression to marriage and motherhood, either by becoming “sexless” spinsters or women of dubious (sexual) reputation. Godfrey’s Theo certainly fits this bill, but Dorothy does not; the characterization and fate of the latter defies the spinster/femme-fatale dichotomy and suggests the possibility of overlap between aesthetic and mainstream Victorian femininities. While Godfrey was British, and Dorothy and Theo presumably were too, the republication of this and other aesthetic fiction by Godfrey on both sides of the Atlantic suggest readers’ demand for such stories, and perhaps even inspired later iterations of female aesthetes who likewise were neither wholly high-art nor conventional.

Transatlantic Aestheticism, Transatlantic Harper’s

The American writer Lucy Cecil Lillie’s *Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London* (1882) takes this alternative approach, suggesting that it is possible to live happily as an aesthetic woman, but that not everyone is suited to such a commitment. Early in the novella, Lillie introduces the reader to her eponymous character, a vivacious young American whose extraordinary beauty causes her to become a sensation in London’s artistic circles. Lillie relates how, “After the fashion of among the ‘aesthetes’ of the day, [Prudence Marlitt] was likened to every type of beauty since the days of our first parents. She was a Titian, a Bordone, a Botticelli—even a Sir Joshua and a Greuze.”⁹²² Yet, Prudence herself reflects, “The jargon of London society meant nothing to her. Was she a Bordone? a Titian? She may have heard the terms, but they implied nothing beyond civilities.”⁹²⁹ Starting with this evocative scene, the novella traces Prudence’s ascent from her humble roots in Maine to the pinnacle of London’s aesthetic society, achieved with the help of her fellow American expatriate, Helena Armory—and much to the chagrin of her straitlaced but adoring childhood sweetheart, Jonas Fielding. Helena becomes Prudence’s mentor in all things aesthetic while also acting as her foil: the former is a thoughtful critic of a movement in which she is nonetheless fully invested, whereas the latter is a rather oblivious interloper who adopts it as a surface-level fashion which she eventually discards as easily as she does her artistic dress. In the end, Prudence rejects not only the British Aestheticism in which Helena tutored her, but also the bleak life Jonas has offered her

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²²⁹ Ibid., 454.
as a New England clergyman’s wife, choosing instead to become a lady of fashion and marry a *nouveau riche* New Yorker.

While now largely forgotten, Lillie’s novella was heralded by one early review as “the first novel given by aestheticism to literature,” a distinction one might assume belongs to Vernon Lee’s *Miss Brown* (1884), or perhaps Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), rather than a work by a comparably minor American writer.  

Scholars such as Colleen Denney and Michèle Mendelssohn have mentioned *Prudence* in relation to satirical treatments of Aestheticism, but there has otherwise been little scholarly discussion of Lillie or of the novella.  

*Prudence* requires further attention for the ways in which Lillie contributes to the construction of British Aestheticism from an American standpoint at the moment of its first reception in the early 1880s, and particularly for how she uses her female protagonists to comment on the movement and to illustrate its different classes of participants—American as well as British. Lillie’s novella was also uniquely positioned to engage with both American and British audiences due to the overhauling of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* shortly before it was serialized therein.

Lillie was born Lucy Cecil White (circa 1851-1855), the youngest daughter of James W. White, a lawyer and later Judge of the Superior Court of the city of New York, and Rhoda Elizabeth Waterman, a philanthropist and sometime writer. Lucy’s

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siblings included Thomas W. White, who “conducted for fully a quarter of a century” the drama section of the New York Herald; Rhoda E. Mack, who ran “one of the most attractive literary and social salons in our metropolis”; and Jenny C. del Bal, who had married a wealthy Panamanian man and was known for her work with the poor in his native country. The White family, particularly its women, were interested in matters of both charity and art: for instance, their mother was highly involved with the Sisters of Charity and other New York institutions that cared for needy women and children, but was also known by some as “the Sévigné of the United States” due to her “extensive correspondence with the learned, the gifted, and the distinguished in this country and in Europe.” In October 1877, Lucy Cecil White married John Lillie, then an editor of the New York Galaxy magazine and later a translator of French texts. Their engagement was remembered in an article in the Literary World titled “A Lily Party”:

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232 James L. Ford, “Dramatic Criticism,” Munsey’s Magazine 24 (April-September 1903): 249-253. Lillie’s brother Thomas W. White is not to be confused with Thomas Willis White, the founder of the periodical the Southern Literary Messenger, to which Edgar Allan Poe contributed in the mid-1830s.


235 John Lillie had worked for the Galaxy from at least 1871 and had worked as an editor since at least 1875 until it was absorbed into the Atlantic in 1878. Since Lucy contributed several pieces to the Galaxy under her maiden name in the mid-1870s, it is possible she and John met while he was editing that magazine, and this professional acquaintance led to their courtship and eventual their marriage.
As it was known that the engaged pair were to be at the usual ‘Saturday night’ at the house of Miss Booth, of Harper’s Bazar, a few literary friends extemporized a ‘lily party.’ Entering the parlor in a troop, each threw in the lap of the surprised lady the emblem of their congratulations, adding an appropriate word or quotation. The ladies bore in their hands almost every variety of lily from calla to tiger, and from daffodils to the lilies of the valley. Among other aesthetic novelties, was a sheet of Japanese paper embossed with huge white lilies, such as is used in Japan to enclose wedding gifts, and a perfumer’s box of ‘Lillie—White’ from the hostess.\(^{236}\)

Leonée Ormond suggests that “The lily seems to have succeeded the sunflower as the chief aesthetic motif around 1880” but that before this “It was also a common motif with Rossetti and the later Pre-Raphaelite disciples” in the 1850s through 1870s.\(^{237}\)

This scene points fairly clearly to the couple’s cutting-edge artistic leanings, and their friends’ delight that the combination of their names so fortuitously matched the type of flowers that were fast becoming staples in the aesthetic visual lexicon.

Based on Lucy and John’s writings in the years following their marriage and the scant records of their movements, the couple seemed to have spent much of their time in England in the late 1870s and early 1880s. In fact, “In December 1880 Harper’s inaugurated an English edition under the editorship of John Lillie,”\(^{238}\) who held the post until Andrew Lang took over in 1884. The historic record says little more about John Lillie or his work as editor than merely this—indeed, there is some confusion as to whether Lucy’s husband and this editor are even the same person.

\(^{236}\) “A Lily Party,” 477.

\(^{237}\) Leonée Ormond, George Du Maurier (Pittsburgh.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 298.

However, the couple’s move to Europe shortly after their marriage, the fact that they both contributed to *Harper’s* before 1880, and their involvement in various literary and artistic circles in New York and London makes an editorship for John seem conceivable. As mentioned in “A Lily Party,” the Lillies were friends with Mary Louise Booth, who was the editor of *Harper’s Bazaar* from 1867 to her death in 1889. They were also good friends of the American artist Edwin Austin Abbey, who had worked at Harper and Brothers under the art direction of Charles Parsons since 1871, and who provided some of the images for Lucy’s 1880 *Harper’s* article, “A Moorland Village,” and illustrated her book *Mildred’s Bargain and Other Stories* (1882).  

Despite the couple’s apparent professional successes, their marriage lasted only three years: Lucy Lillie filed for divorce in December 1880, the same month that John assumed his role as the editor of the English edition of *Harper’s*.  

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240 Lucy Lillie’s 2 December 1880 petition for divorce claimed “That by reason of the malformation of the Respondent [John Lillie] your Petitioner [Lucy Lillie] was prevented from consummating her said marriage,” which was the primary grounds for her suit. In John’s response on 19 February 1881, “he denies that he was [malformed] at the time of the marriage and that he has ever been unable to consummate the same by reason of the said malformation and he alleges that the marriage has been consummated. Therefore this Respondent humbly prays that this Honorable Court will be pleased to reject the prayer of the said Petition and to decree that this Respondent was on the 9th day of October 1877 lawfully married to the said Lucy Cecilia Lillie And to decree that the said Lucy Cecilia Lillie do return home to this Respondent and cohabit with him as his wife and render to him conjugal rights.” (“Lucy Cecilia White, Wife’s Petition for Divorce (1880),” *Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, later Supreme Court of Judicature: Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Files*; Class: J 77; Piece: 252; Item: 7253). Clearly the couple had some irreconcilable differences.
unclear when their marriage actually ended, her relationship with Harper and Brothers far outlasted it. In fact, the new form Harper’s Monthly Magazine took after 1880 under Richard Rogers Bowker (the London representative of Harper and Brothers) is likely part of the reason why Prudence enjoyed as much success as it did. Since its inception in 1850, Harper’s Monthly Magazine aspired to reach a “leisured, elite readership,” while simultaneously serving as a vehicle through which Harper and Brothers could attract promising writers, and promote the authors whose books their firm was already publishing. In his biography of Bowker, E. McClung Fleming notes that Harper’s was not only strategically highbrow as well as commercial, but also “thoroughly Anglo-American in its contents. Its issues often contained more articles and illustrations relating to England than most of the exclusively English magazines and in its pages had appeared the novels of Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charles Reade, and other great English writers.” In her book, Educating the Proper Woman Reader, Jennifer Phlegley furthermore asserts that “Harper’s essentially became the first family literary magazine by building on, ________________

241 A brief biography of John Lillie appears in a later genealogy (Albert A. Pomeroy’s History and Genealogy of the Pomeroy Family, Part III (Detroit: Geo. A. Drake & Co., 1922): 66), and lists his wife as Amy Reynolds, leading to two possible conclusions: either the editor of the Harper’s English edition was a different John Lillie, or John remarried after his divorce from Lucy. Lucy notably continued to publish under her married name.


borrowing from, and transforming British literary sources.”^244 However, McClung Fleming explains:

…because of copyright regulations which required a first printing of English works in England, these same novels were issued in other English periodicals, and Harper's could not be sold in England. The solution seemed to be to purchase the entire rights to serial publication and to make Harper's an international magazine with an English edition. The firm could then include in it the contributions of the most distinguished writers of both England and America and apply the best American wood engraving and printing to the original designs of both English and American artists.^245

With these updates to Harper's, the publishers sought to make the magazine a legitimate publisher of original works by both American and British authors, while still retaining its distinctive transatlantic flavor.

The December 18, 1880 issue of the Literary World triumphantly announced, “Harper's Magazine begins its English edition fifteen thousand copies strong. It is identical with the American edition, with the exception of the editorial departments, which are in charge of Mr. John Lillie, a former editor of the Galaxy, and treat of English subjects. It must be a trial to John Bull to have to come to America for his meat and his magazines.”^246 In his history of American periodicals, Frank Luther Mott confirms that Harper’s New Monthly Magazine “differed, at first, from the American edition by the inclusion of some additional English materials,”^247 but that it soon


^245 McClung Fleming, 137.


^247 Mott, 399.
streamlined so that the same contents were being published for readers on both sides of the Atlantic. The new Harper’s was “a lushly illustrated, deeply Anglophilic publication which was enthusiastically embraced by an extensive transatlantic family audience,” due to its “combination of accessible content and the highest quality illustrations that current technology was capable of producing.”\textsuperscript{248} These illustrations, largely wood engravings that were produced in America, were considered “One of the finest features of Harper’s Magazine, and certainly one that contributed greatly to its popularity in England.”\textsuperscript{249} All these factors allowed the magazine to compete with the British monthlies as well as prestigious American periodicals like the Atlantic Monthly and Scribner’s; by 1885, Harper’s Monthly had reached an estimated circulation of 200,000 copies per issue.\textsuperscript{250}

As the management of Harper’s became even more transatlantic than it had been hitherto, the contents of the magazine increasingly focused on British concerns and trends, including Aestheticism. Coinciding with the start of the new version of the magazine in late 1880, there is a sharp uptick in the number of articles and works of fiction that feature serious and lengthy discussions of aesthetic topics: in the December 1880 issue, the artist W. H. Beard contributed an animal fable titled “The

\textsuperscript{248} Helen Groth, Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 197.

\textsuperscript{249} McClung Fleming, 140.

Oldest Institution in the World,” which satirized modern art criticism and taste; Moncure D. Conway’s article “Bedford Park” (March 1881) depicted one artistic enclave associated with the British aesthetes, while George P. Lanthrop’s “Literary and Social Boston” (February 1881) described those with artistic tastes on the other side of the Atlantic; and the artist Maria R. Oakey contributed “A Talk on Dress” (March 1881), while her brother, the architect A. F. Oakey, wrote an article about “Art-Embroidery” (April 1881) and another about the “decorative art craze” titled “A Trial Balance of Decoration” (April 1882). In his description of “Some London Poets” (May 1882), E. C. Stedman aligned men such as A. C. Swinburne, Edmund Gosse, and Andrew Lang to the “aesthetic, decorative, fastidious later Victorian period that already outvies Queen Anne’s in eccentricity.” The arrival of Prudence was therefore perfectly timed amid this flurry of interest in Aestheticism, and its concerns complemented the newly explicit nature of Harper’s transatlantic endeavor.

An article in the Critic describes Prudence as “an aesthetic story told by one who has watched the growth of aestheticism in its hotbed, and the illustrations are by its head-gardener, Mr. George du Maurier,” framing the novella as an eyewitness-style account of the emergent movement. The timely 1882 publication of Prudence perhaps purposefully coincided with Wilde’s lecture tour of America that same year and placed the novel in conversation with roughly contemporary satirical treatments of

251 Beard was also the creator of the famous “The Aesthetic Monkey” cover of the 28 January 1882 issue of Harper’s Weekly.


253 “Literary Notes,” Critic 1, no. 23 (19 November 1882): 323.
Aestheticism in Britain like *Patience, The Colonel*, and George du Maurier’s *Punch* cartoons. A May 1882 review of *Prudence* in the *Literary News* even claimed that “There is something too much of Mr. Henry James in the analysis of the story,”\(^\text{254}\) probably in reference to James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, which was published in 1881. Sara Stambaugh states that “Mrs. Lucy Cecil White Lillie’s *Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London* (1882, with illustrations by Du Maurier) is clearly inspired by James’s novel both in theme and in character,” while Mendelssohn goes so far as to call *Prudence* an “indelicate tribute to James” and identify it as a” heavy-handed rewrite of *The Portrait of a Lady.*”\(^\text{255}\) Despite these allegations—and the continued fear of authorial robbery they illustrate—I argue that *Prudence* owes just as much if not more to the previous work of du Maurier, to which his illustrations for Lillie’s novella cannot help but be linked. Whatever the case, *Prudence* presents a significant, early intervention in these transatlantic discourses on the subject of British Aestheticism and women’s participation in it.

Many of the reviews of *Prudence* emphasize Lillie’s familiarity with London’s artistic circles as evidence that her novella presents “a faithful picture” of Aestheticism, while also hinting at Lillie’s own aesthetic leanings.\(^\text{256}\) She is described by an 1881 issue of the *Literary World* as “an American lady, who has lived for some time in London, where she has studied her subjects from the life.”\(^\text{257}\) This is


\(^\text{255}\) Stambaugh, 510; Mendelssohn, 45.


\(^\text{257}\) Ibid., 425.
substantiated by her account of London’s most celebrated literary and artistic circles in an August 1875 article for the *Galaxy* titled “A London June,” as well as an April 1887 article called “Belgravian Bohemians,” in which she reflects on her experiences in aesthetic London “some twelve years since the fact.” 258 In a 1904 interview published in the *Republic*, Lillie relates how she came to write *Prudence* in 1882, “when estheticism was the open sesame to English society.” 259 Despite the mistrust many Americans still felt towards British Aestheticism in those early days, the *au courant* subject matter and Lillie’s perceived authority on it meant that *Prudence* enjoyed modest popularity when it was first published. Lillie’s coverage of London aesthetes was in fact so thorough, that a description of *Prudence* appeared in a compilation by American publisher W. M. Griswold titled *A Descriptive List of British Novels*—and this despite being written by an American expatriate (since there is no evidence she applied for British citizenship in all her years living in England), serialized in what was still technically an American periodical, and published as a monograph by an America firm. Griswold’s book includes a review of *Prudence* supposedly taken from the *Spectator*, which noted that the novella “is not powerful,” but that “the book is wholly free from vulgarity, — no small praise to the taste of the author, when a story deals with ‘Aesthetic London’.” 260 The review went on to


remark, “It is amusing to see the evident admiration, not to say reverential awe [sic], with which the author speaks of this enchanted ground.”261 Another review, this one taken from the American periodical the *Churchman*, made significantly more of the transatlantic nature of Lillie’s novel:

Though London is the scene of this delightfully drawn society sketch, the characters most concerned are Americans. Prudence Marlitt creates a great sensation as a new type of loveliness in the aesthetic circle of England’s metropolis. The disciples of ‘the beautiful’ attempt to develop her tastes, and succeed only in spoiling her. The story is simple, but it is effectively told: and its lesson though veiled in fiction, is very real.262

The categorization of the novel as a “society sketch” that is neither “powerful” nor complicated implies a certain lightness, but both these reviews also highlight Lillie’s earnest and “effective” engagement with Aestheticism. These factors affirm that the novella is neither a denunciation of aesthetic ideals, nor an unequivocal tribute to them, but a mixture of both. What sets *Prudence* apart from more famous contemporaneous works that deal with Aestheticism is its focus on the American women’s experience of the movement—which not even Henry James had addressed so directly.

**Types of Beauty and Discernment**

These women and their varied degrees of involvement with the Aesthetic Movement dominate the novel and offer a range of what Lillie calls “types”—and she is meticulous in their delineation. In addition to Helena and Prudence, there is Mrs.

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261 Ibid., 538.

Crane, Prudence’s philanthropically-minded, sharp-tongued aunt; Mrs. Boyce, Helena’s kindly and fashionable fellow-aesthete sister who is married to an Englishman; and Mrs. Van Leide, Helena’s cosmopolitan widowed cousin, who spends most of her time on the Continent. Lillie’s stylish, daring American women are not so different from those of Frances Hodgson Burnett, particularly in her 1881 novel *A Fair Barbarian*. Like Burnett, Lillie seemed to have a “passion for describing beautiful dress, and the larger the wardrobe of her heroine the greater her delight,” but also like Burnett, personal styling plays a central role in the ways in which Lillie’s heroines navigate new spaces and people. Being able to “read” and communicate through clothing, what Christine Bayles Kortsch calls “dual literacy in print and dress culture,” becomes a crucial skill for success, particularly in artistic circles where a dress is never just a dress, but a manifestation of ideologies and ideals of beauty. In reading texts about canny and chic female heroines, female periodical readers were thus implicitly being encouraged to learn such “dual literacy” as well, and to employ it in both their reading and own dressing.

Lillie goes into great detail describing each of her woman character’s physical features, from the shade of her hair to the cut of her dress to the painting she most resembles. For instance, in the opening of the novel, Lillie notes that Helena and her sister, Mrs. Boyce, “were both young, and handsome as American women are expected to be abroad”:


so favored to-day,” while Helena’s “type was distinctively American, yet she might have belonged to the French court a century ago.”266 The implication then is that American women are expected to look a certain way, and both sisters do look thoroughly American—but with a twist. Despite Mrs. Boyce’s physical appearance being in line with contemporary beauty standards, and Helena’s with that of the eighteenth century, both sisters dress in high aesthetic fashion: Mrs. Boyce wears “a gown the cut and color of which reminded one strongly of Titian's women,”267 while Helena’s yellow gown is said to be “Quite as good as Ellen Terry’s.”268 Lillie links one sister’s beauty to the present and other’s to the past, and one sister’s style to Renaissance art and the other’s to one of the most famous British actresses of the day, who herself was a lover of aesthetic garb. In doing so, Lillie subtly reinforces Aestheticism’s focus on supposedly “timeless” beauty, which borrows from the best of all previous periods. As Jonas somewhat begrudgingly marvels at one aesthetic gathering, “half a dozen centuries had contributed to the fashion of one single hour.”269 Beyond merely physical traits and individual charms, such descriptions mark each woman’s attractiveness as bound up explicitly—and perhaps paradoxically—in both the national and the historical.

266 Ibid., 462.
267 Ibid., 449.
268 Idib., 452.
Lillie classifies her female characters based on where they fall on the spectrums of American allegiance or Aesthetic sympathies; their dual identities are not so much split between American and British, as American and Aesthetic. A thread of anxiety that English associations might be taking too strong a hold upon American women runs throughout the novel, and with that, the worry that they are in some way being “spoiled.” Yet these anxieties of infiltration come not, as one might expect, from a nationalistic Gabriel Betteredge figure, as in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), but largely from the older generation of expatriate American women regarding the younger. For instance, Mrs. Crane exclaims to Mrs. Boyce, “‘don’t say you are one of those self-exiled American women who fall down at the feet of foreign aristocracy to worship, and forget their own country!’” while Mrs. Van Leide states, “‘I'm not a particularly patriotic person, […] but I always think transplanting is doubtful business with most Americans.’” These suspicious attitudes seem strange, considering that Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Van Leide have both lived abroad for some time and are respectively involved in British social reform and European literary circles. As they themselves are examples of successful transplants, it seems that only once British Aestheticism enters the picture, is there cause to worry.

Despite the opinions held by some of her characters, Lillie’s portrayal of female aesthetes like Helena, Mrs. Boyce, and Prudence is not censorious, nor is it derivative of previous satires, as some other scholars have claimed. None of these women resembles the ridiculous male aesthetes in the plays by Gilbert and Burnand,


or in Vernon Lee’s bitingly critical *Miss Brown*, nor do Lillie’s heroines fully conform to previous models of female aesthetes such as du Maurier’s laughably glum Mrs. Cimabue Brown or Gilbert’s long-suffering Lady Jane. The only truly overblown representation of an aesthetic character comes in the form of Barley Simmonson, who is neither American nor a woman, but a fairly standard stereotype of a flamboyant and self-involved British aesthete. Lillie’s novel is highly invested in classifying female beauty and female “disciples of the beautiful,” but also in differentiating the *classifiers* from the classified within the novel. It is this focus that sets Helena, rather than Prudence, at the heart of the story.

As well as her impeccable taste, Helena is distinguished by “the charm of a peculiar piquant intellectualty,” both features that are repeatedly highlighted as things that make her equally popular with socialites, reformers, and artists. Her “mind was, as she knew herself, morbidly analytical,” and interestingly she most often employs it in making a “study of types.” Lillie even goes so far as to state specifically, “Helena had always enjoyed the study of types among the many Americans she met abroad,” perhaps endowing the heroine with the author’s own characteristic of keen observation, which she often showcased in her various travel articles for *Harper’s* in the 1880s. At different points, Helena delights in measuring Mrs. Crane against Barley Simmonson, evaluating Prudence’s eventual husband


273 Ibid., 458.

274 Ibid., 461.

George Maybery, and continually re-evaluating Jonas over the course of their recurring debates about art and aesthetics. This practice is not presented as merely a pigeonholing of people, but as an insightful assessment of their values and motives, and Helena’s empathy enables her easily to see many sides of any issue or person. For instance, she is willing to entertain Jonas’s reasonable objections to Aestheticism, while still intelligently defending it. In one of their discussions on the topic, she retorts, “Oh, I know I analyzed it; but don't you know there are times, and especially with certain people, when we analyze and criticize our deepest, our dearest, beliefs.” This attitude sets Helena apart from the other aesthetic women in the novel, who, however kind, curious, and clever, simply do not have her ardent devotion to the movement or her flexibility of mind.

If Helena is being set up as an ideal American transplant, as well as an ideal aesthete—both shifting, indefinite standards to begin with—then Prudence is an opposing example. Though both emigrants, Helena and Prudence differ fundamentally in their modes of assimilating to and assessing their English surroundings, and especially in the ways in which they use Aestheticism to do so. Of Helena, the narrator remarks,

She knew a little of all the topics floating in the aesthetic circle, and a great deal of some of them, and she was keenly interested in everything people had to say. She had been long enough in England to feel herself in harmony with such traditions as affect society and every-day life, yet her American instincts were always apparent, giving a transatlantic flavor even to the way in which she wore her most aesthetic garments.277

276 Lillie, Prudence (Part II): 610.

Lillie presents Helena’s transatlantic hybridity as a positive precisely *because* it is deliberate—Helena herself has crafted an identity through self-education, and the new knowledge she gains enhances her dress as well as her intellect. Meanwhile, after orchestrating Prudence’s transformation, Helena wonders,

> …whether the picturesqueness appealed to anything responsive in [Prudence], or whether it only amused her—whether she ‘believed’ in the cut of her own lovely gown, or whether she thought she had ‘dressed up.’ It was hard, indeed, to tell just what effect this concentrated London would produce on her concentrated Americanism.²⁷⁸

While Aestheticism works like a few refining dabs of oil paint on a canvas for Helena, Prudence allows herself to be completely painted over—but the effect seems all surface and no substance, with little long-term potential. In short, Prudence continually fails “to understand and monitor the social implications of fashion,” which Kortsch argues was an especially important part of the education and socialization of nineteenth-century girls, particularly in the highly-stratified culture of late-Victorian Britain. While Prudence listens readily enough to the ideas of Helena and Simmonson, she is helpless to *do* anything with what they tell her. Prudence’s attitudes are also framed as being reflective of contemporary English society in general, which Helena claims “only has time to look on in a surface way.”²⁷⁹ Lillie seems to suggest that looking at Aestheticism in a “surface way” does not enable full engagement with the movement nor a true understanding of it. Dismissing Aestheticism offhand, or even worse, putting on Aesthetic frills and velvets without having read John Ruskin and

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 459.

Mary Eliza Haweis, or studied Continental art, or attended lectures on decoration and
dress, reduces Aestheticism to a mere freak of fashion—as it was so often portrayed
by its detractors to begin with.

Prudence, however, has no qualms about her lack of understanding, and
because of her beauty and good nature, her aesthetic friends tend to overlook her
relative ignorance. While at the Grosvenor Gallery, the primary London site for the
exhibition of aesthetic painting, the others admire the work of Albert Moore, Edward
Burne-Jones, and James McNeill Whistler, whereas Prudence remarks, ‘I wish so I
could give all the poor people Mr. Burne-Jones and those other gentlemen paint a
good dinner. They want beef tea…’ She then goes on to tell Barley Simmonson that ‘if
all this is real art, then I'll never buy anything but a chromo. I like a picture one can
make up a long story about.’ Such statements serve as humorous reminders of how
thoroughly Prudence seems to miss the point: Burne-Jones’s lissome figures are, of
course, his trademark, while her assertion that she likes “a nice little story in a
picture” is an almost direct opposite of a comment made by Whistler in an 1878
article in the World, in which he complains that “the vast majority of English folk
cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may
be supposed to tell.”

280 Ibid., 624.
281 Ibid., 624.
282 Kate Flint, The Victorians and the Visual Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,
2000), 197.
However, Lillie also hints that Prudence is perhaps not as clueless as she seems: when Prudence feels “called upon to be critical, […] underlying her air of perplexity was a flavor of sarcasm which it amused her to see Simmonson utterly overlooked. She poised her pretty head, looked at this and that, and laughed a great deal at nearly everything.”

We may read this in two ways: on the one hand, we could assume that Prudence truly does have, as one reviewer of the novella snidely remarked, a “not very deep nature.” Yet these statements may be purposefully provocative: they certainly show that Prudence understands the basics of Aestheticism quite as well as Helena, just in a different way—or at least well enough to make sport of it. Readers may then begin to wonder whether Helena—and they themselves—have misinterpreted Prudence from the start. Perhaps Prudence is in fact the shrewdest of all the characters, being prudent, as it were, not to let herself be led blindly into becoming a convert to Aestheticism, but instead knowingly appropriating it only for as long as it serves her purposes—and, in the process, pulling the wool over the eyes of all aesthetic London. In Jonathan Freedman’s terms, she commodifies herself as an artistic object, then cleverly trades in on the cultural capital. But again, this trying on of different identities is not cast in nearly the same positive light as Helena’s—in Prudence it comes across merely as a sign of her being fickle and disingenuous.

Ultimately, it is this, more than her lack of discrimination, which Lillie pinpoints as the real problem with Prudence. Helena’s knowledge of artistic society

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{283} Lillie, Prudence (Part II): 624-625.
\footnotetext{284} “Brief Comments”: 150.
\footnotetext{285} Jonathan Freedman, Professions of Taste, 158.
\end{footnotes}
and aesthetic theory is deep and nuanced; her style is highly allusive and has a rhetoric that she and other women understand as part of the language of dress, and that her fellow aesthetes recognize more specifically as part of the code of Aestheticism. Yet all this is lacking for Prudence, who seemingly cannot read these signs for their full import or simply does not care to do so.

She had no adaptability; she had little or no power of even imitating what she saw, and certainly no perceptions delicate enough to appreciate the raison d'être even of a social form or feeling which was entirely new; but the novelty of her present position amused and interested her, and, in proportion to her lack of perception as to cause and effect, she accepted everything offered as triumphantly personal.²⁸⁶

While Helena sees Aestheticism as a complex life philosophy, Prudence regards it as something she can perform, and consequently be admired for performing. Prudence’s beauty seems to pair well with the clothes she is given, but Lillie makes clear that to Prudence, dress is not so much a series of stylistic choices as a suitable, pre-selected costume. Indeed, Helena later laments, “If we taught her a rôle, she was happy to play it, but it was always a role.”²⁸⁷ Prudence is swayed by just about anyone who expresses an opinion, including her eventual husband, who “had definite ideas upon female apparel, and Prue rigidly followed them, so that as Mrs. Maybery, it might be inferred, Prudence would observe critically the very newest fashion.”²⁸⁸ Though the novella bears her name, Prudence is not the true heroine of the story as much as Helena is, just as her approach to Aestheticism is not presented as positively as Helena’s earnest contemplations and creations.

²⁸⁶ Lillie, Prudence (Part II): 624.
²⁸⁸ Ibid., 783.
“Illustrating the craze he had helped to create”

Though Lillie’s novella focused on the divergent paths and experiences of American women abroad, it was perhaps just as much about what Aestheticism can and cannot do. If we accept that this skepticism towards Aestheticism reflects Lillie’s agenda as an author, then George du Maurier’s willingness to illustrate *Prudence* may be explained by their shared perspective. Lillie claims that she and du Maurier met at a fancy dress ball at West House, the studio home of artist George H. Boughton, where “all the fashion and beauty of esthetic Bohemia” were in attendance.\(^{289}\) Lillie relates the details of this event, which was the supposed origin of her book as well as of her collaboration with du Maurier:

During the evening I met George Du Maurier for the first time. It was during the dancing of the cotillion, which he was watching as only Du Maurier could have watched such a splendid scene. ‘I should like to write a novel on esthetic London,’ I remarked to the great caricaturist after we had watched together for a few minutes. ‘Do,’ he replied quickly, ‘and let me illustrate it.’\(^{290}\)

It is certainly possible that Lillie and du Maurier belonged to some of the same circles in London, and that they did indeed hatch a plan to collaborate on *Prudence* at this particular event. Besides this tantalizing hint, no other extant materials can be located that precisely describe du Maurier’s collaboration with Lillie, but there are some other indications as to how it may have begun and progressed to the point of publication. A 1917 retrospective of *Harper’s Magazine*, Robert Shackleton remarks that “Among the most notable illustrators that Harper’s has ever had was George du Maurier. It was in the late ‘80’s that the Magazine began publishing full-page pictures by him which

\(^{289}\) “The Author of ‘Nan’,” 28.

\(^{290}\) Ibid., 28.
[...] established the present-day American ideas of what English society is like.”

However, du Maurier’s employment with Harper’s began almost a decade earlier when he was commissioned to illustrate Thomas Hardy’s *A Laodocian* for the new English edition of *Harper’s Monthly*, where it was serialized from January-November 1881. Having failed to secure his first choice for illustrator, Helen Paterson Allingham, Hardy approached du Maurier and soon thereafter wrote a letter to Harper and Brothers in June 1880 explaining his choice:

> As I felt, with you, that it would be important that the [new] English edition should start with every possible advantage in the way of an artist, I applied to Mr. George du Maurier (who has often told me he would like to illustrate another story of mine) & who, as you are aware, is by far the most popular illustrator here—especially since he has achieved such wide celebrity by his “English society at home” sketches, reprinted in Punch. 

Hardy seemed pleased enough with the resulting illustrations, but R. R. Bowker was not, so it is a bit surprising that du Maurier was asked to illustrate *Prudence* just a year later. It is likely that his previous work for *Harper’s* (though arguably not his best) combined with his fame as the foremost exponent in Britain of visual satire aimed at Aestheticism, resulted in du Maurier being the obvious choice for *Harper’s* to illustrate Lillie’s novella, but the evident personal connection between himself and

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293 After *Prudence*, du Maurier did not contribute to *Harper’s* again until May 1886 (Ormond, 369).
Lillie might have helped as well. Du Maurier’s biographer, Leonée Ormond, remarks that du Maurier’s financial difficulties during this period forced him to take on work for other illustrated magazines besides *Punch*. Because of these worries, “his enthusiasm for his craft was nearly extinct,” so he “relied almost entirely on his stereotyped cartoon technique”; in the case of *Prudence*, it worked very well, as “he was able to adapt his Cimabue Brown drawings.” It was perhaps this, rather than enthusiasm for Lillie’s project alone that might have spurred du Maurier’s wish to illustrate *Prudence*.

In addition to taking on these commissions from Harper and Brothers, du Maurier was still contributing regularly to *Punch*, introducing his recurrent aesthete characters Maudle and Postlethwaite in 1880 and making frequent use of them through 1881. The art critic T. Martin Wood writes, in *George Du Maurier: The Satirist of the Victorians* (1913):

> In his very style the satirist of the aesthetes stood confessed almost as one of their number, whether he wished this to be seen or not—at least as one of the romantic school from whom they immediately descended. But he was genuine; where Postlethwaite and Maudle posed, his irritation was with the pose, the pretended preoccupation with beauty. [...] He wished to show up the ‘aesthetes’ as the parasites they were, trading socially upon an inspiration too fragrant to be traded with at all.\(^{295}\)

Ormond agrees that du Maurier’s views on Aestheticism were “ambivalent,” but speculates that “It was because he himself admired beautiful things so much, that he

\(^{294}\) Ormond, 367-368.

detested the excessive and affected enthusiasm of aesthetes.” 296 Such disdain is fairly clear in many of his caricatures and cartoons, but the ambivalence is just as plain, since in general, it seemed du Maurier was simply “eager to find subjects which were amusing in themselves and also required deflating” rather than launching a vendetta against the groups he lampooned. 297 However, when looking merely at his drawings for Lillie’s novella, one would hardly suspect they were anything but the type of artful yet earnest illustration he contributed to serials in the Cornhill in the 1860s and 1870s. Du Maurier’s six illustrations for Prudence are a good deal less satirical than many of the Punch cartoons mocking aesthetes that he may have based them on, perhaps because Lillie’s characters are a bit more fully formed and sympathetic than the types he invented in his cartoons. Neither Prudence nor Helena is presented as ridiculous in any way, and even Simonson has only a slight S-curve in his posture that hints at the noodle-like physiques of du Maurier’s caricatures of J. M. Whistler and Oscar Wilde, such as Maudle and Postlethwaite. There are, inevitably, some similarities: a face here, a pose there, but perhaps most striking is the congruence between the final drawing for the end of Lillie’s novella (Figure 6), and a caricature he had done for Punch the year before, An Impartial Statement in Black and White (Figure 7). In the illustration for Harper’s, the newly un-Aestheticized Prudence admires her fashionable dress in a mirror, while Helena looks on in the background; the poses and dress styles of both women are more or less the same as those in the Punch drawing, but the criticism implicit in An Impartial Statement in Black and White is all but erased. Kathy Alexis

296 Ormond, 254.

297 Ibid., 248.
Psomiades explains that “In ‘An Impartial Statement,’ the young woman who looks the same in aesthetic or unaesthetic garb implies the reduction of aestheticism to fashion.” The implication is that a beautiful woman cannot help but be beautiful, whatever her clothing, and that any style can be tasteful, if suited to the person and not taken to extremes. This argument certainly rings true for Helena, who, while Aesthetic, is also universally considered beautiful.

298 Psomiades, 156.
Figure 6  George du Maurier, “‘It was odd to see how completely Prudence forsook her brief period of aesthetic light,’” in Lucy C. Lillie, Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London (Part III). Harper’s Monthly Magazine 64, no. 383 (April 1882): 784. Google Books digital copy of Bodleian Library (OC) 251 g.528.
An additional oddity in du Maurier’s illustrations for *Prudence* is the frequent depiction of Jonas, whose rigid, soberly dressed figure seems rather out of place among the other figures. Jonas features so prominently in half the illustrations that it led T. Martin Wood to make the following rather amusing assumptions about the content of *Prudence*:

In 1882 [du Maurier] is at work in the field that he had made his own, illustrating the story of a fad that has always amused him, illustrating the craze he had helped to create, in *Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London*, by Lucy C. Lillie. We hope the reader of this page does not think we should have read this book. We looked at the illustrations of a
muscular curate—whom we took to be the hero—making an impressive entrance into a gathering of ‘aesthetes,’ and farther on leaving the church door with ‘Prudence’; we read the legend to the final illustration—‘It was odd to see how completely Prudence forsook her brief period of aesthetic light’—and we came to our own conclusions.\footnote{299 Wood, 81.}

This conclusion is obviously a faulty one, not only in its assumptions about Lillie’s plot, but also in its misreading of du Maurier’s images. Wood mistakes Helena for Prudence in the image depicting her “leaving the church door” with Jonas, and furthermore seems to suggest that Prudence gives up Aestheticism in order to marry Jonas after all—in short, Wood ignores Helena entirely and thereby misses the entire point of Lillie’s novella.

It is true that du Maurier’s portrayals of Helena and Prudence are physically and sartorially very alike for the majority of the novella, making it difficult to distinguish between them from image to image; this difficulty is not resolved until the final image, which is the only time du Maurier portrays the two women together. Yet, even an casual reader would easily be able to tell which of the characters was being represented in each of du Maurier’s images by even a cursory glance at the text. Unlike Wood, such a reader would also likely realize the foolishness of relying on these images alone to relate the plot or interpret its different types of aesthetic women. The very fact that Helena and Prudence are somewhat interchangeable in du Maurier’s illustrations for \textit{Prudence}—and furthermore resemble other figures by him, such as those in \textit{An Impartial Statement in Black and White}—adds further complexity to Lillie’s explorations of the different means by which appearance dictates fate, and the
ways in which her characters toy with the idiom that the clothes make the man—or woman. 300

As this chapter has shown, treatments of British Aestheticism in the popular print world of the early 1880s tend take at least one of three stances: informative, didactic, or pejorative. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the growth of magazine culture meant that American magazine editors and publishers were constantly looking for appealing current texts with which to fill their pages, whether legally or not. We may suppose that magazines that pirated British works did so more because such texts were in-demand rather than for their potential to educate American readers about the Aesthetic Movement. Yet other magazines like Harper’s clearly went about selecting their texts with great care as part of a larger agenda of developing the knowledge and taste of their readers. Jennifer Phlegley explains that in its first decade, Harper’s began attempting to forge “a patriotic message addressed primarily to woman readers,” urging these readers “to nurture the next generation of native readers with the British literary models it provided so that they would eventually have the skills to both recognize and create distinctly tasteful American literary culture.” 301 By the time the British version of Harper’s launched thirty years later in 1880, the magazine was famous and “embraced as an authoritative cultural arbiter” 302 on both sides of the Atlantic. It seems only logical that the magazine’s representations of Aestheticism would be nuanced and wide-ranging, and therefore the demands on its readers—particularly women—would still be rigorous.

300 Originally “the apparel oft proclaims the man,” William Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.3.

301 Phlegley, 33.

302 Ibid., 34.
Instead of simply imitating the fun poked at Aestheticism by British periodicals like *Punch*, American family magazines showcased exciting new texts and contexts to measure the serious and satiric views of Aestheticism against—and explicitly asked their audiences to do so by examining prose and illustration. Whether through commenting on transferred or borrowed ideas and images, selectively reprinting (as with Godfrey’s *The Beautiful Miss Roche*), or creating an entirely new interpretation of Aesthetic London (as Lillie did with *Prudence*), American periodicals played a vital role in forming public opinion about British Aestheticism. Many of these periodicals had large middle-class female readerships, and some, like *Harper’s*, were dedicated to providing texts that combined “entertainment and cultural improvement.”

Assuming that *Harper’s*, and Lillie herself, intended *Prudence* to appeal to and teach an audience of mostly women, her arguments about nationalism, educated thought, discernment, and the artistic temperament suddenly take on greater weight—this is a text not only meant to entertain, but to teach certain ways of thinking. The fact that Aestheticism is chosen as the backdrop is simultaneously crucial as introduction to avant-garde aesthetics and art, and irrelevant to the overarching qualities Lillie’s heroines embody. In this way, readers could certainly enjoy *Prudence* as merely a realist society sketch that just happens to take place in Aesthetic London, or they could use Helena and Jonas’s conversations about Aestheticism as a sort of primer on aesthetic philosophy—a dialogue like the ones that Mary Eliza Haweis had simulated in *The Art of Beauty* several years before or like the ones Oscar Wilde would present in “The Decay of Lying” and “The Critic as Artist” some ten years later.

303 Ibid., 38.
T. Martin Wood’s hope that “the reader of this page does not think we should have read [Lillie’s] book” reflects the prevalent attitude toward popular Victorian women’s writing at the start of the twentieth century. By then, the list of respected periodical writers of the Victorian era had dwindled to an elite few, and the “brief period of aesthetic light” had all but dimmed, illuminating few besides the most prominent male contributors to the movement. However, during the last few decades, feminist scholars have begun to recover the women whose prose and poetry were read by thousands in transatlantic nineteenth-century magazines. These kinds of late-Victorian women’s writing—and their audiences—help us better to understand the complex characterization of Aestheticism and aesthetic women, to fill in more of the context around central figures like Oscar Wilde, and to account for the time between seminal texts like *The Portrait of a Lady* and *Miss Brown*. Particularly important to these efforts are closer and more sustained examinations of articles and fiction that not only comment on famous aesthetic ideas and people, but that use them as a springboard to create something new. Such fictions do not simply reproduce and reconfigure different stereotypes of the movement as du Maurier was able to do in his cartoons, but reflect mass-cultural aesthetic discourse and perceptions of Aestheticism alternatively as a style, a performance, and a way of life.

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304 Wood, 81.
Chapter 4
OSCAR WILDE, CHARLES RICKETTS, AND THE ART OF THE WOMAN’S WORLD

In the 1870s through early 1880s, Aestheticism reached transatlantic female audiences through theatre, art exhibitions, and various forms of print media, but it took a while longer to be showcased prominently (and un-satirically) in magazines aimed specifically at women. As with his American lecture tour, Wilde acted as one of Aestheticism’s heralds, when he transformed a failing British ladies’ magazine into the influential, if short-lived, proto-feminist periodical, the Woman’s World (1887-1890). The Woman’s World has been insightfully discussed as a vehicle of professionalization for Wilde by scholars such as Laurel Brake, Loretta Clayton, Anya Clayworth, and Stephanie Green, and others including Kathryn Ledbetter, Talia Schaffer, and Alison Chapman have rigorously examined its most innovative topics and its most influential contributors of prose and poetry. However, what needs to be added to these previous analyses is a more extended discussion of the artistic components and concerns of this magazine, and their wider implications. Kathryn Ledbetter claims that Wilde “used the periodical as a textual example of aestheticism,”305 and presumably as a venue for his own definitions of that concept. However, Talia Schaffer notes that if the Woman’s World is read as an “aesthetic manifesto,” it alters the way Aestheticism is ordinarily framed: it “becomes a

305 Ledbetter, 117.
movement centered upon women, designed for a female readership, passionately concerned with women’s political and literary choices at the end of the nineteenth century,” and reveals “aestheticism as an already feminized realm.”

The Woman’s World then has the distinction of being one of the few publications of this period clearly to embody aesthetic principles, and arguably is the first to be specifically “designed” for a female audience, with the topics covered as well as the illustrations playing a key role in both endorsing Aestheticism and creating new opportunities for women to engage actively with it. In this chapter, I argue that the visual elements of the Woman’s World were not only aligned with the progressive aims of the magazine as a whole, but that the emphasis placed on aesthetic designs in particular offered female readers challenges in visual interpretation that were a critical part of the magazine’s unique aims—aims promoted by Wilde through his careful revision (and visualization) of the Woman’s World.

Following his American tour of 1882, Wilde had continued to write about and preach the values of aestheticism and dress reform in his lectures across England and his journalism. As Loretta Clayton has remarked in her contribution to Wilde’s Wiles: Studies of the Influences on Oscar Wilde and His Enduring Influences in the Twenty-First Century (2013), Wilde often made his arguments by playing these two mediums off one another, writing responses to negative reviews of his lectures, and publishing his own critiques of other aesthetic lecturers such as James McNeill Whistler who did

306 Schaffer, 2.

307 Part of this chapter appeared previously in my article, “‘Cleverly Drawn’: Oscar Wilde, Charles Ricketts and the Art of the Woman’s World,” published in the Journal of Victorian Culture 20.3 (September 2015): 33-50.
not share his interest in making aestheticism accessible to “average” people.\textsuperscript{308} Clayton suggests that beginning with his trip to America, Wilde made much of the “inter-dependent relationship between the artist and a public” (of which his was largely women), and he “maintained that the artist needs the raw material of culture to thrive, and the public plays its role in the construction of a rich culture.”\textsuperscript{309} The public certainly took notice when he married Constance Lloyd in 1884, and when their sons Cyril and Vyvyan were born within the following two years.\textsuperscript{310} Constance herself was an advocate of the Aesthetic movement and a supporter of rational dress long before she married Wilde, and by 1885, artistic society’s “golden couple” and their “Aesthetic uniform” drew great attention in person and in the press.\textsuperscript{311} Constance was deeply involved with the Rational Dress Society (whose \textit{Gazette} she would become editor of in 1888), and disseminated her ideas on fashion through various speeches and periodical articles throughout the mid-1880s. Franny Moyle speculates that “the subject of dress in a new set of lectures devised within a few months of his marriage

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\textsuperscript{309} Ibid., 51; 54.


\textsuperscript{311} Franny Moyle, \textit{Constance: The Tragic and Scandalous Life of Mrs. Oscar Wilde} (London: John Murray, 2011), 93.
may well reflect the influence that Constance had on him and his subject matter,” and certainly shows his continued commitment to addressing female audiences.

It was at this point in his life that the publisher Cassell & Company approached Wilde with the proposal that he edit the *Lady’s World: A Magazine of Fashion and Society*. The *Lady’s World* began in the autumn of 1886, advertising itself as a “high-class magazine” that would “in fact, cover the entire range of subjects in which ladies take an interest.” Yet the magazine attracted little attention during its first year. Hoping that “the social cachet of Oscar Wilde’s public identity” would help matters, Thomas Wemyss Reid, manager of Cassell & Co., offered Wilde the editorship of the *Lady’s World* in 1887. Though Wilde had no obvious qualifications for the post besides his reputation, Moyle speculates that “the fact that he had such a high-profile fashionable wife, well versed in the hot issues of the day such as rational dress, could not have hurt.” In any case, a magazine editorship “was the ticket he needed to launch himself into London society,” and since the job would

312 Ibid., 96.

313 Prospectus for Part I of the *Lady’s World* (London: Cassell & Company, 1886), i-ii.


315 Moyle, 125.
provide the guaranteed and regular income that Wilde sorely needed to support his young family, he initially threw himself into the project quite enthusiastically.\textsuperscript{316}

Upon accepting the editorship of \textit{Lady's World}, Wilde assessed the magazine as it was, and swiftly proposed a complete overhaul of its content, name, and image. Through these changes, the \textit{Lady's World} was reshaped into the \textit{Woman's World}, which Wilde would run from 1887 to 1889. Going along with his editorial choices, the prose, poetic, and artistic contributions to the newly re-imagined magazine were to convey less of the frivolous gossip and fashion that were ubiquitous in the \textit{Lady's World} and other contemporaneous women’s periodicals like the \textit{Queen} and the \textit{Lady's Pictorial}.\textsuperscript{317} Instead, under Wilde’s direction, the \textit{Woman's World} aimed to cultivate a more socially aware and artistically inclined audience of female readers. As he asserted in an April or May 1887 letter to Wemyss Reid, Wilde sought to achieve this by asking an extensive roster of prominent female writers and “now and then […] some man of letters” to write pieces on various topics including literary criticism, art, fashion, politics, history, travel, education, and fiction for the magazine’.\textsuperscript{318}

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318 Ibid., 298.
\end{flushright}
attained by any publication of its kind.” Wilde thereby gave the *Woman’s World* what Loretta Clayton calls “a more general but also more erudite feel than most women’s magazines’. In short, Wilde wanted it to be substantial as well as beautiful through a combination of text and artwork.

Wilde’s attitudes towards the design of his own books suggests how he might have reacted to the layout and illustrations of *Lady’s World*, as well as why and how he would have sought to put quite a different stamp on the *Woman’s World*. In *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books* (2000), Nicholas Frankel traces the fraught relationship among Wilde’s artistic vision for his works, the more practical concerns of his publishers, and the work of the “artists” and “decorators” of his books—particularly Aubrey Beardsley and Charles Ricketts. Frankel asserts that the choices of format, publishing firms, and designers show that Wilde took considerable “care over the appearance cut by his works in the world”, and it would thus come as no surprise to find Wilde exerting similar control in his work as editor of the *Woman’s World*. Since Cassell & Co. wanted to capitalize on the celebrity status that Wilde would bring to the *Lady’s World*, Wilde would certainly not have wanted his name attached to a publication that did not embody his aesthetic sensibilities. Furthermore, Wilde’s

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322 Ibid., 5.
hands-on approach to the design of his books demonstrates that he had an astute understanding of the integral relationship between text and image, which he and his illustrators wrestled with in later, highly visual texts such as *Salome* (1894) and *The Sphinx* (1894). Frankel notes that everything points to Wilde’s overall obsession with the aesthetics of the book and the “look” of the page, so reforming the “look” of the inelegant, over-illustrated *Lady’s World*—in addition to elevating its textual contents—would have been crucial to Wilde as an editor.

**“Executed in the highest style of art”**

To examine how these factors translated into the graphic re-imagining of the *Lady’s World* into the *Woman’s World*, we must return to the origins of the *Lady’s World* in 1886, before Wilde was involved with Cassell & Co. From the start of the magazine’s existence, the publisher was already keenly aware of its highly visual appeal, and advertised it accordingly. An 1886 prospectus for the first issue of the *Lady’s World* announced that “The Magazine will be illustrated with numerous COLOURED PLATES and WOOD ENGRAVINGS from original designs by leading artists [….] executed in the highest style of art”. The *Lady’s World* was certainly extensively illustrated, mostly with images of contemporary women dressed in the latest fashions. Commercial artists such as M. Adolphe Sandoz and “Valentine” were the primary contributors of such illustrations, but were by no means the “leading

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323 Ibid., 19.

324 Ibid., 157.

325 Prospectus for Part I, i.
artists” that the prospectus promised. Nonetheless, an early review in the Spectator had the following to say about the first issue of the Lady’s World:

In beauty of illustration, the quality of paper and type, it makes a great advance on the ordinary lady’s paper. [...] The fashion-pictures—pictures of fashions not only here, but in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin—are free from the woodenness that marks most things of the kind, and have, indeed, almost the reality of photographs. [...] But it is decidedly the literary department of the Lady’s World that needs “stiffening.” The illustrations are already all that can be desired.326

While the Lady’s World was initially well received, Cassell & Co. seemed to think that Wilde could provide the necessary “stiffening” that the magazine’s literary portion needed. This he certainly would do, but Wilde also had a strong opinion about the artistic content of the Lady’s World. In a letter to Wemyss Reid in April or May of 1887, Wilde counters the Spectator reviewer’s enthusiastic praise for the quality and quantity of illustrations in Lady’s World:

It seems to me also that just at present there is too much money spent on illustrations, particularly on illustrations of dress. They are also extremely unequal, many are charming [...] but many look like advertisements, and give an air to the magazine that one wants to avoid, the air of directly puffing some firm or modiste. A new cover also would be an improvement—the current one is not satisfactory.327

Apparently, all of these demands were met by the time the newly reborn and re-named periodical made its debut in November of 1887. Laurel Brake notes that the Woman’s World had almost twice the number of pages as the Lady’s World, “an expansion which may have been paid for by the disappearance of the coloured plates” in order to


327 Wilde, “To Wemyss Reid,” 298.
accommodate the many literary contributors Wilde had commissioned.\textsuperscript{328} Additionally, the cover Wilde had found so unsatisfactory had been replaced: no longer did the magazine bear the former green cover of the \textit{Lady’s World}, which featured an “idealized goddess” vainly gazing at her reflection in a mirror, for the cover of the \textit{Woman’s World} sported “a William-Morris-type spray of leaves” and “serpentine women with sensuous chests,” done in red ink on a pinkish ground.\textsuperscript{329} The more aesthetic feel of the magazine was further enhanced by the restrained use of pictures, which were significantly less flashy than those of its predecessor.

Although Wilde was adamant about almost exclusively commissioning women authors to contribute to the textual parts of the \textit{Woman’s World}, he primarily employed men as illustrators. This choice appears to complicate his claim to Wemyss Reid that “artists have sex but art has none.”\textsuperscript{330} Yet Wilde perhaps hoped that illustrations by men would provide a less “feminized” look to what he wanted to be a “womanly” periodical that appealed to both the anticipated audience of middle-class women and a potential audience of men.\textsuperscript{331} The artistic contributors to the \textit{Woman’s World} included a broad range of British and European artists and illustrators, many of whom had previously contributed to the \textit{Lady’s World}, or to other Cassell & Co. publications such as the \textit{Magazine of Art}. The first year of the \textit{Woman’s World} boasted

\begin{footnotes}
\item[328] Laurel Brake, \textit{Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century} (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 138.
\item[329] Ibid., 138-40.
\item[330] Wilde, “To Wemyss Reid,” 298.
\item[331] Clayworth, 87.
\end{footnotes}
frequent contributions from M. Raphael Jones, E. H. Fitchew, and Gustave Fraipont (three of the primary sources of images for the entire run of the magazine), and occasional illustrations by Charles Ricketts, Herbert Railton, Dorothy Tennant, Paul Hardy, Paul Destez, A. de Parys, A. W. Allen, John H. Bacon, and half a dozen others identified only by initials and indecipherable marks. These men (and the occasional woman) were a disparate group of painters, sculptors, illustrators, and designers who either used such periodical work to supplement their more high-art endeavours or made a living primarily by it. Some, like the landscape painter Jones, steadily exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy, Grosvenor Gallery, and the New Gallery from the 1880s to early 1900s, in addition to doing magazine work, while Tennant exhibited her wildly popular portrayals of impish street Arabs and scenes of London life at the Royal Academy and New Gallery starting in the mid-1880s. Those artists with less illustrious careers similarly specialized in certain styles or themes that can be traced across their contributions to the Woman’s World and various other publications during this period. For instance, Fitchew chiefly “translated photographs in line” and Railton’s “pen-drawings of architectural and topographical subjects were in the modern spirit and their decorative qualities made them very popular with editors and readers”.

The fashion plates in the Woman’s World were done mainly by the prolific women’s magazine illustrators M. Adolphe Sandoz and “Valentine,’ while the French artist Fraipont was responsible for almost all of the dainty headers in the monthly “Fashions” sections; Fraipont would go on to publish an instructional book on The Art

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of Sketching with Cassell & Co. in 1892. It was not unusual for illustrators in the employ of a certain publisher to contribute to several of its periodicals, and it is equally unsurprising to see the names of these artists in the contributor lists of a broad range of illustrated magazines and newspapers of the 1870s-1890s, including the Illustrated London News, Graphic, English Illustrated Magazine, Lady’s Realm, Girl’s Own Paper, Boy’s Own Paper, Chums, and Strand Magazine. Exactly how Jones, Fitchew, Fraipont, and the rest came to be associated with the Woman’s World is hard to determine, but in most cases it probably came down to association: either they were already employed by Cassell & Co., or were contributing work to similar magazines and brought to Wilde’s attention that way, or they were personally known to Wilde and invited by him to contribute in the same manner that he had recruited his authors, perhaps in letters to them that have not survived or been located yet.

With the exception of Wilde’s letters, Brake admits that the lack of a centralized Cassell & Co. archive leaves much to speculation in regards to the type of “contributor, subject and reader [Wilde] was constructing” for the Woman’s World, and the records of artistic contributors are particularly sparse.333 Even the designer of the aforementioned cover that Wilde had petitioned for is not identified in his letters, though he proclaims that “[w]ith the new cover we should start our new names, and try to give the magazine a cachet at once”.334 The initials “L. F. D.” in the bottom right corner of the new cover design suggest that it was done by Lewis Foreman Day, an influential theoerist and designer of the Arts and Crafts movement, who was already

333 Brake, Subjugated Knowledges, 134.

334 Wilde, “To Wemyss Reid,” 298.
working for Cassell & Co.’s *Magazine of Art*. Day had also published several monographs on art and design not long before the debut of the *Woman’s World*, including *Every-Day Art: Short Essays on the Arts Not Fine* (1882) and *The Anatomy of Pattern* (1887). Brake notes that the images and designs included in early issues of the *Woman’s World* “echo the style of the cover,” so the cachet Wilde hoped to gain via the refurbished cover design permeated the magazine as a whole.³³⁵ Many of these interior illustrations were likely by Day himself and suggest the type of aesthetic Wilde might have hoped to convey with even the most incidental of decorations. Some of Day’s decorated initials in the first year of the *Woman’s World*, like the one for Laura McLaren’s “The Fallacy of the Superiority of Man” (Figure 8) had made their first appearances in *Every-Day Art* five years before.

The Fallacy of the Superiority of Man.

It is a curious anomaly in this age of science that no serious attempt has been made to estimate exactly the physical and mental powers of women. Men have been weighed and tested in every conceivable manner; but concerning women the evidence is scanty, conflicting, carelessly collected, and inadequate to support the conclusions based upon it. Scientific men take for granted—first, that women are inherently inferior to men, physically and mentally; and, secondly, that this fact is an axiom supported by masculine inner consciousness, and not needing proof. In popular estimation the same belief prevails usually with a reservation in

Figure 8 Lewis Foreman Day, initial for Laura McLaren, “The Fallacy of the Superiority of Man,” *Woman’s World* (December 1887), 54. Google Books.

Such initials, and the Italianate friezes that often appear as tailpieces, showcase the floral and sometimes almost architectural ornamentation that Day—and apparently Wilde—favored for the magazine. All these elements, as well as the inclusion of a designer of Day’s skill and calibre in the first place, reinforce a tasteful, historically-inspired aesthetic that was more akin to a publication like the *Magazine of Art* than to any other women’s magazine, including the *Lady’s World*. The very words with which Day’s design begins McLaren’s article put the two in stark contrast to each other: Day’s unobtrusive version of aestheticism is here deployed in the service of McLaren’s vehement argument against the supposed inferiority of women and leads straight into a discussion of scientific studies regarding women’s physical
characteristics and abilities. Placing male aestheticism alongside progressive proto-feminism in this way creates one potential set of meanings for the reader, and the reuse of this same decorative initial for an article on “Paris Fashions” in a later issue creates another, but both have enticing implications for the uses that such designs could be put to in the Woman’s World.

As indicated in his April or May 1887 letter to Wemyss Reid, Wilde was particularly put off by the “commercial” aspect of the Lady’s World; the bulk of the magazine was composed of articles and illustrations of fashion, the “air” of which he seemed to find too vulgar and market-driven. In fact, the Lady’s World included an average of ten pages of advertisements per issue, through which the reader had to wade before even reaching the Table of Contents. Additionally, as Simon Nowell-Smith explains, “the frontispieces in many-coloured lithography set off to advantage the dress and hat designs of the magazine’s leading advertisers,” thereby explicitly linking the advertising and content of the magazine and meriting Wilde’s dismissal of the Lady’s World as little more than an organ of consumerism. Consequently, as part of his editorial remodelling, Wilde limited advertisements to the wrappers and endpapers, and relegated an abbreviated version of the fashion pages (which had once taken precedence) to the back of each issue. The advertisements that remained were of the type one might expect from a magazine of the period: some examples include Dr. Rooke’s “universal medicine, Fry’s cocoa, Mellin’s food for infants and invalids, Wright's coal tar soap, the American Braided Wire Co. (maker of “health bustles”

336 Wilde, “To Wemyss Reid,” 298.

which “do not heat the spine”), Chorlton’s steel spring mattresses, and Messrs. C. J. Bonnet & Cie’s “Perfection of Silk” (a black silk fabric which is also praised in the Woman’s World’s fashion column for March 1888). Besides this sorts of publicity for household and personal care firms, the Woman’s World also contained advertisements geared to appeal to a more specifically “artistic” reader. Among these within the first year of the magazine, there was the announcement of a prize drawing at the Royal Institute Art Union, a publisher’s notice from Debenham & Freebody for a new edition of Fancy Dresses Described; or What to Wear at Fancy Balls by Ardern Holt (whose article, “Fancy Dresses for Children,” would appear in the December 1888 issue), and an advertisement from the silverware firm Mappin & Webb, who claimed to have “the largest and most varied stock of useful and artistic presents” (the last two words being highlighted in a bold, Gothic font). Even though Wilde may have aspired to run a periodical completely free of advertisements, he surely must have acknowledged that they would be necessary to keep the Woman’s World afloat—and that perhaps including some that pointed the magazine’s readers towards the taste and topics it was advocating elsewhere might not be such a bad idea.

Wilde was not satisfied merely with cutting out advertisements and replacing prose contents that dealt with frivolous topics; his input was also likely instrumental in replacing what he saw as generic, photograph-like illustrations of women in fashionable dresses with more eclectic and consciously stylized images, like those by Day. Alison Chapman remarks that “Illustrations were crucial for depicting the world of exquisite objects, and the lavish, high-quality visual texts in the Woman’s World made its signature style sharply different from competing titles, thereby suggesting
that the commodification of things is attached to their visual appeal.” Such visual appeal could certainly be employed to convince readers to buy advertised items, but if the images were to do more than merely that, it was not enough for a magazine just to be liberally illustrated, as was the Lady’s World. Wilde was, of course, fully aware that in order to convey the good taste for which he was advocating, he would need to strategically illustrate that taste, even if that often meant depicting some of the same types of wares that were formerly foisted upon readers in pages upon pages of advertisements. By cutting the number and prominence of advertisements and fashion illustrations, the newly-reborn magazine avoided the problem that, as Linda K. Hughes has noted, befell the contemporaneous Pall Mall Gazette, whose “aestheticism was constantly in danger of being upended by the juxtapositions (including crude adverts) that resulted from the paper’s imperative to generate income.” Instead, the minimal advertisements and judiciously selected images sprinkled throughout each issue of the Woman’s World worked subtly to “sell” a pared-down and presumably more tasteful aesthetic to its readers, aligning this aesthetic with the magazine’s “womanly” concerns. After all, Chapman argues, the Woman’s World was “a supremely female, aestheticized publication, one in which the consumption of gorgeous objects was not counter to intellectual life.” So, pairing Day’s refined


340 Chapman, 153.
initial letter at the start of a “Paris Fashions” article with the illustrations of dress included within might in part counteract the more overtly commercial nature of these fashion-centric segments, while still acknowledging the appeal of the featured commodities.

(Re)placing Fashion with History and Ornament with Art

Wilde’s editorial choices seem to suggest that if the discourse of fashion were to be included in the Woman’s World at all, it would have to be elevated from its mundane associations with dressmakers and haberdashers by more clearly relating to art and history. As both Brake and Clayton have remarked, Wilde’s aversion to showcasing fashion in the Woman’s World seems at odds with his lectures and articles on dress in the years leading up to his editorship. This is especially puzzling considering his wife’s involvement with the Rational Dress Society and the fact that her style “represented a practical demonstration of serious thinking about dress,” and seeing as it was probably pieces such as “The Relation of Dress to Art” (Pall Mall Gazette, 28 February 1885) and “The Philosophy of Dress” (New York Daily Tribune, 19 April 1885) that in part earned him an offer of employment with Cassell & Co. in the first place.

Though various contributors (including Constance Wilde) offered articles on issues surrounding rational dress and dress reform, such topics are notably and somewhat perplexingly absent from Wilde’s sporadic contributions to the Woman’s World. Brake speculates that, though “a taste for triviality, dress, [and] gossip” were “valorised in Wilde’s own writing,” his disavowal of these features in

341 Brake, 141-42; Clayton, “Arbiter of Elegancies?” 67.
342 Moyle, 96.
the magazine he edited exhibits the still-present instructional undercurrent that pervaded many magazines for women and girls in the nineteenth century, and perhaps speaks to his attempt at establishing a more “serious” persona for himself.\(^\text{343}\)

Nonetheless, the \textit{Woman’s World}’s attitudes towards fashion seemed careful to follow the tenets that Wilde outlined in “The Philosophy of Dress,” which in turn echoed the advice of other arbiters like Mary Eliza Haweis: “There must be no attempt to revive an ancient mode of apparel simply because it is ancient […]. We start, not from History, but from the proportions of the human form”.\(^\text{344}\) In accordance with this aim and in response to the increased artistry of the magazine, an early reviewer in the Supplement to the \textit{Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury} exclaimed: “It is a most attractive publication, and is illustrated really well, with true artistic feeling. […] The fashions illustrated are decidedly superior to any I have seen, and the ladies who wear them are really like well-dressed women, and not like the wooden deformed dummies one is accustomed to see in fashion plates”.\(^\text{345}\) A review in \textit{Sporting Life} made similar claims that the fashion section of the \textit{Woman’s World} would “at once

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \(^\text{343}\) Brake, \textit{Subjugated Knowledges}, 142.
\item \(^\text{344}\) Cooper and Wilde, 91.
\item \(^\text{345}\) “Penelope,” “Our Ladies’ Column,” Supplement to the \textit{Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury} (21 January 1888), n. p.
\end{itemize}}

This article was also published with the same title “By One of Themselves” in the \textit{Wrexham Advertiser} (21 January 1888), 2.
commend itself to the lady reader, let her views of the rest of the contents be what they may."

Instead of representations of doll-like women wearing dress like no fabric under the sun, we have cleverly-drawn human figures with their ‘wear’ depicted by genuine artists. Hereafter this department of the magazine will be consulted by those who desire to study the costume of the period from an English—adapted, if you like, but still English—and not from a Parisian point of view.

While the Sporting Life reviewer did not seem convinced that the contents of the Woman’s World would appeal to all readers, he or she was very complimentary of the fashion illustrations. He or she even went so far as to suggest that the quality and accuracy of these fashion plates was so superior that they could be used as a reference to contemporary connoisseurs as well as to future scholars of dress (how fitting!).

The elevation of dress was also readily seen in the increased presence of articles and illustrations representing women of the past in historically-accurate garb, which evoked even less the realm of the “modiste,” and more that of high art. For instance, in the January 1888 issue of the Woman’s World, the Paris fashions section was partially devoted to discussing how one should best wear historically inspired dress and was accompanied by drawings of Sarah Bernhardt in costumes from a Paris production of La Tosca, in which she was then starring. This blending of fashion, history, and art is thus partially facilitated by highlighting a famous female artiste and aesthete and offers some idea of the sorts of overlaps among these subjects that Wilde desired, and the improvements he made to achieve them. The last sentence of “January

346 Woman’s World, 1 (December 1887), endpaper included in the unbound issue in original pink printed paper wrappers held by the British Library (General Reference Collection Eccles 417).
Fashions” for 1888 informed the reader that “The accompanying sketches have been done specially for THE WOMAN’S WORLD by M. Adolphe Sandoz, the well-known artist, and they give a very perfect picture of the costumes of the great tragédienne”.347 This notice indicates that Wilde continued to hire some of the better illustrators from the Lady’s World, but required them to visualize significantly more Aesthetic topics than they perhaps had in the previous incarnation of the magazine. The presumed superior quality of these pictures and designs supports Brake’s assertion that Wilde took particular care to include original work from skilled illustrators like Sandoz and Aesthetic artists such as Walter Crane and Charles Ricketts, as well as photographic reproductions of oil paintings and of Pre-Raphaelite art such as that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in an effort to enhance the prestige and cultural capital of the Woman’s World, even while maintaining attention to topics like fashion that readers had come to expect from a women’s magazine.348

In addition to the alterations in editorial policy for the art contents of the Woman’s World, the pages of the magazine also included different stylistic forms that harked back, as prescribed by Wilde, to previous eras of art and history. For example, decorated initial letters resembling those found in medieval manuscripts—and the high-art books produced by the likes of the Kelmscott Press, which William Morris would found in 1891—were subtly incorporated as part of the new design, to which Day and Ricketts contributed several particularly elaborate examples. In prioritizing such current yet historical approaches to illustration, Wilde made an implicit effort to

348 Brake, Subjugated Knowledges, 138.
align the appearance of *Woman’s World* more closely with Arts and Crafts publications such as the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* (1886-1892) than with other mass-market magazines. Even though he chose not to write any full-length articles for the *Woman’s World*, he did pen the magazine’s “Literary Notes” column, and it is here that his own ideas about print aesthetics appear, some of which he had presumably attempted to implement through his editorship of the magazine. In “Some Literary Notes” for January 1889, Wilde reviewed a collection of Christmas books, particularly praising an *édition de luxe* of Richard Sheridan’s “Here’s to the Maiden of bashful Fifteen” as being “very cleverly illustrated,” before launching into a discussion of what constitutes good print decoration more generally: 349

> It seems to me, however, that there is a danger of modern illustration becoming too pictorial. What we need is good book-ornament, decorative ornament that will go with type and printing, and give to each page a harmony and unity to effect. Merely dotting a page with reproductions of water-colour drawings will not do. […] Our aim should be to discover some mode of illustration that will harmonise with the shapes of our letters. At present, there is a discord between our pictorial illustrations and our unpictorial type. The former are too essentially imitative in character, and often disturb the page instead of decorating it. 350

In an extended example of this ideal, Wilde praised the “intimate connection” between Japanese art and printed characters, which share “the same feeling for form and line.” 351 It is this harmony between illustration and text, wherein the two both complement and enhance each, which to Wilde seemed to be lacking in the haphazard


350 Ibid. 168.

351 Ibid., 168.
and superficial approach to illustration taken by the majority of British printers. Wilde might now be famous for his espousal of “art for art’s sake”, but this passage proves that he was decidedly not in favor of illustration for illustration’s sake; rather, he argued that illustration and other design elements should be integral to the text as a whole rather than tacked on as an afterthought or included merely to break up blocks of type. A typical page from the *Woman’s World* often integrated images that were not only well-matched to the text, but that were also well-matched to the type. An example of this may be seen in the illustrations done by Herbert Railton for Constance Howard’s article “Kirby Hall,” in which his own handwritten caption closely resembles the Aesthetic-style font of the next article’s title (Figure 9).
the wicker, if observed, would have paid for his devotion with his life. From that lovely iron inscribed
indelible regret and longing. The old house, which witnessed the Lord Keeper's gallop and loving “God-

The Great Court of Kirby Hall

...the garden, embowered in ivy (now falling in pieces and worn with rust), did the fair crevices of the Montagu's, when heated here, stepping forth from her daily boudoir, welcome her coming and speed her parting guests.

Ruin and decay have marked Kirby for their own. Nothing remains of its splendour but its beautiful outside walls; though those who linger among the gables, chimneys, windows, and courts of Kirby will find much to please the eye. The ghost of a dead past reigns paramount over everything; the avenues are all gone, cut down, and sold; the approach to the house is ever grass and deep rut; and we who loved it look on with night! to his mistress and Queen, now sleeps in a sepulchre which knows no awakening, and it is—

"Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand.
And the sound of a voice that is still."

Truly “the tender grace of a day that is dead” will Kirby Hall nevermore. Constance Howard.

[Lady Constance begs to acknowledge with many thanks the information contained in the Quarterly Review of 1857, and also that given her by the Rev. William Finch-Hatton, of Weldon Rectory, Northamptonshire.]

Medicine as a Profession for Women.

THE question whether women shall study and prac-
tice medicine as a profession in England has been practically answered in the affirmative within the last thirteen years. When we compare the facilities for medical study enjoyed by the women students of to-day, and the many qualifying examinations which are now open to them, with the almost insuperable difficulties, both for study and examinations, with which the earliest medical women students had to con-
tend, it will be seen that there are few public questions which have progressed so rapidly in the same space of time as this one has done. Eighteen years ago only one woman had succeeded in obtaining such a com-
plete medical education in England as entitled her to

Figure 9  Herbert Railton, illustration of “The Great Court of Kirby Hall” for Constance Howard, “Kirby Hall,” Woman’s World (January 1888), 105. Google Books.
Wilde’s claims in “Some Literary Notes” furthermore show the influence of artists and printers such as Emery Walker, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, and Walter Crane, whose lectures at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society’s first exhibition Wilde had attended and positively reviewed for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in November 1888. In an early December 1888 letter to Cobden-Sanderson requesting an illustrated article about “Bookbinding as Craft” for the *Woman’s World*, Wilde showed great interest in including explicit discussions of book arts in the magazine, while in his review of Walker’s talk on “Letterpress Printing and Illustration,” Wilde a bit more obliquely observes that “[h]is remarks about the pictorial character of modern illustration were well timed, and we hope that some of the publishers in the audience will take them to heart”. 352 Perhaps Wilde, in his capacity as editor, did just that; his own statements in “Some Literary Notes” just over a month later certainly echo the ideas of designers such as Cobden-Sanderson and printers such as Walker, arguing as they did for greater unity of the arts.

All of these factors helped mark the *Woman’s World* as a more intellectually ambitious and culturally sophisticated publication than the *Lady’s World* and other comparable magazines claimed to be, and the press took notice. The second issue of the magazine (December 1887) dedicated a whole page of its advertising space to


reprinting excerpts from some twenty reviews from various British periodicals which had praised the magazine’s first number. These included other women’s magazines such as the *Lady’s Pictorial* and the *Queen* as well as publications such as the *World, Country Gentleman, Irish Times*, and *Scotsman*. In a May 1888 article for *Time: A Monthly Magazine* titled “What Women Read,” the journalist and advice-book author Mrs C. E. Humphry traced the development of exemplary women’s periodicals through the nineteenth century, and among the contemporary magazines she discussed at some length was the *Woman’s World*. She wrote that it “is far ahead of the others in an artistic sense. It is printed on good paper, in clear, neat type, and the illustrations are as cleverly drawn as they are finely engraved”.* While the *Woman’s World* did not strive to achieve the kind of graphic and typographic innovation that the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* was known for (and that Wilde advocated in “Some Literary Notes”), its simple yet pleasing design and strategic use of illustrations met the approval of reviewers like Humphry. The emphasis on both the ingenuity—or “cleverness”—and the equally fine quality of the magazine, both visually and materially, would seem to be just what Wilde was aiming for.

In his letters to authors, Wilde often specifically mentioned that he wanted illustrations to accompany the articles he hoped to commission from them, but he rarely noted who was to provide those illustrations, what the illustrations would be of, and in what style he would like them to be presented. Even when he did go into somewhat more detail, the particulars were sparse. For example, when Wilde wrote to Alice Meynell to ask for a contribution in September 1887, he left the “literary or

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artistic subject” up to her but disclosed that “I prefer subjects that admit of illustrations.”354 A few months later, in a December 1887 letter to Cordelia Courtney discussing the article she had written on “The Women Benefactors of Oxford,” Wilde noted: “The photographs are somewhat formal. I think I will send an artist down to Oxford, so as to get something really good.”355 When Courtney’s article was published in the June 1888 issue of the *Woman’s World*, it was indeed accompanied by several illustrations of the exteriors of Oxford college buildings, presumably the “really good” illustrations Wilde had requested the unnamed (and unidentifiable) artist to sketch.

Sometimes, however, Wilde’s dictates for illustrations were targeted more directly at the author he was courting: in a 15 October 1888 letter to A. J. Hipkins of the Royal College of Music, Wilde wrote to compliment him on his “fascinating article in the *Hobby Horse* of this month” and to ask for a similar piece for the *Woman’s World*, adding that “it would add greatly to its charm if you would make a selection of some old musical instruments, either spinets or viols, that could be reproduced. […] We might also have for the frontispiece of the magazine an engraving of a good Jan Steen or any other picture you might care to select’.356 Here, Wilde very clearly demonstrated interest in Hipkins’s input regarding the illustrations,

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though the type and tenor of the images he already had in mind was equally clear. By commissioning an article that strongly resembled one in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* both in terms of content and illustration, Wilde ambitiously sought to bring the *Woman’s World* in line with the high-art publications he admired.

Although Wilde undoubtedly took an interest in maintaining this level of aesthetic excellence, it is likely that the day-to-day demands involved in editing the *Woman’s World* became tedious to him after awhile. To an extent, this is demonstrated by an October 1888 letter Wilde wrote to John Williams, Cassell & Co.’s general editor; Wilde complained: “I find that without a staff of some kind a magazine with special illustrated articles cannot get on,” probably exaggerating the amount of work he himself was being forced to do, but also taking a dig at the relative lack of cooperation from Cassell’s in helping him to create the type of magazine he wanted.  

Arthur Fish, the magazine’s assistant editor, recalled Wilde’s gradual withdrawal from the *Woman’s World* over the course of 1889, and presumably took over some of his duties as he let them drop. Fish had written extensively on art himself, and he would go on to contribute to another Cassell & Co. production, the contemporaneous *Magazine of Art* edited by the famed art critic M. H. Spielmann. Yet for the first few numbers of the *Woman’s World* in particular, during the period when Wilde was still invested in the magazine’s art contents, he went out of his way to advocate for the reproduction of work from both established artists and rising talents.


358 Nowell-Smith, 150-51.
A Shared Aesthetic Vision

One of the latter was the artist Charles de Sousy Ricketts (1866-1931), who provided two full-page illustrations and two headpieces for the magazine’s first year (November 1887 to October 1888), as well as numerous headpieces and tailpieces, decorated initials, and several small embedded pictures for the subsequent volume (November 1888 to October 1889). It is easy to imagine that the ambitious young Ricketts might have sent Wilde some drawings that ultimately earned him occasional work for Cassell & Co., but it is unclear what prompted Wilde so generously to give a relatively untested and (to him, at least) unknown artist several full-page commissions. What is clear is that by the time Wilde left Cassell & Co., so did Ricketts, as there is no evidence of any drawings by him in the magazine’s final year (1889-1890) under Fish’s editorship. Such a coincidence suggests an affinity between the two men’s artistic visions even before their official partnership began. Since Ricketts would become the primary, “almost official” artist and designer of Wilde’s books in the 1890s, it is logical that he would start contributing to a magazine run by Wilde in order to attract the already-famous aesthete’s attention, and it is equally reasonable to assume, therefore, that they may have met during the year that their tenures at Cassell & Co. overlapped (autumn 1887 to autumn 1888).359 However, despite the fact that these illustrations would appear to suggest that there was contact between Wilde and Ricketts as early as 1888, such assumptions fly in the face of the usual story told about how they came together. According to all contemporaneous accounts, Ricketts and his partner Charles Haslewood Shannon (1863-1937) sent Wilde a copy of the Dial (1889-1897), the Symbolist periodical they both edited and published, as a means of

359 Denys Sutton, quoted in Corbett, 130.
introduction in 1889. This move precipitated their first meeting with Wilde himself and the commencement of the friendship and professional relationship between Ricketts and Wilde. Meanwhile, the *Woman’s World* and Ricketts’s work for it remain a largely unacknowledged link between the two men.

J. G. P. Delaney is one of the few scholars to address this discrepancy directly. In his biography of Ricketts, Delaney asserts that Ricketts and Wilde “had certainly already met” by the time Ricketts and Shannon posted a copy of the *Dial* to Wilde in 1889, since Ricketts had “sent drawings to Wilde when the latter was editor of *Woman’s World* and had been offered work illustrating and decorating the magazine” as early as 1888.\(^{360}\) David Peters Corbett further affirms that after this first contact, “Wilde responded and, encouraged by the older man’s interest, Ricketts set out to court him seriously,” presumably by way of the *Dial*. In light of their simultaneous labor on the *Woman’s World*, this sequence of events does appear probable.\(^{361}\) Yet there seems to be no surviving documentation to substantiate this assumption, and neither Ricketts’s nor Wilde’s collected letters include any correspondence on Ricketts’s side that might have accompanied the drawings for the *Woman’s World*, or any on Wilde’s side acknowledging receipt of them. Besides Delaney and Corbett, Nicholas Frankel, Laurel Brake, Maureen Watry, and several other scholars have made brief reference to the fact that Ricketts contributed to the *Woman’s World*, but there has been no extended scholarly discussion of his work for Cassell & Co. and its implications beyond a mere mention. Furthermore, Ricketts does not discuss his

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\(^{361}\) Corbett, 137.
involvement in the *Woman’s World* in his *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (1933), nor does it crop up in *Self-Portrait: Taken from the Letters and Journals of Charles Ricketts, R. A.* (1939)—though, admittedly, both works were rigorously edited, the former by Ricketts himself near the end of his life, and the latter posthumously by his friend Cecil Arthur Lewis (1898–1997). Ricketts himself is positively misleading in *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* when describing his first interaction with Wilde, stating outright that “A copy [of the *Dial*] sent to Wilde brought him to the house I shared with Charles Shannon in the Vale, Chelsea’. 362 Of course, it is possible that Wilde and Ricketts did not actually meet before this point, but at the very least, a remote acquaintance existed between them long before the publication of the *Dial*.

If, as Corbett suggests, Ricketts worked “hard to make common cause with Wilde and to interest and attract him” from the start of his professional career, it is curious that Ricketts did not acknowledge this debt, or the fact that the *Woman’s World* gave him his first opportunity to meet and impress Wilde. 363 Ricketts, however, likely considered this and the other magazine illustrating he did early in his career to be unworthy of attention and not up to the standard of artistic finish of his later work. Delaney relates how Ricketts “refused to discuss these early drawings, which gave him little opportunity to express his own personality in his work,” even going so far as trying to buy back and destroy them later. 364 It is also possible that Ricketts was not

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363 Corbett, 137.

364 Delaney, 46.
overly proud of his association with a woman’s magazine, a genre that bore the stigma of a frivolous, commercial reputation, even though Wilde was the editor. Certainly, being known as a contributor to a magazine directed toward an audience of middle-class women would be directly at odds with the exclusive queer male aestheticism that Ricketts espoused through the *Dial* and many of his other later endeavors.  

Both Ricketts and Wilde might have considered the tale of first encountering one another in the homosocial, non-commercial space of Ricketts and Shannon’s home at the Vale to be a far more aesthetically-pleasing origin narrative than a story centered upon the offices of Cassell & Co., and the beautifully-produced *Dial* as a more worthy emissary of Ricketts’s artistry than a bundle of drawing proofs. Of course, any such conclusions are always necessarily speculative, but the overlap of the two men’s work at Cassell & Co. is too tantalizing to ignore in the light of what it might indicate about the visual project of the *Woman’s World*, as imagined by Wilde, pictured by Ricketts, and received by its readers.

In 1887 Ricketts had just finished his apprenticeship as a wood-engraver at the South London School of Technical Art (now the City and Guilds Technical Art

School), in Kennington Park Road, South London, and his work began to appear in periodicals such as *Alarum*, the *Magazine of Art*, *Atalanta*, and the *Universal Review*. These illustrations and those Ricketts contributed to the *Woman’s World* have perhaps been too readily dismissed as belonging to his body of magazine “hack work,” even by Ricketts himself. Yet, as Watry has rightly noted, by 1890 they nonetheless “displayed great skill in an eclectic selection and recombination of images” and “demonstrate his various and developing skills as a draughtsman.”

Besides providing an invaluable record of the development of Ricketts’s own individual style, these earlier “hack” illustrations contribute to our understanding of the *Woman’s World* as a visual manifesto of sorts, which owed part of its appearance to the Arts and Crafts movement, part to the Pre-Raphaelites, and part to emerging Symbolist motifs. Like that of many “hack” artists at the time, Ricketts’s work was largely anonymous, but its frequency throughout the first two years of the *Woman’s World* indicates that his unique blend of these styles was eagerly adopted and promoted as part of the magazine’s new aesthetic—and perhaps by Wilde personally.

Though the magazine originally was published in monthly installments, Cassell & Co. at some later point collected the *Woman’s World* into volumes by year; only in the first of these is there a direct mention of Ricketts. The 1887-1888


367 Delaney, 46.

368 Watry, 13.

369 “Editor’s Jottings,” *Blackburn Standard and Weekly Express* (8 December 1888): 5. This column suggests that the monthly installments of several Cassell & Co. magazines were collected in “year-by-year” volumes and republished as gift books for
volume of the newly collected magazine included a list of contents, with literary contributions appearing alphabetically by title, and a separate “List of Full-Page Plates.” In the latter list are two images identified as “Drawn by C. Ricketts,” one titled “The Toilet of a Lady of Ancient Egypt” in the July 1888 issue, and the other, “A Lady of Pompeii” in the October 1888 issue. “The Toilet of a Lady in Ancient Egypt” (Figure 10) evokes Victorian Egyptomania, but it owes perhaps even more to Pre-Raphaelitism, which was clearly still a major influence on Ricketts’s style at this time, and which a keen reader could not help noticing. The central figure of an idealized and adored woman calls to mind paintings in which Rossetti personifies “body’s beauty” such as Lady Lillith (c. 1866-1873) and The Beloved (1865-1866); in the former, the woman admires her reflection in a mirror as she combs her hair, and in the latter, she is attended by several handmaidens as she pulls aside a veil. Meanwhile, the terraced interior and lavishly detailed décor in which the three Egyptian women are posed in Ricketts’s “The Toilet of a Lady of Ancient Egypt” contains echoes of Edward Burne-Jones’s King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid; this painting had been exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery several years before in 1884 to much acclaim, and Ricketts may have seen it while still a student. There is no doubt that Ricketts’s own hand is obvious in “The Toilet of a Lady of Ancient Egypt,” but the invocation of Pre-Raphaelite elements in this image and in “A Pompeian Lady” shows just how much he—and Wilde—admired the style and sought to promote it (and its Aesthetic permutations) in the Woman’s World. Ricketts’s work in this period contained a

the 1888 holiday season. Since the Woman’s World would have just finished its first year with the October 1888 issue, a reprint by December of the same year does not seem unreasonable.
stronger current of Pre-Raphaelitism than perhaps that of any of the other artists who contributed to the magazine, even as his illustrations simultaneously became more and more Symbolist as the issues progressed. Ricketts’s illustrations were not merely decorative, nor purely narrative, but asked to be closely examined for both these traits. The reader who took the time to do so would see that unlike the more readily apparent, if erudite, symbolism featured in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Rickett’s designs contained original condensed narratives that complemented or completely deviated from the texts with which they were paired in the Woman’s World.
Figure 10  Charles Ricketts, illustration of “The Toilet of a Lady of Ancient Egypt” for “A Lady in Ancient Egypt,” Woman’s World (July 1888), 395. Google Books.

Ricketts’s illustration for Edith Marget’s “A Pompeian Lady” (Figure 11) illustrates a scene almost identical to “The Toilet of a Lady of Ancient Egypt,” but in a different time and place and with slightly different treatment. It had pre-eminence as the only attributed and full-page illustration in the article, and even more tantalizing, Marget explicitly described Ricketts’s illustration—or at least what it should have illustrated:
Let us try to assist our readers to form a clear idea of some of the minor features of the domestic life, the daily surroundings of our Pompeian, such as the one whose graceful figure is represented in the first of the accompanying illustrations. Half-clothed, she is seated on the square stool, whose decorations are of bronze, holding in her right hand the polished silver mirror, with its twisted and flower-wrought handle, and chased with mythological figures on the back, while with her left hand she combs her yellow hair.\textsuperscript{370}

Presumably, Ricketts was working from this description to create his illustration, not the other way around, and the result does show careful attention to detailing the household items and attitudes Marget’s article discussed. There are, however, some discrepancies: Ricketts’s “A Lady of Pompeii” is the only image that Marget could possibly be referring to as “the first of the accompanying illustrations,” since the article otherwise included only smaller inset illustrations based on photographs of Roman artifacts, yet Ricketts’s illustration appeared second-to-last. In it, he had furthermore chosen to clothe the lady fully and render her ornate stool invisible, and while the mirror and comb are accounted for, the hands that hold them are reversed. The placement of the illustration probably came down to editorial discretion and had nothing to do with either Ricketts or Marget, while the “errors” in representation could be a mark of Ricketts’s relative inexperience with a photographic transfer process that might have produced a reversed image of his original pen-and-ink drawing. However, it is more likely that Ricketts’s illustration is just as he wanted it to be, and any discrepancy in depiction was simply Ricketts taking advantage of what little artistic license illustrating prescribed topics allowed. One is left to wonder what the magazine’s readers made of these sorts of deviations—were they used to inexact

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illustration and took no notice, or did they begin to pay attention to Ricketts and his
designs and engage in the deep reading of images that his work solicited?

Figure 11 Charles Ricketts, illustration of “A Lady of Pompeii” for “A Pompeian

Even with two substantial contributions within a few months, the Table of
Contents of the first volume was the only place in which Ricketts’s name appeared in
any of the issues of the *Woman’s World*. Because Ricketts’s work was not attributed in
the original issue format of the magazine, it is unlikely that these early examples would have been readily recognized, let alone by the intended readership of the magazine, as Day’s might have been at the time. Ricketts’s first illustration to appear in the *Woman’s World* was actually in the June 1888 issue, to which he contributed a headpiece for the Countess of Munster’s article, “A Woman’s Thoughts upon English Ballad-Singers and English Ballad-Singing,” and he also provided a headpiece for a historical short story titled “Decebal’s Daughter” by Carmen Sylva (the *nom de plume* of Queen Elisabeth of Romania) for the July 1888 issue; both feature women with elaborate gowns and flowing hair, the former nestled in an idyllic grove listening to music, the latter draped on a battlement while armies clash below. While these and all subsequent headpieces go un-credited, they are clearly identifiable as Ricketts’s, even if they lack the distinctive, boxed “CR” initial which marks most of his signed work (and can be seen quite prominently in the bottom right of Figures 12 and 13). These deductions of attribution are based upon the style of the illustrations, which show a burgeoning resemblance to Ricketts’s mature Art Nouveau-infused style, and upon the somewhat telling box-within-a-box symbol often included in these designs in lieu of the boxed initials, nonetheless recalling Ricketts’s customary mark. Even though “The Toilet of a Lady of Ancient Egypt” and “A Lady of Pompeii” are the only full-page images Ricketts contributed to the magazine during the period when Wilde was exercising direct editorial control, Ricketts was commissioned to do far more work by Cassell & Co. in the *Woman’s World*’s second year. Between June 1888 371

and October 1889, there are at least seven initialled drawings that are clearly his, and several more unsigned pictures that are likely by him as well.\footnote{372}{Woman’s World, 2 (1888-1889), illustrations on pages 276, 328, 344, 348, 388, 495, 619.}

\section*{Illustration as Play}

In terms of Ricketts’s art, his drawings for the \textit{Woman’s World} certainly represent an early style, but they merit further examination beyond the mere assumption of their quality. Not only do they show a rapport with the aesthetic aims that Wilde put forth for the \textit{Woman’s World}, but they also forecast the aesthetic that would characterize Wilde’s own books in the 1890s. Moreover, Ricketts’s contributions to the later issues of the \textit{Woman’s World} exhibit the beginnings of his own style and his idiosyncratic approach to illustration. Regarding Ricketts’s work for periodicals of the early 1890s like the \textit{Magazine of Art} and the \textit{Black and White}, Delaney claims that “though his illustrations remain unexceptional, his decorations—initial letters and head and tailpieces—are in a more fluent and symbolic mode that shows more up-to-date Art Nouveau influences,” and these traits are likewise apparent in his work for the \textit{Woman’s World} several years before.\footnote{373}{Delaney, 46.} Arguably, Ricketts’s magazine illustration in general served the purpose of allowing him to experiment, but it seems that the \textit{Woman’s World} in particular provided Ricketts with a testing ground for some of the techniques and motifs that would come to characterize his subsequent independent work. Like the Rossetti-inspired pen-and-ink illustration Ricketts did for “Jezebel” in the \textit{Universal Review} (1888), some of his work for the \textit{Woman’s World}
“anticipates clearly what was to come,” especially his fascination with Gustave Moreau and the French Symbolists, and his love of mythological subjects, serpentine lines, and densely-drawn detail.  

Strong correlations can also be drawn between some of his work in the 1888-1889 issues of the *Woman’s World*, and the artworks he created for his own magazine, the *Dial*, which he and Shannon began working on during this time. The most striking example of this symmetry is in the tailpiece Ricketts drew for Annie Hetherington’s article on “Type-Writing and Shorthand for Women,” which features a young girl recumbent in an Art Noveau-esque landscape, surrounded by classical elements such as a water-bearing putto and the pastoral god Pan (Figure 12). Ricketts would re-use elements of this design—adding even more finicky detail—in the initial he created for John Gray’s story, “The Great Worm,” in first volume of the *Dial*, which featured a woman with a similar Moreau-inspired flower headdress, offering a blossom to a docile, winged dragon (Figure 13). In the context of “The Great Worm” in the *Dial*, the latter image makes perfect sense, since Ricketts had roughly represented a scene in Gray’s story. As the accompaniment to “Type-Writing and Shorthand for Women” in the *Woman’s World*, however, the young woman and her mythological friends are significantly less relevant, a fact that raises the question of what role illustration was actually meant to play in the *Woman’s World*, beyond merely giving the magazine a particular artistic sensibility.

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374 Ibid., 41.
In their research on mid-Victorian illustrated periodicals, Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge explore the ways in which illustrations factored into the reading of serial fiction in the 1860s, yet parts of their argument ring true for what Ricketts’s designs were doing in the *Woman’s World* twenty years later. Leighton and Surridge point out: “By their very nature, Victorian serial illustrations and chapter initials are proleptic, anticipating the events of the verbal plot to follow. The verbal
text then seems to repeat what the illustration has already shown, and readers wait to see when it matches (or ironically fails to match) their visual expectations.” The seemingly neater, anticipatory function of headers and initials in the serials of the 1860s, however, gave way to increasingly conflicted relationships between word and image in illustrated texts of the 1880s and 1890s. As Ricketts’s commissions and confidence grew through these latter decades, what Leighton and Surridge call “ironically fail[ing] to match” visual expectations seems to have become a preferred tactic for him. Although the four illustrations Ricketts did for the first year of the *Woman’s World* are clearly linked to the texts they accompany, many of his designs for the later volumes—like the one in which “Type-Writing and Shorthand for Women” appeared—have little to do with the surrounding text. For instance, Ricketts’s tailpiece following an 1889 article on “Modern Gloves” is utterly irrelevant to the topic, as it features an angel playing a violin to a flock of geese. Like “A Lady of Pompeii,” even those images that reflect the written text at hand often do so in a whimsical and complicated way, representing the origins of Ricketts’s propensity for reconfiguring meaning.


376 Ibid., 67.

377 Jeremiah Romano Mercurio has discussed similar strategies deployed in Ricketts’s illustrations for Wilde’s *Poems in Prose* (1894) in his article “Faithful Infidelity: Charles Ricketts’ Illustrations for Two of Oscar Wilde's Poems in Prose,” *Victorian Network* 3, no. 1 (Special Bulletin: January 2010), pp. 3-21.
Ricketts’s playful perversity is certainly apparent in the case of B. de Montmorency Morrell’s May 1889 piece on the stylistic development of footwear titled “Boots and Shoes.” The images Ricketts supplies to accompany the article refer obliquely to the historical overview provided in the text by making visual some of the things the author refers to, but in a way that must be deciphered. The decorated initial “T” at the start of Morrell’s article forms part of a frame that reads “Crispinus Sutor,” the Latin for “Crispin shoemaker,” referring to the Roman martyrs of similar name who later became conflated into the patron saint of shoemakers, Saint Crispin. This frame surrounds a central image of a hooded man with a halo (presumably an interpretation of Saint Crispin), who seems to be fitting an angel with a shoe (Figure 15). Ricketts clearly enjoyed fashioning these sorts of somewhat tongue-in-cheek medieval “illuminations,” since he created a similar initial inscribed “Orpheus” in his headpiece for Wilhelmina Munster’s June 1888 article “A Woman’s Thoughts upon English Ballad Singers and English Ballad Singing.” The tailpiece at the end of the “Boots and Shoes” article also calls for a slightly different interpretive approach; it transcends a merely illustrative function in relation to the text, as shoes are not really the focus at all—only two or three pairs are even visible. Its image of four couples dancing seems innocuous enough until one more closely examines their dress and

378 While only the two larger illustrations on pages 334 and 348 of the article are clearly initialed by Ricketts, I am assuming that the initial letter and two other small images on p. 333 are also done by him based on the box-within-a-box symbol included in the latter two pictures.

notices that the dancers are chronologically mismatched: their clothes all derive from
different historical periods, ranging from a fourteenth-century lady wearing one of the
“towering peaked and horned headdresses” referred to by the author of the article, to a
shepherdess-like “merveilleuse” of the late eighteenth century, who sports an
ostentatious bonnet and excess drapery (Figure 14).380

Figure 14 Charles Ricketts, tailpiece for B. de Montmorency Morrell, “Boots and

Ricketts’s pictures for “Boots and Shoes” not only provide relevant
accompaniment to the article, but also turn Morrell’s earnest attempt at chronology on
its head. The implication, then, is that the magazine audience must be not only savvy
readers in general, but also conversant in “the realms of art and history” in order to be

380 Morrell, 346; 348.
able to parse the eras represented on the dance floor.\textsuperscript{381} In this way, Ricketts seemed to encourage readers to “read” visual markers with attention equal to that devoted to the text itself, especially at the points where the two representations do not match up. In their playful irrelevance or irreverence towards the narrative, Ricketts’s images challenged the pre-eminence of text and, by extension, the authors whose work he was illustrating. This personal artistic strategy, identified as “collaborative resistance” by David Peters Corbett and as “faithful infidelity” by Jeremiah Romano Mercurio, became the hallmark of much of Ricketts’s later work.\textsuperscript{382} It is especially prominent in the illustrations that he created for Oscar Wilde’s own volumes of poetry, such as the Bodley Head’s \textit{The Sphinx}, which Lorraine Janzen Kooistra has thoroughly examined in \textit{The Artist as Critic} (1995). Whether subtly using images to comment on the text they accompany, alter the reader’s perception of it, or wilfully disregard the topic altogether, Ricketts’s designs do not lend themselves to easy “reading.” Like any self-respecting Symbolist, Ricketts balked at the Victorian affinity for art that conveyed a clear narrative.\textsuperscript{383} So, by presenting the readers of the \textit{Woman’s World} with images that must be read but that do not tell a coherent story, Ricketts subverted readerly expectations by demanding a more complex type of interaction. His designs urged readers to engage more earnestly in the interpretation of his image-text in relation to the word-text, and many also playfully tested readers’ abilities to interpret historical, symbolical, and sartorial allusions.

\textsuperscript{381} Clayton, “‘Arbiter of Elegancies?,” 67.

\textsuperscript{382} Corbett, 24; Mercurio, 17.

\textsuperscript{383} Flint, \textit{The Victorians}, 197.
The challenges presented by such visual reading tie back to Wilde’s aesthetic aims for the magazine in its entirety: to elevate its content (and by extension, its readers) to a higher state of art and erudition. Under Wilde’s supervision, the Woman’s World acted not just as a vehicle for aesthetic pleasure, or for impersonally disseminating “high art principles” to a wider audience, but for encouraging the assumed readership of educated middle- and upper-class women to work actively towards attaining greater artistic sophistication. Loretta Clayton has argued that aestheticism as it was articulated and practiced by Wilde was particularly appealing to women, since he “no doubt, assumed the role of expert to an audience, but also engaged in a generous and appealing model of education, one that suggested a widening, not a narrowing, of the “cognoscenti’.” Laurel Brake likewise claims that the Woman’s World constructed women as “serious readers who want (and need) education and acculturation,” and the magazine aimed to do this partially by deepening their understanding of and critical engagement with art, design, and fashion. By comparison, Margaret Beetham notes that among the “aesthetic and intellectual pleasures” illustrated Victorian women’s periodicals offered their readers, was “the potential for a discourse of high art to interrogate the meanings offered elsewhere in the paper.” The illustrations of the Woman’s World endeavoured to inform the female reader further on matters of sound Aesthetic taste, not purely by

386 Brake, Subjugated Knowledges, 142.
387 Beetham, A Magazine of Her Own?, 101.
dictation, but also by encouraging her to call on her education, observation, and prior reading—in short, to think critically. This implicit goal mirrors the more explicit aims of earlier instructional writings on aesthetics by authors such as Mary Eliza Haweis and Lucy Crane, with which many of the intended readers of the Woman’s World may have already been familiar. Ricketts’s illustrations in particular (though not to the exclusion of others) urged the reader not merely to look at images or project stories onto them, but to perform visual analyses that draw from her prior knowledge and innate aesthetics, and even her previous reading of the Woman’s World. A reader might, for example, notice Gustave Fraipont’s propensity for including fans and other feminine accessories in his headers for the monthly “Fashions” section, and note with some amusement how Ricketts playfully set butterfly-winged putti upon these items in his own later headers for the same type of article. The fact that Fraipont thereafter suddenly seemed to take to drawing cherubim himself as he and Ricketts traded off “Fashions” headers seems all too deliberate not to indicate a friendly rivalry at least, or a bitter feud at worst—if only one fought with armies of hand-drawn imps. These sorts of visual nods to high art and history as well as artists’ play within the magazine itself ensured that the Woman’s World rewarded patient and observant readers with further “instruction” via its images.

As Margaret Beetham has noted of the illustrations of other contemporaneous illustrated periodicals, the images included in the Woman’s World also played a “role in adding to the readers’ cultural capital” since “A knowledge of current developments in the arts was essential to a lady’s class position.”388 Perhaps, then, the Woman’s

388 Ibid., 101.
World, and by extension, Wilde in his capacity as editor were suggesting that Ricketts’s designs were at the artistic cutting-edge. Of course, the implications of men, much less male aesthetes, dictating or even suggesting “good taste” to an audience of women were politically complicated. Certainly, it seems odd that Wilde did not appear to have commissioned any articles from prominent women design critics such as Mary Eliza Haweis, for example, whose ideas on aesthetics and dress so influenced his own earlier in the 1880s. Such a decision might have been in service of bolstering (and privileging) his own authority as an arbiter, who had made a name for himself writing and lecturing about proper approaches to art for both men and women. Laurel Brake has claimed that “this palpable divergence of view between the male editor of a woman’s magazine and the male writer about men is in part a function of the social constructions of gender in the period but also one determined by the site of literary production, in this case a woman’s magazine which as a form had long been associated with moral conduct and instruction.”

Although Wilde—and, in a more subtle way, Ricketts—controlled the types of art and design to which readers of the Woman’s World were exposed, their attitudes and methods of doing so seem less patronizing than the overtly prescriptive tone often adopted by other magazines of the period on any number of topics. The discourse of design that suffuses the Woman’s World is far more aligned with the empowering critical mode of reading endorsed by earlier publications like Haweis’s The Art of Beauty as well as later magazines such as the feminist Shafts (1892-1899), which asked readers to consider “their own point of view in relation to the principles at stake,

389 Brake, Subjugated Knowledges, 142.
and [compare] the information given in a text, fictional or otherwise, with their own knowledge of facts."\textsuperscript{390} What sets the \textit{Woman’s World} apart is its careful inclusion of images and designs—like Ricketts’s—that were equally intricate and worthy of analysis as any of the other texts included in the magazine. This aim speaks to the changing role that illustration and visual reading played in the late nineteenth-century, and hints at the complexities that arose when male aestheticism met female pleasure-reading.

**British Aestheticism as a Transatlantic Endeavor**

While the \textit{Woman’s World} was widely praised for its exciting art and literary contents, much of the public interest in the magazine was because Wilde was at the helm, a fact that seldom failed to be mentioned in British and American periodical reviews. In his “English Notes” column for the 1 November 1887 issue of the American journal the \textit{Book Buyer}, British writer J. Ashby-Sterry announced the title-change of the \textit{Lady’s World} and remarked that the \textit{Woman’s World} would “henceforth be under the editorship of Mr. Oscar Wilde, who will be joined by several writers of note, and many novel features will be introduced into the publication. There is plenty of room for a ladies’ journal or a ladies’ magazine of the first-class, and we might take many a hint from some of your numerous publications which are devoted to the interests and requirements of the fair sex.”\textsuperscript{391} In comparing the \textit{Woman’s World} favorably to American women’s magazines, Ashby-Sterry perhaps alluded to the high quality of contributions and illustrations that the magazine contained, the latter of

\textsuperscript{390} Flint, \textit{The Woman Reader}, 153.

\textsuperscript{391} J. Ashby-Sterry, “English Notes,” \textit{Book Buyer} 4.10 (1 November 1887): 338.
which American publications were famous for at the time. Michèle Mendelssohn asserts that Wilde “noticed there wasn’t a single periodical in England likes the ones he had admired in the United States”; he thus very consciously used such American magazines as inspiration for the Woman’s World, both to produce the kind of magazine he envisioned, and to fill the gap he had identified in the English periodicals market.\textsuperscript{392} Ashby-Sterry’s categorization of the Woman’s World not as an exemplary British magazine, but a “ladies’ magazine of the first-class,” therefore pointed to the erasure of national distinctions, and suggested that Wilde’s periodical would be met with admiration on either side of the Atlantic—and indeed it was.

The Woman’s World is rightly categorized as a British magazine, of course, but scholarship seldom mentions that it also had an American edition, supplied by Cassell & Co.’s New York branch. This office was opened in 1860 by John Cassell, and the publishing house opened other offices and distributors in Paris, Toronto, and Melbourne in the decades that followed.\textsuperscript{393} While the British edition of the Woman’s World debuted in November 1887, it appears that the American edition may have been released one month behind. The 19 November 1887 issue of the New York Critic announced that “The Woman’s World, of which Oscar Wilde is now editor, will be published by Cassell & Co. in this country as well as in England hereafter, the new arrangement beginning this month.”\textsuperscript{394} Meanwhile, an advertisement posted by Cassell & Co.’s new Broadway office that appeared in the Book Buyer for 1 December

\textsuperscript{392} Mendelssohn, 219.

\textsuperscript{393} Nowell-Smith, 85.

\textsuperscript{394} “Notes,” Critic 8.203 (19 November 1887): 265.
1887 (and elsewhere) demurred, saying that “The December Issue being PART I. is Now Ready.” Despite lagging behind the London release, the contents of the American edition of the Woman’s World otherwise exactly replicated those of the British publication. This meant that both editions almost exclusively contained contributions from British writers and artists, but the transatlantic availability of the magazine suggested that Cassell & Co. believed it also had transatlantic appeal.

Before and after its release in the United States, the magazine received significant attention in the American press. For example, in the 1 December 1887 issue of the Manufacturer and Builder, the reviewer described it as “a handsome volume of the size of the Magazine of Art, profusely illustrated with full-page pictures, and smaller ones sprinkled through the text. The topics are, of course, such as women are interested in, and while fashion plays an important part, it is not to the exclusion of matters of general interest to women.” Like the promotions of the Woman’s World in British periodicals, American advertisements by Cassell & Co. described it as endeavoring to deal with “everything that is likely to be of interest to women, everything that may conduce their welfare,” and that “Contributions will be received from all women who are engaged in any practical work tending towards the intellectual and social advancement of the community. THE WOMAN’S WORLD will be edited by Mr. Oscar Wilde, who will deal with many of those questions in the discussion of which he has already taken a prominent part in public.”

397 “Cassell & Company’s Periodicals,” 487.
here seemed to be on the practicality of the magazine’s contents, but also emphasized the appeal of Wilde’s editorship. Indeed, the hint that Wilde would deal with some of the same topics he had become famous for during his lecture tour of 1882 surely suggested to many consumers to expect discussions of dress, aesthetics, and Aestheticism in the magazine. This, then, implicitly branded the magazine as a high-class women’s publication, but also explicitly promised it to be one that would deal with art matters and women’s involvement with them.

Once the first American number was announced, a range of American magazines eagerly reviewed it, and more often than not, these reviews continued to suggest that Wilde’s involvement was integral to the magazine’s reception. Some were less than generous in their assessment of Wilde and, subsequently, of the magazine. For instance, a reviewer in the Critic remarked that the first number “suffers from a combination of aristocracy and amateur. All the articles not written by the editor are by ladies, and […] they amount to little from an American point of view.” 398 Considering that the original edition of the magazine was simply being reprinted in America rather than tailored for an American audience, the reviewer’s second objection is valid; less decipherable is the review’s hostility regarding a women’s magazine created by Wilde and what Godey’s Lady’s Book called “a long list of contributors, nearly all women of rank and position.” 399 Meanwhile, the Literary World praised the first issue, noting its handsome design and adding with some satisfaction that, “The fashion notes are thrust to the end of the number and occupy but


...a small space.400 Though the review mentioned some of the texts published in the first issue, Wilde’s own contributions were given special attention:

The literary notes of the editor, Mr. Oscar Wilde, are naturally enough concerned with women’s writings and are not too critical. But when Mr. Wilde says that the ‘remarkable intellectual progress of the United States is very largely due to the efforts of American women, who edit many of the most powerful magazines and newspapers,’ he permits his faith to get the better of the facts.401

Despite this reviewer’s objections to the technical veracity of Wilde’s assertion, the very highlighting of this line might have suggested to the American reader just what to expect of the Woman’s World. It certainly was a magazine focused on items of interest for the modern woman, and one that not only valued the contributions made by women to literary culture, but particularly lauded American women’s efforts in the realm of periodical writing and production. Mendelssohn argues that for Wilde, “American women were the role models,” and he wished the Woman’s World to reflect the “modern outlook” of kinds of bright, cosmopolitan American women he had met during his tour of the United States and in London society.402 Whether intentional or not, the Literary World review also portrayed Wilde as intent on making common cause with women writers and editors, both in America in Britain; this assumption was certainly confirmed in his commitment to commissioning mostly women contributors, even if reviewers like the Critic’s were not so easily won over this idea.


401 Ibid., 462.

402 Mendelssohn, 219.
In addition to Wilde’s reputation, the contents of the first few issues of the American edition also led some reviewers to rightly identify the *Woman’s World* as an organ of his philosophy. In March of 1888, *Scientific American* magazine featured a review the *Woman’s World* at the top of its “New Books and Publications” column:

…we have received copies of the new magazine edited by Oscar Wilde, the apostle of personal aestheticism. It has upwards of forty large octavo pages to each number, containing a variety of articles all more or less pertinent to the subject. As frontispiece in the last issue is a portrait in fac-simile of red crayon of Christina Rossetti by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a pensive face, which from its associations with the life of the artist-poet is of peculiar interest. We also note a collection of literary and other notes by the aesthetic editor.403

Here, the reviewer focused heavily on the aesthetic aspects of the *Woman’s World*, not only in association with its “aesthetic editor,” but also in reference to its design and artistic contents. The choice to highlight the Rossetti frontispiece seems deliberate, immediately aligning the *Woman’s World* with both the mid nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite movement as well as the more recent Aesthetic movement and its offshoot, “personal aestheticism.” This review and its focus seem somewhat incongruous with the usual fare covered by *Scientific American*, whose subtitle at the time was “A Weekly Journal of Practical Information, Art, Science, Mechanics, Chemistry, and Manufactures.” The reviews that followed were for such texts as *Pocket Atlas of the World, Diseases of the Dog, Stair Building in its Various Forms*, and *Astronomy for Amateurs*, and seem much more in line with the periodical’s general themes. Yet the inclusion of “art” in its subtitle does perhaps account for the appearance of the *Woman’s World* in the magazine’s review column—the *Woman’s World* did indeed

dispense not only art but also “practical information,” even if it was of a different sort than Scientific American’s. The Boston-based Methodist paper Zion’s Herald agreed, its reviewer declaring that, “This is really a magazine of a fine order of literary merit, and the articles are written with special view to practical helpfulness for women.”

As late as its final year, the Woman’s World was still receiving coverage in the American press, which continued to laud the magazine and had by that point softened somewhat towards Wilde. In Current Literature for March 1889, the writer of “General Gossip of Authors and Writers” remarked that, “Oscar Wilde has not found his occupation gone because the world has grown accustomed to the wan lily. [...] He is really, in spite of his impertinence and his affectations, a very bright individual. [...] Mr. Wilde has made a success of his magazine, The Woman’s World, and has recently contributed some clever articles to The Nineteenth Century and Fortnightly review, which place him as a writer of talent.” While this review highlighted the success that Wilde had found in his journalistic work, both including and beyond his editorship of the Woman’s World, it also brought attention to the greater acceptance of Aestheticism by the late 1880s. Even though the writer claims that, “the world has grown accustomed to the wan lily,” that did not necessarily mean that (women) consumers and readers were no longer interested in ideas related to Aestheticism and Wilde’s conception of it. The fact that world had “grown accustomed” to the images, texts, and concepts associated with Aestheticism merely meant that they were no longer considered as outlandish as they once were—in fact, one might go so far as to


405 “General Gossip of Authors and Writers,” Current Literature II.3 (March 1889): 194.
argue that this review illustrated the mainstreaming and general acceptance that popular Aestheticism had achieved by the time the *Woman’s World* ceased publication.

While the initial surge of interest in the *Woman’s World* did not result in lasting success, it does reiterate the public’s recognition of the magazine’s cosmopolitanism and Aestheticism and hints at what its future transatlantic potential might have been. The reception of the *Woman’s World* in both Britain and America indicate that it resonated with its intended audiences as well as with readers beyond those intended audiences, and that part of the reason for this was Wilde’s Aesthetic cachet, which he in turn channeled into the magazine he oversaw and edited. The stated aims Wilde had for the *Woman’s World*, combined with the text and art contributions it published—the enthusiastic reception of those contents—confirms the standing of the *Woman’s World* as a truly Aesthetic publication, and one that might have become even more thoroughly transatlantic had it last longer than three years. For the time that it was available in Britain and America, however, the *Woman’s World* acted as not only as an ambassador of British Aestheticism, but also as a piece of pleasure reading that allowed—even urged—women readers to engage in self-improvement and self-education through art culture.
Chapter 5
FROM GREENAWAY TO GIRTON:
AESTHETICISM IN JUVENILE MAGAZINES

The late-Victorian period saw not only an expansion of opportunities and media for women, but also a flowering of children’s and youth culture, which led to the creation of new categories for adolescence, as well as adolescent literature. Sally Mitchell’s *The New Girl* (1995) outlines how “the word girl became dramatically visible about 1880,” and how girlhood came to be understood as the space young women occupied between the parental homes of their childhood and their marital homes. By the end of the century, this space had expanded enough to mark it as a distinct stage of middle- and upper-class female life between the mid-teens and mid-twenties, and one with freedoms and interests that now needed to be catered to in print and in the culture at large. As demonstrated in previous chapters, Anglo-American periodicals aimed at women provided valuable outlets for female authors writing on Aestheticism and were crucial in otherwise circulating aesthetic ideas and images; yet, such efforts were not limited to women’s magazines and family papers. British and American periodicals for children, and for middle and upper-class girls specifically, helped to spread the influence of Aestheticism to younger readers, aligning the movement’s emphasis on beauty with morality as well as good taste. Magazines with

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406 Mitchell, 6; 9.

407 Ibid., 8-9.
largely female juvenile readerships naturally dealt with Aestheticism in different ways than their adult and/or male counterparts, which speaks to the changing aspirations of and for girls at the end of the nineteenth century.

Even more so than adult magazines, illustrated periodicals for children and young people used illustration, cartoons, and commentary not only to cover certain cultural trends, but to teach visual literacy. Naturally, part of that aesthetic education at the end of the nineteenth century included education on Aestheticism. Based on the wide circulation of images like George du Maurier’s *Punch* cartoons of aesthetes, it is logical that the types of images and objects associated with Aestheticism in these cartoons and in the popular press at large—sunflowers, lilies, peacock feathers, blue and white china, rich half-tones, old-fashioned dress, and languid figures—were also used in juvenile magazines. Like periodicals for adult audiences, some children’s magazines explicitly laid out what made something or someone Aesthetic or actively celebrated artists and writers aligned with the movement. Others simply reproduced without comment the same kinds of images, satiric poems, or character descriptions that appeared in adult magazines, implying that these Aesthetic markers could be readily identified by child and teenage readers, with or without the help of a parent. Either way, being able to “read” images and texts for tell-tale Aesthetic signifiers—whether to admire or to condemn the movement—was a skill seemingly encouraged by the frequency and detail with which they were published in middle-class juvenile magazines.

Curiously, though, there were other variants of the visual codes or code-words of Aestheticism that appear almost exclusively in children’s books and magazines, especially in America. It is almost as though an additional set of signifiers was deemed
necessary fully to convey Aesthetic values to younger readers—and certainly to convey them across the Atlantic. Juvenile texts rarely invoked the names of du Maurier, Whistler, or Wilde. Instead mentions of bric-a-brac, “Greenaway girls,” Mother Hubbard dresses, Walter Crane illustrations, and of course, the infamous Fauntleroy suit all became popular short-hand for talking about the look or feel of the Aesthetic movement, if not the movement itself. These descriptors and images appeared again and again in American and British periodicals of the 1880s, implying that they, in addition to the usual taxonomy of symbols, were just as easily legible as markers of Aestheticism. Contrary to the ridicule and unease with which the movement was approached in many adult magazines, the framing of Aestheticism for children and young people seems to have been a much less serious affair. Instead, Aestheticism was often presented as harmlessly “queer” or “old-fashioned,” and, just as often, as desirable and pretty.

To claim that Aestheticism and juvenile literature do not cross paths at all in current scholarship would be an overstatement. However, it does bear acknowledging that when they do, it is usually in one of several identifiable forms: studies of fin-de-siècle fairytales by the likes of Oscar Wilde, scholarship on popular children’s illustrators like Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane, or analyses of the Little Lord Fauntleroy craze started by Frances Hodgson Burnett’s immensely popular novel and play of the same name.408 A good deal of work remains to be done in order to place

408 “Oscar Wilde and the Culture of Childhood,” a conference organized by Joseph Bristow and held on 29 May 2015 at UCLA, and the resulting book edited by Bristow, Oscar Wilde and the Cultures of Childhood (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), suggest that this may be changing.
these famous writers and artists—as well as the many other now less-famous ones—more firmly into the context of contemporaneous popular print culture. The overlaps between Aestheticism and American children’s texts, and between Aestheticism and Anglo-American juvenile periodicals, are particularly ripe for further investigation.

This chapter will by no means be able to address all these topics, but in it I will lay a groundwork by focusing on just two late-nineteenth century publications, the American children’s magazine *St. Nicholas* (1873-1940) and the British girls’ periodical *Atalanta* (1887-1898). While *St. Nicholas* was intended for younger audiences and was by far the more popular magazine, with distribution on both sides of the Atlantic, I believe that it and *Atalanta* have significant similarities in style and

Relevant book-length studies that touch on the intersection between Aestheticism and childhood include Anne H. Lundin’s *Victorian Horizons: The Reception of the Picture Books of Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, and Kate Greenaway* (Lanham, MD: Children’s Literature Association and Scarecrow Press, 2001); Michèle Mendelssohn’s *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2007); Caroline Sumpter’s *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Jennifer Sattaur’s *Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011).

editorial management, though they differ in the degree and extent of their representation and treatment of Aestheticism.

Both *St. Nicholas* and *Atalanta* were edited by respected female authors (Mary Mapes Dodge and L. T. Meade, respectively), and both featured contributions from some of the foremost children’s writers and illustrators of the day, many of them women. *St. Nicholas* published poetry and prose by successful women writers and intellectuals including Frances Hodgson Burnett, Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett, Clara Erskine Clement, Helen Gray Cone, and Dodge herself. *Atalanta* featured contributions from Burnett, E. Nesbit, Sarah Tytler, Amy Levy, Julia Cartwright, Jean Ingelow, and John Strange Winter (pseudonym of Henrietta Eliza Vaughan Stannard), in addition to popular male writers including Robert Louis Stevenson, Grant Allen, and H. Rider Haggard. Many of the writers for both *St. Nicholas* and *Atalanta* traveled in the same circles as Aesthetic artists, publishers, and tastemakers; their contributions about girls in these magazines were aimed at exactly that demographic, and thereby allowed them to explore Aesthetic themes with younger—and specifically female—audiences. In this way, both magazines helped do the work of placing women and girls at the center of Aesthetic discourse during a time when media catering to girls was still a relatively new concept.

“Suggestive, attractive and epigrammatic”

In his important compendium of *Children’s Periodicals of the United States* (1984), R. Gordon Kelly states that *St. Nicholas* is “the best known of nineteenth century American juvenile periodicals,” and its reputation remains that of “a literate, principled, conservative, yet open-minded voice of the nineteenth-century American
elite.’” As a product of Scribner & Co. (and, after 1881, Century & Co.), St. Nicholas very consciously reflected its adult counterparts, Scribner’s Monthly Magazine and the Century, in part because they shared the same authors, illustrators, and editorial goals. In the November 1873 issue of Scribner’s Monthly, an often-quoted announcement for St. Nicholas began, “Make way for the children’s magazine!” and claims that “Wherever ‘SCRIBNER’ goes, ‘ST. NICHOLAS’ ought to go. They will be harmonious companions in the family, and the helpers of each other in the work of instruction, culture and entertainment.” The magazine became a juggernaut against which many other children’s magazines could not compete, and it absorbed rival publications Our Young Folks and the Children’s Hour in 1874, the Schoolday Magazine and the Little Corporal in 1875, and Wide Awake in 1893.

While these were only a small number of the many juvenile periodicals published throughout the nineteenth century, there were few periodicals designated for girls alone before the mid-1880s in Britain and the late 1890s in America. Like many contemporaneous magazines, St. Nicholas had a correspondence column, called “The Letter-Box,” which provides a great deal of rich insight not only into the thoughts and identities of the magazine’s readers, but also the ways in which the magazine hoped to characterize itself. In his 2015 book, Commercializing Childhood: Children’s


410 Ibid., 377-378.


412 Kelly, 378.
Magazines, Urban Gentility, and the Ideal of the Child Consumer in the United States, 1823-1918, Paul B. Ringel points out that the actual contents of magazines marketed to both boys and girls, such as *St. Nicholas*, often skewed quite a bit more toward the former than the latter, particularly before the 1880s.\(^{413}\) However, based on the names of children whose letters were published in the “The Letter-Box,” or who sent in responses to “The Riddle-Box,” there are indications that *St. Nicholas* had a large or even primarily female audience. Allowances must, of course, be made for the use of pseudonyms (particularly in “The Riddle-Box”) that obscure the gender of the reader, and for the somewhat skewed readership sample that “The Letter-Box” represented, as not all letters sent to the magazine were actually published, and many avid readers likely never wrote such letters to *St. Nicholas*. Ringel goes on to explain that starting in the 1880s, “*St. Nicholas* more actively supported the expansion of girls’ prospects during this period, although it focused more on economic opportunities than on education.”\(^{414}\) These potential prospects were largely covered by articles about balancing artistic or literary work with household duties or motherhood, but the magazine also “began to present stories about young women who were building communities that encouraged them to expand their ambitions beyond home duties and social gatherings.”\(^{415}\) Such communities were often made up of sisters of friends bound together through art production, interior decoration, or domestic crafts like


\(^{414}\) Ibid., 188.

\(^{415}\) Ibid., 188.
embroidery, dressmaking, and millinery. This increase of texts and images featuring
girl heroines and their aspirations may reflect the perceived increase in the number of
girl readers, and the magazine’s commitment to providing more content to suit these
readers.

In this and various other ways, St. Nicholas made a point (or at least a show) of
being responsive to the wishes of its audience. In “The Letter-Box” for January 1882,
a member of the editorial staff (probably Dodge herself), reported the results of a
previous issue’s “Invitation to Our Readers” to provide feedback about what they like
best about the magazine and what they wanted more of. In this report, Dodge claimed
that the many letters received from readers expressing their satisfaction “proves that,
of the vast army of children who read ST. NICHOLAS, each reader finds a
considerable part of every number exactly suits his or her tastes.”^416 However, she also
acknowledged the magazine’s aim to shape this taste further: “You will find that, in
this hurrying, busy, nineteenth-century life of ours, your present tastes will change or
new tastes will develop more rapidly than you can now imagine, and ST. NICHOLAS
if it is truly to be your magazine, must keep pace with, and even anticipate your
growth.”^417 In its first two decades, the usual fare of St. Nicholas included serialized
novels, humorous poems and songs, articles and fiction about animals, narratives
about foreign countries and cultures, fairytales, historical biographies, articles about
travel and occupations, various riddles and puzzles, as well as the editorial and
correspondence columns. However, St. Nicholas is particularly notable for its


^417 Ibid., 260.
emphasis on art and artists, and its copious amount of high-quality illustration, both of which seem explicitly in line with the magazine’s aims to hone children’s visual discrimination and refine their aesthetic tastes. These topics were not only assumed by Dodge to be crucial to children’s development, but also something that children actually wanted from their print media.

Before the first issue of *St. Nicholas* was even published, Dodge had already emphatically argued that children’s magazines must be held to the same rigorous standards as adult magazines, but that they must “give just what the child wants” rather than a watered-down version of what his or her parents read. In an unsigned July 1873 article in *Scribner’s Monthly*, Dodge laid out some guiding principles for the *St. Nicholas* magazine to come, including an explicit statement about the importance of art and illustrations in children’s magazines, a focus which perhaps also speaks to the type of visual literacy endorsed by Aestheticism and by more overtly art-conscious periodicals.

A child’s periodical must be pictorially illustrated, of course, and the pictures must have the greatest variety consistent with simplicity, beauty and unity. They should be heartily conceived and well executed; and they must be suggestive, attractive and epigrammatic. […] One of the sins of this age is editorial dribbling over inane pictures. The time to shake up a dull picture is when it is in the hands of the artist and engraver, and not when it lies, a fact accomplished, before the keen eyes of the little folk.418

Dodge asserted that periodical illustrations must accomplish a great deal in order to meet the aesthetic and qualitative expectations of young readers, and that an editor must be vigilant in meeting these expectations. Dodge went on to argue that besides

being attractive, illustrations should also spur children to think: “Well enough, too, for the picture to cause a whole tangle of interrogation-marks in a child’s mind. It need not be elaborate, nor exhaust its theme, but what it attempts to do it must do well, and the editor must not over-help nor hinder.” Dodge assumed that children would inspect pictures closely and would subsequently have questions, but she argued that these questions should arise from the interest generated from the illustrations, not from their poor execution. In this way, Dodge’s approach to illustrations in *St. Nicholas*—and how she hoped to guide child readers to interact with them—aligned with the Aesthetic tenet of deep engagement with visual culture.

At the start, *St. Nicholas* may not have been a consummately “Aesthetic” publication in the same way that later periodicals such as the *Yellow Book*, the *Woman’s World*, or *Atalanta* were, but it clearly did reflect Dodge’s commitment to good illustration and it made an effort to educate its child readers about current and historical art in general. In her 2015 dissertation, “*St. Nicholas Magazine: A Portable Art Museum*,” Mary Frances Zawadzki argues that *St. Nicholas* was always intended as “an art magazine for children,” and that the visual features of the magazine were explicitly meant to provide a template to its readers for the development of proper taste. She explains, “By supplying children with reproductions of fine art, art historical essays, and illustrations and page layouts that parallel the styles and types of fashionable art, *St. Nicholas* provided children with the foundations of art

419 Ibid., 353-354.

The magazine published contributions such as the American art writer Clara Erskine Clement’s long series “Stories of Art and Artists” (January 1881-September 1886) as well as stand-alone articles on painters such as Sir Edwin Landseer, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Elizabeth Butler; frontispieces that reproduced works by members of the artistic canon such as Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, and John Everett Millais; and illustrations by some of the foremost British and American illustrators, including Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, Jessie McDermott, Reginald Birch, Alfred Brennan, and later, Howard Pyle. Zawadzki goes on to note that “by choosing certain styles for illustration and page layouts, and by choosing to feature certain stylistic periods in the history of art, the editors of St. Nicholas actively trained the eye towards acceptable styles of visual imagery”—in particular, styles that “were actively promoted by cultural elite.” So-called “elite” styles were often the same ones that were endorsed by members of the rather conservative American Genteel Tradition, medieval and Renaissance art, Old Masters, and contemporary European and American painting. Yet, such art styles often ran adjacent to representations of Aestheticism in popular print more generally, both as a means of comparison and as an indication that many aesthetes actually celebrated the same artists and kinds of art. In its aims to make “high art” accessible to all its readers, St. Nicholas went out of its way to cover current art of many different kinds, and Aestheticism was no exception.

421 Ibid., 4.

422 Ibid., 7.

423 Ibid., 47; 49.
Besides coverage of artists and art movements, *St. Nicholas* also included contributions that highlighted practical approaches to art and its manufacture that aligned with the values of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements. For instance, in the late-1880s, the magazine published a number of articles about homemade crafts by the American author and art educator Charles Godfrey Leland. While crafts and handiwork were not uncommon features in children’s and women’s magazines at the time, the choice to publish Leland’s work in particular was perhaps a strategic one. Leland had spent most of the 1870s in England and had been highly influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement there. After his return to America, he founded the Public Industrial Art School in Philadelphia in 1881. J. Liberty Tadd, later the Director of the school, remarked that it was “the first school in Philadelphia in connection with the public school system for the introduction of manual training” and that it was intended to educate girls and boys of “all grades from kindergarten to the university.”

Oscar Wilde visited the school during his 1882 stay in Philadelphia and enthusiastically promoted it in his lectures thereafter, later writing to Leland: “I have received so many letters about it and congratulations that your school will be known and honoured everywhere, and you yourself recognised and honoured as one of the great pioneers and leaders of the art of the future.”

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Wilde, Leland conveyed his equal admiration for the aesthete’s work, particularly in drawing the attention of women and girls towards art:

I can never thank you as you deserve for the good you have done to the Great Cause of Art Education—and to me as one of its humble teachers. You made a great sensation among all those in Philad[elphi]a who knew anything of the school. As soon as your lecture had ended a flock of young artless-Artfull female dodgers — who had heard you came directly to the school which they had never visited before. Nothing has occurred since my return to America which has gratified me as much.426

While Leland’s articles for St. Nicholas do not explicitly deal with Wilde or with Aestheticism, the kinds of crafts he suggested perhaps did align with the prevailing tenets of the movement. At the very least, they instructed readers on the skills of drawing, sculpting, and carving that were taught at the Public Industrial Art School and encouraged better understanding of design principles through hands-on experience. Leland’s inclusion in St. Nicholas therefore reinforced the magazine’s endorsement of the art and aesthetic approaches suggested by the likes of Leland and Wilde, as well as their dedication to engaging female audiences.

“The kind of art desired”

Throughout the late 1870s and 1880s, various articles, stories, poems, and illustrations that explicitly invoked Aestheticism appeared in the pages of the

magazine. These contributions ran the gamut from nouveau-Hellenic and -Medieval to Queen Anne, and from playful teasing to earnest engagement. Whatever the style or attitude, the prevalence of these Aesthetic elements marked them as important to the magazine’s editors and contributors, as well as worthy of note by readers.

Additionally, the Aesthetic topics and images in *St. Nicholas* at times mirrored, but on the whole vastly exceeded in number, those presented in *Scribner’s Monthly* and the *Century*. The juvenile magazine’s emphasis on visually interesting design and copious illustrations created a richer environment in which to introduce different visual styles and schools, including Aestheticism. *St. Nicholas* may not have been committed solely to the Aesthetic cause, but Mary Mapes Dodge did do her part in forwarding Aesthetic artists and imagery. For instance, Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway, arguably the preeminent creators of Aesthetic images of and for children, both contributed to and were promoted by *St. Nicholas*. Along with Randolph Caldecott, Crane and Greenaway made up what Greenaway’s biographer Rodney Engen calls the “nursery triumvirate” of British illustrators whose toy books were published by the successful engraver and printer Edmund Evans, and whose styles thereby came to dominate late-Victorian children’s print culture.

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427 Crane and Greenaway’s work for *St. Nicholas* is in itself not unusual for either artist. Over the course of his career, Crane contributed illustrations to a number of popular British periodicals, including the *Magazine of Art*, the *Argosy*, and *Atalanta*, and created covers for magazines like the *Scottish Art Review* and the German journal *Jugend*. Greenaway’s illustrations were published in dozens of periodicals like the *Illustrated London News* and *Cassell’s Magazine* as well as magazines for children such as *Harper’s Young People, Little Folks, Routledge’s Every Girl’s Annual*, and the *Girl’s Own Paper*.

Crane was commissioned by Mary Mapes Dodge in 1877 to design a new cover for *St. Nicholas* (Figure 17), which was unveiled with the Christmas number that year, and was announced with great enthusiasm in “The Letter-Box” (probably by Dodge herself):

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Our beautiful new cover was designed and drawn by Walter Crane, of London, who made all those lovely pictures in “The Baby’s Opera.” Our readers will remember what we said of him last month, and that, though a great artist in other ways also, he has done his best and most famous work in drawing for the little folks. It would have been impossible, therefore, to find a hand more skillful in the kind of art desired, or better fitted to put upon the cover of ST. NICHOLAS just the things to suit best the tastes and fancies; and of Mr. Crane’s success we think no one who really studies the new cover can have a doubt. It seems to us fully worthy both of the artist and the magazine; and, believing that our young readers will all agree with us, we leave them the delight of discovering and enjoying for themselves its special beauties.429

This emphasis on Crane’s work being “the kind of art desired” and moreover particularly suited for this magazine, further aligned the elements of Aestheticism with the aims of St. Nicholas. Dodge not only included praise of Crane’s art, but urged the reader to “really study” the design, thereby deriving even more pleasure and erudition from it—much as Mary Eliza Haweis urged her readers to do with paintings, décor, and dress in The Art of Beauty. This exhortation became even clearer in the April 1878 issue of St. Nicholas, which contained a detailed parsing of the cover design in that month’s “The Letter-Box”:

The readers of ST. NICHOLAS are so familiar, by this time, with the new cover of the magazine, that they can understand, better perhaps than at first, how much this cover, which Mr. Walter Crane has so carefully and thoughtfully drawn, is meant to express. The girls or boy who will take the trouble to study the meaning of the many distinct parts of which the design is composed, will see that pretty much every subject that ST. NICHOLAS thinks it well to talk about, is, in some way, symbolized in the smaller pictures.430


Dodge then went on to describe each of these elements within the cover as a whole, including the vignettes that appear in each of the boxes along the border, the mythological figures at the top and bottom, and St. Nicholas himself. She even supplied an interpretive reading of Crane’s artist’s mark, concluding, “Thus we have shown that this cover tells quite the story, and, if we study it longer, we may see more in it than is mentioned here.”

In these statements from St. Nicholas’s editorial department, the magazine clearly identified its own aesthetic (and Aesthetic) ideal, as well as how it believed images in general ought to be approached.

While Crane’s work may have been popular, Kate Greenaway’s became iconic in juvenile print culture, her name used as shorthand for the quaintly-appareled pastoral girls and boys who so often appeared in her work. Through the popularity of these illustrations, Rodney Engen claims that Greenaway “dressed a generation of children,” and her “influence extended into the spheres of commercial printing, publishing, fine art porcelain, jewelry, and haberdashery.”

Engen records that Greenaway partly or wholly illustrated at least 150 books, contributed to at least ninety periodicals, exhibited upwards of fifty watercolors in galleries, and produced dozens of cards, calendars, and other ephemera. Greenaway’s illustrations appeared in St. Nicholas as early as 1877 and continued to do so sporadically until 1880. Her first two illustrations for the magazine may have been the Cavalier-style boy in the December 1877 issue’s “Christmas Card” and the girl dressed in an approximation of

431 Ibid., 444.
432 Engen, 9.
433 Ibid., 9.
late eighteenth-century garb in the January 1878 issue’s “New-Year Card” (Figures 16 and 17). There is some uncertainty as to whether these were actually done by Greenaway herself, but even if they were not by her, they are very clearly versions of the old-fashioned children who were featured in her most widely recognized works.434

434 The first of these drawings is unattributed in the issue and the second includes a note indicating it was “Drawn by Miss L. Greenaway” (a probable error for K. Greenaway). Both images are included in various Greenaway bibliographies and catalogues, such as the auction catalogue for The Kate Greenaway Collection of Miss M. I. Meacham of New York City (1921), Susan Ruth Thomson’s Kate Greenaway: A Catalogue of the Kate Greenaway Collection, Rare Book Room, Detroit Public Library (1977), and Thomas E. Schuster and Rodney Engen’s Printed Kate Greenaway: A Catalogue Raisonné (1986). However, in the February 1878 issue of St. Nicholas, “The Letter-Box” includes the following comments about these images:

“By letters just received from England, we learn that the pretty Christmas and New-Year cards in our December and January issues were not drawn by Miss Greenaway, though a friend had mistakenly sent them to us last summer as specimens of that lady’s work, cut from a scrap-book. We, therefore, hasten to correct the error, wishing, at the same time, that we knew to whose hand to credit the drawings. To our still greater regret, we now learn that Marcus Ward & Co., of London, had published these as Christmas cards, and counted upon having a large sale for them in America. Had we known this in time, we certainly should not have copied the pictures without previously referring to the publishers. The best reparation we can make at the present date is this acknowledgment and a bit of honest advice to our readers: Hunt the shops for beautifully colored cards from which these pictures were copied, and buy them for next Christmas. They are far better than our printed ones.” (“The Letter-Box,” St. Nicholas 5 (February 1878): 300).

It is unclear whether the “letters just received from England” alluded to above came from the friend who had initially submitted the images to St. Nicholas, or whether they were from Marcus Ward & Co. or from Greenaway herself. Greenaway had broken with Marcus Ward & Co. earlier in 1877, following a dispute with Ward, who had refused to return original card designs to her and otherwise exploited her artistic labor (Devereaux, 61). If these designs were in fact genuine Greenaways, the attempt to dissociate her name from them may be indicative of the bad blood between the artist and publisher, and her justified anger over the frequent pirating and copying of her designs.
Many of Greenaway’s later illustrations for the magazine did not necessarily represent the quintessential “Greenaway girls” for which she was fast becoming famous in the 1870s, but her Aesthetic maidens—along with those of Crane—were continually recommended to readers as suitable models for *tableaux vivants*, theatrical costumes, and everyday dress.435

Figure 16  [Kate Greenaway], “Christmas Card,” *St. Nicholas* (December 1877), 91. Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/stnicholasserial05dodg>

Both Greenaway and Walter Crane’s children’s books, as well as those of Thomas Crane, were also enthusiastically advertised in the pages on St. Nicholas, suggesting a further affinity between these artists’ styles and the taste defined by the magazine as “good.” In Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1915, Kristine Moruzi explains that “The reading culture of the period was created and reinforced through the periodical press. Not only did the editors want girls to read their magazines, they wanted to promote the reading of other books and magazines as
This publication network therefore made periodicals the preferred reading material for middle-class families with a small amount of disposable income, while also encouraging the development of children’s taste for other types of texts. Before Crane’s cover debuted, *St. Nicholas* published a glowing review of Walter (and Lucy) Crane’s *The Baby’s Opera* (1877), but warned of imitators who would “put a bad sham before the people as the work of a true artist” and thereby not only lessen Crane’s profits, “but also [take] away from his good name, besides spoiling the taste of the youngsters.” Such statements manifest the magazine’s concern with exposing children only to the work of “true artists,” and teaching them to appreciate the beauty and the correctness of these works, as well as to revere individual artistic talent.

Furthermore, this warning about “bad shams” referenced a letter Crane himself had sent to the editor of *Scribner’s*, which was published as part of an article in the September 1877 issue of *Scribner’s Monthly*. This is just one example of the ways in which the child readers of *St. Nicholas* received much of the same sorts of news and recommendations as readers of the adult periodical, albeit in a simpler and more easily digestible form.

Such cross-pollination, especially in the case of advertising books, also meant that the publishers had greater potential influence over the purchasing habits of readers, through both the parents’ and the children’s periodicals. Several years later,


437 Ibid., 10.

the January 1882 issue of *St. Nicholas* featured a large reproduction of one of John George Sowerby’s illustrations from Marcus Ward & Co.’s holiday book, *At Home*, which depicted three quite Aesthetic little girls wearing oversized soft hats trimmed with feathers and Greenaway-esque dresses decorated with sunflowers. This image was accompanied by a long endorsement that called the book a “dainty volume, which will delight young America as well as young England” and described how a reader could “tread your happy way through a wealth of appropriate colored pictures and lively rhymes of home life, stopping often to specially admire some exquisite bit of decoration or rich effect of color.” In this, the “appropriate” and “exquisite” features of the text were emphasized, and the reader was explicitly encouraged to assess the text aesthetically, and perhaps specifically Aesthetically. The review concluded, “Suffice it to say, it is illustrated by J. G. Sowerby, beautifully decorated by Thomas Crane, elder brother of Walter Crane,” seeming to assume that this artistic pedigree would have impressed both child readers and their parents, based on previous endorsement by various Scribner’s publications.

**American Interpretations of Aestheticism in *St. Nicholas***

Besides these British exemplars of Aesthetic illustration, American artists including Jessie McDermott, Walter Satterlee, and Reginald Birch illustrated texts pertaining to Aestheticism in the pages of *St. Nicholas*. In accordance with the magazine’s promise to “keep pace with, and even anticipate” the changing tastes of its readers, *St. Nicholas* provided ample commentary on this emerging art movement,


440 Ibid., 261.
starting in 1881 and continuing throughout the decade. The unattributed humorous poem “Decorative,” which appeared in the July 1881 issue of *St. Nicholas*, was one of the first to touch on Aestheticism, and—through Jessie McDermott’s accompanying drawing of a pseudo-Grecian girl—to visualize it (Figure 18). McDermott was a frequent contributor to *St. Nicholas*, and was described in an 1891 *New York Times* article as “one of the best-known illustrators of juvenile books in this country, her delineations of child-life being familiar to the readers of *St. Nicholas, Harper’s Young People, Wide Awake*, and innumerable stories for little folk.” Many of these illustrations showcased the Aesthetic bent of McDermott’s style, as did her illustrations for Margaret Sidney’s book *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* (1881) and several of its sequels, which are probably now her best known works.

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In the illustration for “Decorative,” McDermott depicted a girl dressed in flowing robes and sandals sitting in a pretty attitude on a stone wall. On its own, this image and its quiet, classical subject might have called to mind the work of Albert Moore or Frederic Leighton, but when paired with the poem, it was colored by the satirical tone of the verses. This was especially true at the end, when the speaker supposes the subject is merely a “silly girl” who asks, “Will some kind artist […] Just please to paint me on a plaque or dish?”442 Such gently mocking poems appeared

frequently in *St. Nicholas*, and poetry in general was one of the most common genres through which the magazine addressed Aestheticism. Like “Decorative,” some of these poems poked fun at the vanity and lethargy that were sometimes attributed to aesthetes, and thereby pointed out the “moral” of not getting too carried away by art fads, while others simply reveled in the charming and artistic aspects of Aestheticism.

Angela Sorby explains that the poetry published in *St. Nicholas* contained “strains of a commercial aesthetic that offers a patchy but persistent counterdiscourse to the assumption that poetry must be universally ‘true’ to be ‘good’,” instead exemplifying the somewhat radical *fin-de-siècle* idea that “to be ‘good,’ a poem must simply be amusing—and must, at all costs, avoid being boring.”443 Sorby asserts that “In these pieces, we can find something rare among new works in the later nineteenth century: we can find poetry that addresses (while constructing) the immediate anxieties and desires of its readers.”444 Such addresses and constructions were of utmost importance to Mary Mapes Dodge in the roles of editor and poet. She wrote many poems for *St. Nicholas*, both under her own name and under the name ‘Joel Stacy’ (to whom several poems dealing with Aesthetic topics were attributed), as well as contributing most of the magazine’s unsigned verses (perhaps including “Decorative”).445 The September 1881 issue featured a poem by Stacy titled “Aramantha Mehitabel Brown,” which described the eponymous girl as “the prettiest


444 Ibid., 79.

445 Ibid., 79.
girl in the town,/ In the days of King George, number Three,” whose clothing was so impeccable that “all the modistes declared it was ‘sweet’."

The title of the poem recalls George du Maurier’s Aesthetic couple, Mr. and Mrs. Cimabue Brown, then appearing in *Punch*; the drawing of Aramantha was unattributed, but it appeared to owe a debt to Greenaway, if it was not actually by Greenaway herself, who did illustrate several of Dodge’s other poems in *St. Nicholas*.

One of Stacy’s next poems was a limerick titled “The Aesthetic Young Lady,” which was published in the July 1882 issue, and framed by F. W. Lamb’s sketch of a girl in a sunflower-covered Aesthetic dress painting a frieze of cranes and cattails. Like McDermott’s drawing for “Decorative,” the illustration of “The Aesthetic Young Lady” was not satirical in itself, but the reader was clearly meant to recognize the folly of the “zealous, aesthetic Louise,” who finds that “The style of that day/ Had long passed away/ Ere she’d come to the end of her frieze!” As these poems demonstrate, Dodge seems to have had a rather vexed relationship with different aspects of Aestheticism: while she clearly wanted to promote certain visual aspects and artists associated with the movement, she appears to have been suspicious of the faddishness that many came to associate with Aestheticism because of its portrayal as ridiculous in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience*, in the magazine *Punch*, and elsewhere in the early 1880s.


In her role as editor, Dodge made sure to include reminders of the need for restraint when it came to Aestheticism in other parts of the magazine, including in her editorial column, “Jack-in-the-Pulpit.” In the March 1883 installment, Dodge penned a segment called “Pretty Is as Pretty Does”:

That’s an old saying, my chicks, and more true than grammatical. There’s the sunflower, for instance, which lately has been held aloft by folks who thin or fatten, as the case may be, on what is known as ‘the beautiful.’ Now, pretty as the sunflower certainly is, its works outshine it, though they may be neither ‘aesthetic’ nor ‘poetic.’

Dodge then went on to describe the uses of the sunflower’s seeds for livestock feed and mechanical lubricant, the stalks for fiber, and the blossoms for dye. This practical and somewhat moralizing approach to “Aesthetic” topics did not, however, prevent Dodge from publishing many other approaches in various genres and with different degrees of seriousness. Considering her commitment to making sure that St. Nicholas addressed readers’ current interest and tastes, this makes sense, especially since there is evidence that the readers of St. Nicholas were attentive to and engaged with some of the more popular aspects of the Aesthetic movement as it appeared in America. As early as January 1880, readers were apparently asking about the meaning of “bric-à-brac”—a term that was at the time often associated with the kind of trinkets and curiosities valued by the Aesthetic decorator—so an explanation of the definition and etymology of the word was published in that month’s “The Letter-Box.”

Meanwhile, “The Riddle Box” segment at the end of each issue always included the


names or pseudonyms of the readers who had written in with their solutions, and some readers made very *au courant* references. For example, in “The Riddle-Box” for May 1882, ‘Bunthorne and Grosvenor’ submitted an answer, while in the September 1882 issue, ‘Patience’ and ‘Two Aesthetic Maidens’ participated. In each of these instances, the readers were likely drawing inspiration for their pseudonyms from *Patience*, Gilbert and Sullivan’s famous opera. This was perhaps a small indication that the magazine’s child readers, young though they may have been, were well aware of the texts and figures associated with Aestheticism, if only in its most popular forms.

In addition to Dodge’s own poems and editorials, *St. Nicholas* featured a significant number of other texts dealing with Aestheticism in the early to mid-1880s, when the movement had arrived in earnest on the shores of America, along with Oscar Wilde. In the March 1882 issue of *St. Nicholas*, the American artist Walter Satterlee’s highly Aesthetic images accompanied Susan Hartley Swett’s narrative poem, “How it Happened,” a love story between the painted figures on a Chinese vase and on a Japanese fan, who are parted and ultimately ruined due to the decorative machinations of a fair young aesthete (Figure 19). Satterlee also illustrated A. Wolhaupter’s “Lament of the Cat-Tail” for the April 1882 issue, in which a dried cattail relegated to a female aesthete’s studio tells its woes to a fresh cattail still living in the swamp. The illustrations Satterlee provided for both these texts strongly resembled those he had done the previous year for the immensely popular book *The Decorative Sisters* (1881), a satiric ballad by Josephine Pollard (1834-1892), which told the tale of sisters Dorothea and Dorinda (Figure 20).


Figure 20  Walter Satterlee, illustration for Josephine Pollard, *The Decorative Sisters* (New York, A.D.F. Randolph & Co., 1881), 44. Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/decorativesister00poll>
Pollard was an American author and hymnist, who wrote a number of books on American history and on the Bible for children, as well as publishing poetry in magazines including *Harper's Magazine*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and *Baldwin's Monthly*. *The Decorative Sisters* was published in November 1881, with seventeen full-page illustrations by Satterlee that showed the girls’ transformation from country bumpkins to ultra-refined damsels in aesthetic gowns. In an advertisement placed in the *Advance* (among other periodicals), the book was described as “a kindly hit at the excesses and absurdities of modern Decorative Art. It is the story of the progressive movements of two English lasses through the wonderful labyrinths of art, from the painting of the sun-flower, and the decoration of the churn, on to the development of ‘high art,’ in costume and household decoration.” Pollard’s stanzas followed the sisters to London and back home again, where they comically attempt to bring aesthetic style to their simple parents, much to the confusion and amusement of their country neighbors. Eventually, the sisters both married, Dorinda to a London artist and Dorothea to a farmer from their hometown; the latter enjoyed a life of happiness and industry, while the former longed for an un-Aesthetic life, and “wished to be a model wife, but not in artist-fashion” for “her love of the Aesthetic soon became a worn-out

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451 Pollard and Satterlee collaborated on several other books that included vaguely Aesthetic topics/images, including a collection of poems for children titled *Elfinland* (1882) and *Artistic Tableaux: With Picturesque Diagrams and Descriptions of Costumes* (1887).

452 [“The Decorative Sisters”], *Advance* 16.742 (Dec 8, 1881): 787.
passion.” 453 The seeming message of the tale was that Aestheticism was silly but forgiving, so long as it was nothing more than a youthful phase.

Pollard’s book was universally praised in a number of American periodicals in the month following its publication, but there was some disagreement about its audience. The British magazine the Critic noted that “there is a good deal of innocent fun in the book, which is a sort of ‘Patience’ for children,”454 but the Advance warned, “Though the pictures at once suggest the children’s pleasure, a closer look shows that it will be the older heads who truly appreciate the book, as a satire on the extreme to which the decorative craze may be carried.”455 The New York Evangelist added, “The Decorative Sisters is a dainty bit of satire. Poet, artist, and publishers have happily united in giving to the public a really impressive moral commentary upon what has become the ruling fashion of the time. The book has a mission to accomplish, and ought to have the aid of all who approve of its purpose, in giving it circulation.”456 The idea of circulation may have applied not only to the book itself, but also to the images by Satterlee. Indeed, since The Decorative Sisters was meant to appeal broadly, but appeared in the guise of children’s book, it was unsurprising that Satterlee’s images would have received further circulation in magazines intended for that young audiences, like St. Nicholas.

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456 [“The Decorative Sisters”], New York Evangelist 52.49 (Dec 8, 1881): 1
Like Greenaway’s and Crane’s, Satterlee’s version of Aestheticism—and of aesthetic damsels—seems to have been perceived as especially suitable for children, and for girls in particular. Unlike texts meant for adults, such as *Punch* cartoons or *Patience*, the “moral commentary” on Aestheticism presented in *The Decorative Sisters*—and in the texts Satterlee illustrated for *St. Nicholas*—was a bit more nuanced. At worst, the sisters were presented as naïve in becoming excessively enamored with Aestheticism, but they were not rendered unattractive or unaccomplished in their adoption of it. Dorothea’s farmer beau, “though not at all Aesthetic, thought the maiden ‘sweetly sweet’,” and when he proposed, “laid his fortunes at her Decorative feet.”457 While he had admired her long before her introduction to Aestheticism, he found her all the more beautiful and worthy after, even though she abandoned the style following their marriage. Meanwhile, Dorinda’s artist husband seemed only to value her as a model for his art, rather than as an individual and a partner; she was always called to pose “No matter how she felt herself,” which was the real problem with their relationship, rather than his artistic allegiances.458 In Satterlee’s illustrations for Pollard’s book and for *St. Nicholas*, aesthetic girls and women were presented consistently as positive and pretty, even as the accompanying text was slightly more disapproving.

Satterlee’s aesthetic images were by far not the only ones that graced the magazine’s pages in 1882. In May 1882, *St. Nicholas* included Adelia B. Beard’s reimagined “Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary,” which replaced the “silver bells and

457 Pollard, 61

458 Ibid., 54.
cockle-shells” of the original nursery rhyme with Aesthetic “sunflowers bright and lilies white,” and illustrated the verses with Greenaway girls bearing sunflowers; “The Riddle-Box” for that same month featured an “Illustrated Puzzle in the Head-Piece” that was made entirely of Aesthetic pottery and textiles. September of 1882 brought L. Hopkins’s heavily embellished illustration for “Aurelius Wellington Wilks,” a jingle about the speaker’s eccentrically-dressed great uncle and his wife, “Maria Esthetica Mummer.” This profusion of texts and images that explicitly invoked Aestheticism reflected the general popularity of such subjects in the popular press of 1882; St. Nicholas clearly saw value in presenting these visual elements and references to its child readers, sometimes with teasing humor and sometimes without any negative commentary at all.

A year later, E. S. (Elbridge Streeter) Brooks’ play, Ye Three Somber Gentlemen & Ye Three Pretty Girls: A Christmas Pot-pourri, was offered to dramatically inclined readers in the December 1883 number. All the players were at various points directed to sing parts of the rhymes from Walter Crane’s The Baby’s Opera and snippets of songs from Patience, both texts aligned with and were representative of different attitudes towards Aestheticism; the girl participants were to be dressed in “pretty aesthetic or French Directory costumes,” conveniently modeled by Reginald Birch’s illustrations. These drawings were among the first, but by no


means the last, that Birch would create for St. Nicholas, many times specifically to accompany a text that dealt with Aestheticism or one of the historical periods that Aestheticism revered. Birch, along with Alfred Brennan, whose often medieval- or Renaissance-inspired drawings were matched with various fairy stories and series such as Brooks’s “Historical Boys,” became two of the most frequent and prolific illustrators of St. Nicholas, and their whimsical and elaborately-styled children filled the magazine. The December 1883 issue ushered in the new year with a poem and drawing by Brennan titled “Lucy Lee from High Dundee,” in which a quaintly dressed aesthetic girl comes to pay her respects to St. Nicholas and all the magazine’s illustrators.\footnote{“Lucy Lee from High Dundee” might be an homage to an ca. 1852 poem called “Lucy Lee” by the Scottish-born American poet James Linen, who wrote poems in the Scotch dialect for several American periodicals and was also a New York City-based bookbinder until his death in 1873.} Consequently, whether Pre-Raphaelite-inspired or Greenaway-derived, Aesthetic images and tropes of all strains seem to have become normalized as part of the magazine’s overall aesthetic by 1884.

*St. Nicholas* engaged with Aestheticism more consistently and more often than either iteration of its adult sister magazines, *Scribner’s/Century*, and it clung to the topic and the style far longer. In the late 1870s and the early 1880s, issues of *Scribner’s Monthly* and then of the *Century* certainly contained material dealing with Aestheticism, including reviews of books by Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, Oscar Wilde, and William Morris; humorous contributions like the poem “Aesthetic” (*Scribner’s Monthly*, September 1881) and the faux-advertisement for “The Taste Supply Association” (*Century*, March 1882); and longer articles such as “Whistler in

One explanation for this may be found in the pages of the *Century* itself, in a February 1883 article on “Artists’ Models in New York.” There, Charlotte Adams described the lives and characters of various models and the artists who depended on them, but her comments about child models shed some light on the connections between art trends and juvenile print culture:

> The introduction of Christmas cards has greatly increased the demand for child-models. Then the ‘high art’ picture books for children, imitated or reproduced from London publications, have set the fashion of mediaeval or ‘Queen Anne’ types in the illustration of juvenile books and magazines. […] The magazines, also, aim at absolute fidelity and care in their illustrations of the letterpress in their pages. This realistic tendency in book-illustration is constantly increasing, and as a natural consequence the demand for individual types of models keeps pace with it.⁴⁶³

According to Adams, Aesthetic style found a stronger toe-hold in children’s print culture than it perhaps had in the popular press at large and showed little sign of letting go anytime soon. The Christmas cards which Adams alluded to are undoubtedly the product of manufacturers such as Marcus Ward & Co., just as the “high art” books can reasonably be assumed to have included those illustrated by Crane and Greenaway. Adams suggests that these types of texts “set the fashion” for

styles more explicitly associated with Aestheticism, which developed a broader appeal through their introduction into periodicals. *St. Nicholas* certainly seemed to support this viewpoint, as it frequently published what Adams referred to as “medieval or ‘Queen Anne’ types of illustration.” For example, the American painter Ellen Oakford contributed the frontispiece for April 1884, featuring a pseudo-medieval girl as “Spring,” as well as a June 1885 head-piece of several medieval or Pre-Raphaelite girls titled “A Society of Decorative Art” (Figure 24). This drawing was possibly influenced by the similarly titled article in the *Century* several years before, or by that article’s subject, which was the work of the women artists and artisans who made up the New York Society of Decorative Art. It was just as likely, however, to be a depiction of girls of some long-ago royal court as of a group of Victorian girls whose “Society” was little more than an informal network of friends with artistic leanings who enjoyed fancy dress and embroidery.

The mid- to late-1880s saw a number of (particularly female) illustrators, poets, and writers contributing texts and images to *St. Nicholas* that explicitly invoked the values and visuals of Aestheticism, but many had dropped the sort of self-conscious commentary of earlier contributions, instead celebrating the quaintness and discernment of an artistic lifestyle. The American poet and poetry professor Helen Gray Cone contributed several poems to *St. Nicholas* over the years, but during the 1880s she turned her attention to Aesthetic topics, contributing “The Mongol and the Maiden: A Bric-a-Brac Ballad” (December 1884) about an ivory statue and a Greenaway girl figurine, and “The Aesthetes” (June 1885), a humorous poem about a kitten and a puppy who are consummately taken with a sunflower and peacock feather and who are illustrated with much humor by Reginald Birch. Jessie McDermott also
contributed several more Aesthetic illustrations, many of which featured girls engaged in artistic pursuits or styled in Aesthetic dress. These included a drawing for Margaret Johnson’s April 1884 poem, “A Modern Artist,” in which the good-natured girl painter deprecates her own “Japanese work,” the sketch “Easter Lilies,” which showed a procession of Greenaway-like girls bearing flowers for the April 1885 issue, and several illustrations for Rose Lattimore Alling’s serial story about a girl’s artistic ambitions, “Nan’s Revolt” (July-October 1886). Besides Alling’s story, St. Nicholas featured fiction by various other authors about girls who aspired to become artists, adding to the magazine’s general air of acceptance regarding artistic lifestyles and ambitions.

In addition to these treatments of Greenaway girls and female art students, several of the texts and images published in St. Nicholas at this time entered into other broader cultural conversations about art and taste, such as “Chinamania” and the increasing popularity of Japanese designs and objects. One example was Louise Trumbull Cogswell’s poem “Willow Ware” (November 1884), in which a grandmother recounted to her granddaughter the story of two lovers encapsulated in the design of a china plate; Reginald Birch provided the accompanying illustrations, based on designs by Lea Southwick. As the title of the poem suggested, the “ware” in question bore the famous willow pattern, which was immensely popular in Britain and America in the nineteenth century, both for its aesthetically pleasing design and colors, and for the picture-story incorporated into it. In Cogswell’s poem, the Grandmother modeled how to “read” the story on the plate:

Grandmamma puts her spectacle on,

And shows me on the plate
The mandarin’s house, the island home
The boat, the bridge, the gate.

“Here is the orange-tree where they talked—
Here they are running away—
And over all at the top you see
The birds making love alway.”  

By offering this close reading of a material object in the form of a narrative poem, the willow plate could even become a template for teaching the child readers of *St. Nicholas* to parse other images and objects in a similar way. After all, part of the aesthetic—and Aesthetic—fascination with blue and white china was due to the intricate patterns and symbols incorporated into each piece.

“Willow Ware” was not the only non-satirical and indeed wholly sympathetic depiction of items and people related to Aestheticism in *St. Nicholas* around this time. The August 1885 issue opened with a frontispiece by Reginald Birch (Figure 21) to accompany that month’s lead story, “Little Dame Fortune” by the American author Rachel Carew. Carew began her tale by stating, “The von Lyndons were a very ‘aesthetic’ family,” and then described in great detail their Munich home, from the “boy in yellow stockings, knee-breeches, and a long-tailed blue coat” who attends the


465 There is little information about Rachel Carew, except records of her surviving publications. She contributed at least once more to *St. Nicholas*, a cat story titled “Lucifer” (September 1894). She also published *Tangled: A Novel* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Co., 1877), and several other short stories and articles in various periodicals including *Belgravia*, the *Perry Magazine*, *Peterson’s Magazine*, and *Youth: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine for Boys and Girls* from the 1880s through early 1900s.
door, to the historical artifacts that fill each one of the Baron and Baroness von Lyndon’s rooms. The Baron is a collector of bric-a-brac and coins, and the Baroness is a painter and enthusiast of historic fashion, but the bulk of the story revolved around their little daughter Gisela and her encounter with a struggling Scottish child-portraitist, Hugh Balbirnie. After he happens to sketch Gisela in her quaint dress, the resulting painting catapults him to fame, prompting the kind and discerning von Lyndons to become his patrons. Birch’s frontispiece captured Balbirnie’s Aesthetic studio and Gisela’s antiquated dress, while Birch’s other illustrations for the story contrast these with the clothing and architecture characteristic of nineteenth-century Munich. In her good-natured and trusting demeanor, as well as her doting parents’ propensity for dressing her in old-fashioned clothing, Gisela may almost be deemed a sister to, if not a harbinger of, the title character of Little Lord Fauntleroy, one of the most beloved stories to appear in the pages of St. Nicholas. Child heroes like Carew’s Gisela and Fauntleroy’s Cedric Errol, who were visually aligned with Aestheticism through their clothing and appearances, were thus seemingly held up by St. Nicholas as worthy role-models of temperament as well as taste.

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The Fauntleroy Craze

Among Frances Hodgson Burnett’s many novels, plays, and story collections, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* remains one of her most famous works, and it was certainly the most profitable for her in the years after its publication. First serialized in *St. Nicholas Magazine* from November 1885 to October 1886, and then released as a book by Scribner & Sons in 1886, the story about the precocious and pretty American boy named Cedric Errol who becomes heir to an English earldom was an instant hit. It proved to be so popular that Burnett adapted it for the stage in 1888, and the child actress Elsie Leslie was cast in the title role. This play would make Leslie famous, and
her costumes would spur a transatlantic children’s clothing craze for “Fauntleroy
suits”—made up of velvet jackets with broad lace collars and cuffs paired with velvet
knickerbockers and tights—that would continue into the early twentieth century.
These suits were modeled on Reginald Birch’s original illustrations for the novella,
which in turn were based on the clothing in which Burnett had dressed her own son,
Vivian. Little Lord Fauntleroy itself does not discuss Aestheticism nor does it strongly
resemble Aesthetic literature in style, but the emblematic Fauntleroy suit certainly
drew from aspects of popular Aestheticism as well as contributing to the movement’s
changing visual modes.

Burnett’s interest in dress, interior décor, and the bohemian enclaves of
London put Aestheticism on her radar long before she began writing Little Lord
Fauntleroy. As Patricia Cunningham notes, Burnett was a “notable author of aesthetic
fiction” and “Stories by her with an artistic theme appeared in Peterson’s Magazine,”
a women’s periodical to which Burnett contributed some of her earliest stories in the
1870s. While many of the stories that Burnett published at this time were romances
and regional fiction, several dealt specifically with the artistic circles of London and
Paris. Stories such as “Esmeralda” (May 1877) in Scribner’s Magazine and “The
Black Lace Mantilla” (January 1878) published in Peterson’s had to do with male,
often expatriate, artists and their artistic sisters and/or sitters. Burnett liked the topic

467 Patricia A. Cunningham, Reforming Women’s Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics,
Health, and Art (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 145.

Burnett was a prolific writer of stories, novels, and plays. Starting in the 1870s, she
published dozens of stories in periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic, including
Godey’s Ladies Magazine, Peterson’s Magazine, Lippincott’s Magazine, Scribner’s
Magazine, the Century Magazine, and, of course, St. Nicholas.
and settings of these tales enough to adapt and expand several of them, just as she did with *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Together with the American playwright and actor-manager William Gillette, Burnett adapted “Esmeralda” into a stage play of the same name in 1881.\footnote{The *Century* published an abridged version of the play script in its February 1882 issue in which the Aesthetic elements are notably left intact.} *Esmeralda* featured characters identified by their allegiance to aesthetics and Aestheticism, and would go on to become incredibly popular. Of Burnett’s other stories with an “artistic theme,” Cunningham has identified two that appeared in 1884 and “have aesthetically minded heroines.”\footnote{Cunningham, *Reforming Women’s Fashion*, 163.} She explains that, “In ‘Lindsay’s Luck,’ Lindsay lives in an artistic Gothic house and wears flowing artistic gowns. In ‘Miss Crespigny,’ the heroine holds ‘aesthetic soirees,’ and it is noted that she is striking because she is artistic.”\footnote{Ibid., 163.} Burnett’s 1883 novel *Vagabondia*, which tells the story of a set of artistic sisters living with their artist brother and navigating their love lives in bohemian London, likely also fits into the category of “aesthetic fiction.”\footnote{In the introduction to *Vagabondia*, Burnett calls it “This my first novel” since several of its multiple incarnations predated the book commonly accepted to be her first, *That Lass O’Lowries* (1877). The story that would become *Vagabondia* was published serially as “Dorothea” in the *Lady’s Friend* in 1873. Then, as Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina explains, “it first saw life as a novel in a single volume in 1877, when, capitalizing on the success of her novel *That Lass O’Lowries*, Porter and Coates of Philadelphia brought it out without her permission as the novel *Dolly*” (p. 313). Angered by this transgression, Burnett revised the story, copyrighted it, and reissued it as *Vagabondia* in 1883 with the Boston firm James R. Osgood and Company, and with Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1889, 1891, and 1899. The novel was reissued once more as *Dolly* by the London firm Frederick Warne & Co. in 1892. This edition was}
By 1882, “Personal” columns in papers such as *Harper’s Bazaar* and the *American Bookseller* had begun reporting that “Mrs. Burnett is developing aesthetic tendencies in dress,” and that she was also bringing her two sons to receptions “in full aesthetic costumes.” Unsurprisingly, then, Burnett was one of several society ladies in cosmopolitan cities such as New York, Boston, and Washington who took an interest in the young poet Oscar Wilde when he arrived in America for his 1882 lecture tour. Passing through the capital, Wilde attended a meeting of the Washington Literary Society that Burnett hosted at her home, and Eleanor Fitzsimons states that there “Wilde made a favourable impression by assuring Hodgson Burnett that Ruskin had read everything she wrote, thus elevating her fiction by associating it with a hero the first to feature illustrations, which were done by the prolific magazine illustrator Hal Ludlow.


By 1889, these reports had been repeated and exaggerated to such an extent that Burnett had to refute claims that she was parading around in outrageous outfits, accompanied by an entourage of identically dressed ladies. In a letter to the *Critic*, published in the 2 March 1889 issue, Burnett quoted the following statement made about her and republished in various American papers: “Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett is still a regarded figure in New York on account of her eccentricities of dress and behavior. Boston lionized her but the metropolis is inclined to find her amusing” [qtd. in Frances Hodgson Burnett, “Mrs. Burnett Protests,” *Critic* 14.270 (2 March 1889):106]. Burnett then wrote a long rebuttal to these and other false statements (including ones about her young sons): “I will close by asserting that if any apparently insane person, attired in broid silk Kate Greenaways belted with wide sashes, and collecting by the force of her attractions armies of young men, has been amusing the metropolis, it has been some one for more imposing, far more fascinating, and with far more leisure on her hands than FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT” (Burnett, “Mrs. Burnett Protests,” 107).
of Aestheticism.” Fitzsimons furthermore notes that “Wilde’s aesthetic costume of velvet jacket and knee breeches may have informed the flowing curls and lace-collared velvet suits Hodgson Burnett adopted for her sons Lionel and Vivien, and for her fictional Little Lord Fauntleroy, published four years later, a further example of an influential woman lending her public approval to Wilde’s controversial image.” The velvet suits and artistic airs that Bunthorne donned in *Patience* and which Wilde adopted in America were frequently ridiculed, but the same costume in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was deemed sweet and imminently marketable (as many clothing companies discovered). Indeed, the Fauntleroy suit was just one—if the most famous—version of late nineteenth-century boys’ clothing that incorporated “exotic, historical, or military fashions for men,” but almost all of which more “complemented women’s fashions of the day and trends in interior design” than they resembled most contemporary men’s clothing. 

This affinity between *Fauntleroy* and female audiences may be recognized in some of the coverage of Burnett’s story and play in the periodical press during the late 1880s, including in *St. Nicholas* itself. Despite *Little Lord Fauntleroy*’s male protagonist, Jo B. Paoletti speculates that “It is very likely that Burnett’s fans were women and girls rather than boys or men,” in part because of the prettiness and

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474 Ibid., 58.

sentimentality of the character of Cedric, but also perhaps because of Elsie Leslie, the first and most famous child actress to play the role.476 In what appears to be a piece meant to puff Burnett’s new stage play of Little Lord Fauntleroy and to drum up renewed interest in its earlier serialization in St. Nicholas, the magazine published a lengthy cover article titled “‘Fauntleroy’ and Elsie Leslie Lyde” in April 1889. The article was written by Lucy C. Lillie and featured old and new illustrations of Cedric by Reginald Birch, as well as photographs of Leslie in and out of costume—in one, she is dressed in her Fauntleroy suit and a wide-brimmed hat, looking remarkably like the Greenaway cavalier published in St. Nicholas a decade before (Figure 16). Lillie, the American writer whose Prudence: A Story of Aesthetic London (1882) was credited with being the “first” aesthetic novel, knew and was perhaps even friends with Burnett, and furthermore seems to have been quite close to Elsie Leslie. An article titled “My Stage Life,” which appeared in the February 1889 issue of the Cosmopolitan, was attributed to Leslie herself, and was accompanied by an addendum written by Lillie in which she reflected on her acquaintance with Leslie as well as with Burnett. Another similar article by Lillie, titled “Elsie Leslie. (Little Lord Fauntleroy)” was the cover story of the 29 January 1889 issue of Harper’s Young People. As a writer of girls’ fiction herself—including Nan, which Leslie averred was one of her favorite books—Lillie was a natural choice to be featured in the pages of St. Nicholas.477 However, her previous associations with Aestheticism suggest that the decision to have her to write about Fauntleroy may have been strategic on the part of

476 Ibid., 68.
the magazine, Burnett, and/or Lillie herself. The web of associated texts thus woven might allow readers to reach back to Burnett and Lillie’s earlier aesthetic fiction, while of course also buying into the immense popularity of the stage play of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

The *St. Nicholas* article about Leslie may furthermore have had the effect of specifically drawing in the magazine’s girl readers who admired her exciting life and achievements, and of calling attention to the tempting slippage of gender that her role as Fauntleroy permitted. Lillie wrote that, despite her fame, Leslie “has preserved her entire unaffectedness,” which “proves that she can act Fauntleroy because she is like him in heart, and spirit, and feeling,” but there were more visual features that aligned the actress not only with her character, but with the version of child-Aestheticism that his appearance came to embody.478 In addition to Leslie’s sweetness, Lillie also emphasized her innate sense of good taste: “As to her dress, she wears guimpes and Greenaway gowns at home — simple, childish, and pretty, and she has a keen sense of color and tasteful adornment, though I have never detected any vanity in her.”479 Just as the Fauntleroy suit represented an alignment with Aestheticism for boys, Lillie’s nod toward Leslie’s girlish Aesthetic dress at home associated the actress with artistic style in both her private and public life. The illustrations that accompanied Lillie’s article not only reinforced these styles, but also valorized Leslie’s gender fluidity, showing her in the aforementioned Greenaway gowns, as well as several images in character as Cedric, but always with the same long, blonde curls.


479 Ibid., 410.
Girls playing boy roles were not uncommon in the nineteenth-century theatre, nor were boys dressed in fanciful historically-inspired outfits, but the prominence of Fauntleroy and Fauntleroy suits in the late 1880s and early 1890s highlighted interest in the essential androgyny of the child at the time. This idea was in-step with changing notions of gender expression in progressive circles, even as the specters of masculinized women and feminized men haunted the more conservative corners of mainstream culture. In the case of Fauntleroy/Leslie, those fears were minimized; instead, popular Aestheticism provided an acceptable opportunity to try on alternative forms of girlhood and boyhood, which were eagerly promoted and endorsed by St. Nicholas itself through the 1880s. The Fauntleroy craze showed little signs of slowing until the end of the century in America, but the coverage of it and other topics related to Aestheticism in St. Nicholas had more or less dropped off by the early 1890s. Perhaps Fauntleroy helped normalize certain visual markers of Aestheticism to such an extent as to make them commonplace and not worth covering; the movement’s disappearance from the magazine may have ultimately reflected the cultural saturation of some of Aestheticism’s most popular incarnations.

“Such high art as is pressed into all departments of Atalanta”

Around the same time St. Nicholas reached the downturn in its enthusiasm for Aestheticism, Atalanta began publication. Atalanta was a literary monthly for young women in their teens to early twenties, published in London by Cassell & Co. It was founded and co-edited by L. T. Meade, the pseudonym of Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Smith (1844-1914), a prolific writer of girls’ fiction. Atalanta was named after a huntress from Greek mythology, who would only consent to marry a man who could best her in a foot-race, and the name suggested that the magazine celebrated
independent, active girlhood. From its beginnings in 1887, *Atalanta* consistently marketed itself as a refined publication that sought to promote the intellectual development of its female readership, a kind of younger sister to Cassell’s similarly progressive, artistic publication for women, the *Woman’s World*. Sally Mitchell states that the contents and sixpenny price-point of *Atalanta* “suggest that the readers Meade hoped to reach were daughters of the gentry and upper middle class between fourteen and twenty-five—intelligent, serious girls who needed only support and guidance in order to become women on the new pattern.”\(^{480}\) *Atalanta* advanced this aim in part by employing a large number of prominent women writers, intellectuals, and professionals of all stripes whose experience “reflects the ideas and concerns of the women’s movement,” and “who were familiar with, or working in” the occupations they were writing about for the magazine.\(^{481}\)

Kristine Moruzi notes that “the magazine firmly established its support for girls’ education, while also depicting a feminine ideal of virtue and womanliness.”\(^{482}\) Moruzi asserts that periodical features like “The Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union” encouraged independent study as well as intellectual competition and correspondence, but that such pursuits could and had to be easily laid aside as readers grew up, for “Although education is desirable and necessary, marriage remains the ultimate goal.”\(^ {483}\) In Adolescent Girlhood and Literary Culture at the Fin de Siècle:

\(^{480}\) Mitchell, 11.

\(^{481}\) Moruzi, 121.

\(^{482}\) Ibid., 120.

\(^{483}\) Ibid., 122.
Daughters of Today (2016), Beth Rodgers surmises that by juxtaposing various kinds of learning experiences with charitable work and literary or artistic production, “Atalanta girls are called on to cultivate their philanthropic duties and artistic accomplishments, essential aspects of the ideal English woman, but they are equally encouraged to consider the composition of scholarly essays as part of the modern girl’s duties.” Both Moruzi and Rodgers focus on the educational emphasis of Atalanta, as well as possible aspirations towards higher education and a career following in the footsteps of the infamous “Girton girl.” Beth Rigel Daugherty adds that “Although the magazine directly discusses the need for girls to find work after their schooling, Atalanta also functions as a school by bringing schoolroom assignments and questions into the home.”

I contend that in the early years of the magazine, at least, the part of this home-schooling that Atalanta seemed to encourage its readers most urgently to pursue was in art and aesthetics; the numerous articles, commentary, and fiction dealing with the artistic world, as well as exemplary illustrations and design elements, all helped to reinforce lessons about art, aesthetics, and taste for the interested reader. The magazine’s contents certainly suggested that “women on the new pattern” were explicitly artistic—knowledgeable about historical painters, home décor, and contemporary artists, as well as having aspirations towards art production

484 Beth Rodgers, Adolescent Girlhood and Literary Culture at the Fin de Siècle: Daughters of Today (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 188.

themselves—and one of the magazine’s aims was to provide girls with plenty of informative and amusing material in that vein.\textsuperscript{486} The progressive tone towards education of all sorts, however, changed drastically within a year of Meade’s departure in late 1893, so I will focus on the years 1887-1893, when the magazine was still primarily under her supervision and reflected her editorial policies.\textsuperscript{487}

In \textit{Juvenile Literature As It Is} (1888), the critic Edward Salmon remarked that of the “The high-class girls’ magazine,” “There are three only—\textit{The Girls’ Own Paper}, Atalanta, and Mrs. Stephen Menzies’ \textit{A1}—that could be placed advantageously before anybody, to say nothing of girls in their teens.”\textsuperscript{488} Despite this grim pronouncement, Salmon praised Atalanta, in what would have been its first year of publication: “The popularity of the magazine is not surprising. It has secured the highest literary and artistic talent, and in all ways […] is the nearest approach we have yet had in London, in beauty and general attractiveness, to the best American magazines.”\textsuperscript{489} Based on the presumption of superior printing quality of most American magazines at the time, this was high praise indeed, but made sense if Atalanta was modeling itself upon other British high-art publications. Salmon’s only

\textsuperscript{486} Mitchell, 11.

\textsuperscript{487} According to Kristine Moruzi’s \textit{Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1915}, Alicia E. Leith was Meade’s co-editor for the first year of Atalanta, after which John C. Staples assumed that role. Staples held this position until the magazine merged with Alfred Balfour Symington’s \textit{Victoria Magazine} in 1892, and Symington took over from Meade as editor shortly thereafter. The magazine’s quality and progressive tone declined rapidly after Meade’s departure (p. 120).


\textsuperscript{489} Ibid., 195-196.
complaint was that the magazine was perhaps too focused on high-art: “there is not a single element in it which appeals to the humbler sections of the girl-world. Its tone is distinctly academic, and almost aristocratic. If such high art as is pressed into all departments of Atalanta could brought to bear on the women and girls of the democracy, it might have an effect for good such as none can foresee.” Here, Salmon categorized the interest in “high art” as one distinctly aligned with the privileges of middle- and upper-class girlhood, offering less to lower-class girls. Yet even he conceded that the artistic aspects “pressed into all departments of Atalanta” were an inherently positive thing, and could have a great “effect for good” if the references to and applications of art were only made more accessible to all. Atalanta’s intended audience certainly did seem to be girls who were able to take an interest in art and art knowledge as a hobby, or as a respectable student-artist, rather than needing to take on more practical applications or employment out of necessity. Nevertheless, the magazine’s tone always indicated that such art education was valuable in itself, even if it happened to be much more relevant to the aspirations of middle- and upper-class readers.

Like St. Nicholas, Atalanta included numerous illustrations and artistic reproductions, as well as many articles, poems, and stories having to do with art in general and Aestheticism in particular. Atalanta, however, placed even greater emphasis on its art content, while also being far more circumscribed in the types of art and illustration it included. The magazine heavily favored artists and designers whose

490 Ibid., 197.

491 Ibid., 197.
work might be classified as Pre-Raphaelite or Aesthetic, even if it rarely actually
mentioned Aestheticism by name, and certainly did not deal with it as frequently in the
humorous way that St. Nicholas had done. Among Atalanta’s illustrators were prolific
book and magazine illustrators such as Alan Wright and Mary Ellen Edwards, as well
as up-and-coming Aesthetic designers such as Charles Ricketts and Laurence
Housman.\textsuperscript{492} The magazine also reproduced work by respected painters aligned with
the Aesthetic school, including Frederic Leighton, Walter Crane, and Edward Burne-
Jones. Besides providing visual examples of art in “good taste,” the magazine
published articles by Royal Academicians, such as G. D. Leslie, who wrote “On the
Study of the Works of Raphael” (October 1888), and W. P. Frith, who offered a two-
part treatise on “Art Teaching, As It Was and As It Is” (December 1888 and January
1889). These artists, as well as the men and women of letters whose work appeared in
Atalanta, were portrayed as celebrities and as role models for girl readers to aspire to.
Articles about formal and informal art training that were featured throughout the
magazine’s first five years drew back the veil to reveal the people, histories, and
techniques behind the exemplars of art that Atalanta published and reproduced, thus
making them more accessible to girl readers (if only to those of a select social class).

During its first year, Atalanta launched a series of articles titled “Our English
Schools of Art,” which covered art classrooms at the Royal Academy, in South
Kensington, at the Herkomer School, and elsewhere. J. Penderel Brodhurst, who
inaugurated the “Our English Schools of Art” series, contributed several other articles,
such as “Students’ Day at the National Gallery” (January 1890). The subject of art

\textsuperscript{492} Mary Ellen Edwards, who usually signed her work M. E. E., was married to
Meade’s co-editor, John C. Staples.
schools was also covered by contributions such as Professor A. J. Church’s article on “Holloway College” (November 1888) and “The Ideal Art School” (December 1888) by J. Sparkes, the principal of the National Art Training School in South Kensington. This abundance of art school articles suggested that it was a topic that Atalanta wanted to promote for its own sake, as well as that of readers seeking an occupation. In fact, the magazine seemed to operate under the assumption that most of its readers might be interested in learning about formal art education and even in pursuing it themselves. Articles in the “Women in Contemporary Art” series suggested that such a path was not only feasible, but desirable, by profiling well-known female artists such as Louise Jopling (March 1892) and Helen Allingham (April 1892). Atalanta was also quick to celebrate and promote the work of student artists. In the “Our English Schools of Art” installment about the Herkomer School, the author noted that, “The illustrations to this article, which are reproduced in tone, are selections from The Palette, a school magazine, printed by the aid of the typewriter, and profusely illustrated by the students with drawings, studies, and sketches in watercolor, pencil, pen-and-ink, &c., with an occasional contribution from the Professor’s own hand.”

The magazine’s privileging of professional, respected artists for the bulk of its illustrations and reproductions makes sense, but its inclusion of boy and girl art students’ work demonstrates Atalanta’s dedication to encouraging young talent and making artistic production an attainable goal for girls.

For readers not ready to attend an art school, but still wishing to educate themselves about architecture and art—both fine and decorative, as well as ancient and

contemporary—art critics such as Julia Cartwright and William Cosmo Monkhouse, who was also a poet, offered further guidance, both explicitly in their writings and implicitly through the juxtaposition of these articles alongside the other contents of the magazine.\textsuperscript{494} For example, the October 1890 issue opened with a reproduction of Edward Burne-Jones’s \textit{The Godhead Fires}, the third of four images in his second series of “Pygmalion and Galatea,” and the poem “Yea, I have a goodly heritage” by Christina Rossetti appeared on the facing page. That issue featured the first installment of Julia Cartwright’s two-part article “The Art of Burne-Jones” (October and November 1890), which was generously illustrated with other reproductions of paintings as well as drawings and sketches. Readers who had sought out Walter Crane’s previous work might have recognized the reproduction of Burne-Jones’s 1871 watercolor \textit{Hope} in Cartwright’s article, which Crane had also included a version of in his sister Lucy Crane’s \textit{Art and the Formation of Taste} (1882).\textsuperscript{495}

Cartwright wrote another two-part article on G. F. Watts (October and November 1891), and various other articles including “On the Drawings of the Old Masters” (April 1889), “Children in Modern Art” (December 1890), and “Some Painters of the Century” (December 1892). The last of these articles was an overview of art throughout the nineteenth century, but its first page spread revealed Cartwright’s more specific allegiances: a chalk drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti of three stunners titled \textit{Rosa Triplex} (1867) adorned the top of the page, while Burne-Jones’s \textit{The

\textsuperscript{494} Julia Cartwright is sometimes also credited as Mrs. Henry Ady after she married Ady in 1880.

Annunciation (1879) took up the facing page. Furthermore, this issue also included Burne-Jones’s painting The Star of Bethlehem (1890). As with her earlier writing on Burne-Jones, this article thereby helped to make the issue in which it appeared a sort of gallery of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic art in miniature. No reader would be able to ignore this concentration of images, and perhaps the hope was that she would not be able to help becoming indoctrinated into the cult of Burne-Jones.

Monkhouse’s on “The Decoration of China” took a slightly different approach: it was at once a descriptive overview of different styles of china and methods of making it from around the world, some practical suggestions for china decoration, and a treatise on taste. Monkhouse averred that this article gave but a cursory summary of his points, and did not provide “words of law or taste in decoration,” because those two terms did not always mean the same thing—nor did they need to, as when something is tasteful yet breaks the “law,” or the law results in something boring or vulgar. Instead, his reminder to the reader strongly recalled William Morris’s ideas about usefulness and beauty harmonizing: “I have roughly defined decoration as making a thing prettier. In thinking of the prettiness the true decorator never forgets the thing; its quality, its shape, its purpose are all to be regarded by him; his fancy, 

496 According to the Rossetti Archive, Rossetti created various drawings, sketches, and watercolors with this title between 1865 and 1874, but the one reproduced in Atalanta seems to be of the 1867 red chalk drawing with “ROSA TRIPLEX” inscribed on a cartellino at the center (also reproduced in the magazine). Alexa Wilding served as the model for the girl at the center of this drawing, while the 1874 variant used May Morris. (“Rosa Tripex: Collection Intro,” Rossetti Archive, accessed 13 September 2017. http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s238.raw.html)

invention, and love of beauty are all to be held in restraint in the service of the thing to be decorated.”\textsuperscript{498} Such musings about the nature of art, decoration, and taste were not uncommon in \textit{Atalanta}. Yet the many different voices that discussed these topics did not so much endorse one way for the reader to hone her art education or visual literacy, as to offer her a variety of approaches and reminders to enrich her individual approach. To support this, the magazine furthermore supplied a good deal of instruction in Ruskinian methods of art assessment and drawing. For readers wanting to strike out even more entirely on their own, \textit{Atalanta} also provided resources such as “Outlines for a Course of Study in Art” (September 1889), and the “Employment for Girls” series, which included installments on practical skills and crafts such as “House Decoration” (April 1888) by Agnes Garrett and “Chromo-Lithography” (May 1888) by Clo (Clotilde) Graves.

Besides the generous amount of material educating readers about art and art criticism, \textit{Atalanta} also published what may be called “aesthetic fiction,” both for its subject and style. John Strange Winter’s story “Yum-Yum: A Pug” (December 1888) was less a dog story (as its title might suggest) and more a peek into the lives of a struggling artistic family living in London’s “Upper Bohemia.”\textsuperscript{499} The mother is a magazine art-critic and art-amateur with two daughters, Rosalind and Nannie. Rosalind is a talented art student, and Nannie offers to sell her beloved pug to fund her sister’s expensive drawing classes, but in the end Rosalind’s passion and talent and Nannie’s devotion and selflessness win over the art teacher, and he agrees to teach

\textsuperscript{498} Ibid., 694.

\textsuperscript{499} John Strange Winter [Henrietta Eliza Vaughan Stannard], “Yum-Yum: A Pug,” \textit{Atalanta} 2.3 (December 1888): 161.
Rosalind for free. Winter’s story paints a vivid picture of artistic London in the 1880s, while Mary Ellen Edwards’s illustrations of the Aesthetic sisters completes it. On the other hand, *Atalanta* also published stories that were reminiscent of the melancholy and potentially subversive Aesthetic fairytales in Oscar Wilde’s 1888 volume, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. With its vaguely historical setting and supernatural elements, Alice Comyns Carr’s three-part tale, “A Fairy’s Love” (January, February, and March 1892), was certainly in the Wildean mold. Carr’s story centered on a haughty Swiss girl named Salome and her hapless admirer, the cowherd Michael, whom she orders to brave the dangerous fairy woods to bring her back a mystical lily. After Michael faces the seductive, tempestuous fairy Nerina, all three characters learn a lesson about loyalty, beauty, and love. Carr is perhaps now less known as an author than as an influential member of London’s Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic circles in 1870s and 1880s, along with her husband Joseph Comyns Carr, the co-director of the famous Grosvenor Gallery and co-founder of the New Gallery. In her 1926 memoir, *Reminiscences*, Carr noted that because of her advocacy for and designs of Aesthetic fashions, she was commonly believed to be the inspiration for Mrs. Cimabue Brown, the caricature of a female aesthete made famous by George du Maurier’s *Punch* cartoons.\(^{500}\) Though she contributed articles and fiction to a number of magazines, her fiction in *Atalanta* ensured that girl audiences she might not have otherwise reached got a taste of her particularly piquant brand of female Aestheticism.

Clemence Housman’s story “The Were-Wolf” was published in the December 1890 issue, and is described by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra as evoking “the atmosphere of William Morris’s late prose romances.” In it, Housman seemingly used the story’s medieval setting to explore the very modern concerns about “feminized” men and “masculinized” women in the character of Christian and the werewolf, White Fell, respectively. As Kooistra notes, this story was both radical and apocalyptic in its overtones, but ultimately, “both sexual/cultural deviants must die in order for the vigorous, ‘manly’ man to retain his authority in a purged patriarchal culture.”

Having already become “a respected artist-designer at the Bodley Head,” Clemence’s brother Laurence “later arranged with John Lane for the publication of The Were-Wolf in book form, embellished by his decorative title page and six full-page plates.”

While Laurence Housman did not illustrate his sister’s story in its initial publication in Atalanta (instead it was illustrated perfectly serviceably, if unremarkably, by Everard Hopkins), he did contribute other works of his own to the magazine. He wrote and illustrated the poems “The Corn-Keeper” (October 1892) and “Royal Heart” (January 1893) in his distinctive style, though the design of the former in particular showed the influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Figure 2). The publication of Clemence Housman’s potentially subversive story in the pages of a girls’ magazine, as well as


502 Ibid., 184.

503 Ibid., 187.

504 Ibid., 185.
Laurence Housman’s radically aesthetic illustrations, suggests that *Atalanta* (and L. T. Meade) had its finger on the pulse of the avant-garde literary and artistic world, and moreover wanted its girl readers to be granted access to and cultivate admiration for it.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 22  Laurence Housman, “The Corn-Keeper,” *Atalanta* (October 1892): 57. HathiTrust.

**Periodicals and Picture-Books as “perfect works of art”**

In addition to the art criticism by the likes of Cartwright and Monkhouse and fiction by writers such as Winter, Carr, and Housman, *Atalanta* published articles and
designs by artists and writers whose names were—or would soon become—well-known in Aesthetic circles. These included Alan Wright, Mabel F. Robinson, Charles Ricketts, and Reginald Savage. In the magazine’s first years, Wright contributed various articles to do with artistic communities, starting with “Brush-Strokes” in March 1889, “Through some London Galleries” in February 1891, and an article about “The New English Art Club” in June 1891. He was also responsible for many of Atalanta’s illustrations, head-pieces, and tail-pieces, most of which had an Aesthetic verging on Art Nouveau look. The “characteristic beetle-like cypher figures” with which Wright signed his work appeared in his drawings for Atalanta and other late-Victorian illustrated periodicals such as the Wide World Magazine, wherein he famously collaborated with Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe) on some of his outlandish stories.  

Wright was also a prolific designer of bookplates, and was commissioned to create them for important figures of the 1890s including John Lane, Richard Le Gallienne, and L. T. Meade.  

Mabel F. Robinson’s June 1893 article, “Artistic London,” similarly dipped into the vast network of the fin de siècle art community, offering a brisk overview of the different facets of art and artists associated with London.  


507 The author’s given name was Frances Mabel Robinson, but she is identified as Mabel F. Robinson in some of her work for periodicals (including Atalanta), and as F. Mabel Robinson in other periodical work and in most of her monographs. She also
home, which she shared with her parents and her sister, the poet, writer, and translator
A. Mary F. (Agnes Mary Frances) Robinson, was a hub for the literary and artistic
elite, including William and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Robert Browning, George Moore,
and Vernon Lee, as well as others associated with the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic
movements. Robinson had also attended the famous Slade School of Art, as she had
originally intended to become an artist before turning instead to fiction-writing and
journalism, the latter of which she published in the *Art Journal*, the *Athenaeum*, and
other periodicals. Her article in *Atalanta* consequently drew on her own artistic circle
and sensibilities, and showcases her intimate knowledge of various branches of art;
she began by describing “schisms in the art world,” using “the divergence that broke
up the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood” as a means to discuss the recently-formed New
English Art Club, though the original and second-generation Pre-Raphaelites appeared
numerous other times throughout the article.\footnote{Mabel F. Robinson, “Artistic London,” *Atalanta* 6.69 (June 1893): 610.}
She then covered the current state of
sculpture, decorative art, illustration, and national art, as well as the lives of artists and
art students. In each of these sub-sections, Robinson offered a crash-course on the
important persons and debates currently involved, so that in the space of only three
pages, she was fairly successful in conveying the general milieu and status of each
branch, circa 1893, for even the novice pupil of art.

Robinson notably included coverage of decorative and book arts, which had
only come to be considered seriously alongside the other arts in the previous few
decades. Her remarks summarized the enthusiastic adoption of home décor by well-
published under the *nom de plume* WS Gregg, under which name several of her books
first appeared.

known contemporaneous “Art workers”: “The name of ‘Morris’ is now a household word, and a ‘Morris’ wall-paper, chintz, or chair, has a character summed-up in that word. A ‘de Morgan tile’ and a ‘Benson lamp’ are only a little less well-known, and a binding by ‘Saunderson’ or Miss Prideaux appeals to a smaller public only because of its costliness.” Each of these “household words”—William Morris, William de Morgan, W. A. S. Benson, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, and Sarah Treverbian Prideaux — was the name of a designer or craftsperson associated with the Aesthetic or Arts and Crafts movements, and Robinson’s privileging of them and their designs not only reaffirmed their popularity, but also implied her endorsement of them as the best of their kind “in this humbler sphere” of art.

After discussing these designers on decorative arts, Robinson asked, “what shall be said of the illustrator, that result of our modern love of periodicals?” — and she has a ready answer:

…now-a-days, the illustration of books, magazines, and newspapers maintains more artists than does any other branch of the profession. Cheap methods of reproduction, such as ‘process’ cutting, and the like, have rendered the printing of pictures almost as rapid and inexpensive as the printing of words, so that there is an almost unlimited number of papers cleverly illustrated by competent artists. I hope that readers of Atalanta do not see vulgar papers of the class published in such numbers; but even these often contain drawings of a high degree of

509 Ibid., 611. I am assuming the name “Saunderson” refers to T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, as his name is sometimes misspelled with the “u” in other contemporaneous texts.

510 Ibid., 611.

511 Ibid., 611.
merit, while magazines which use a more delicate method of reproduction, are often perfect works of art.\textsuperscript{512}

Here, Robinson reflected on the explosion of “illustrative periodic literature in England” since the founding of \textit{Punch} some fifty years before, and on the current state of periodicals, and of periodical art in particular.\textsuperscript{513} While she sounded somewhat chagrined by the number of artists who seemed only to be able to make a living by creating magazine art, she nonetheless found much to admire in their work. She acknowledged that even the mass-produced papers are “cleverly illustrated by competent artists” and “often contain drawings of a high degree of merit.”\textsuperscript{514} However, she still made a distinction between magazines that contain merely competent illustration and those whose illustrations were “perfect works of art.”\textsuperscript{515} Robinson all but stated outright that \textit{Atalanta} was one of the latter type, which reinforced that the art and artists published therein were the true acme of quality and artistic taste. Robinson’s pronouncements in “Artistic London” lent credence to \textit{Atalanta’s} categorization as a truly Aesthetic periodical and point to the important role of magazines in distributing high art through their very design and visual elements as well as through explicit commentary and art criticism.

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Charles Ricketts might reasonably have been said to be among the “Hundreds and hundreds of young artists employed on these

\textsuperscript{512} Ibid., 611.
\textsuperscript{513} Ibid., 611.
\textsuperscript{514} Ibid., 611.
\textsuperscript{515} Ibid., 611.
papers” whom Robinson described in her article. Ricketts’s earliest known published works appeared in the pages of the *Alarum* in 1887 and the *Woman’s World* in 1888, but he also contributed a number of illustrations to *Atalanta*, starting in December 1888 with the illustrated poem “The Christmas Fleet.” His next contributions were the designs and drawings for a series of illustrated ballads, which included “Whittington’s Advancement” (December 1889), “The Friar of Orders Gray” (June 1890), Mme. La Marquise de Pompadour’s “Nous N’Irons Plus Au Bois” (October 1890), “The Doleful Death and Dirge of Harpalus” (January and February 1891), and Anna Leticia Barbauld’s “West End Fair, September 1806” (June 1891). Ricketts does not seem to have provided other types of illustrations for the magazine (such as the head- and tail-pieces he drew for the *Woman’s World*). Instead it appears that he was specifically commissioned to do these intricate, illuminated poems and songs, many of which bore distinctly Aesthetic details such as sunflowers and lithe maidens.

Together with his friend and fellow artist Reginald Savage, Ricketts illustrated a three-part series of such ballads called “The House of Tudor, and the House of Stuart in Ballad and Verse,” which were published in the October 1892, December 1892, and May 1893 issues. Savage had likewise illustrated a number of ballads for *Atalanta* before this collaboration with Ricketts, including “Lohengrin,” (December 1891) and E. A. Andrews’s “The Sad Ryme of Queen Valentine” (March 1892). With Charles Shannon, Ricketts and Savage had previously collaborated on the ultra-artistic small-press periodical, the *Dial*, and their stylistic harmony was seemingly recognized by

516 Ibid., 611.
Atalanta and repackaged for the magazine’s wider and decidedly more feminine audience. By September 1893, Ricketts and Savage were among the few contributors advertised on the cover of the issue for their visualization of “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” and “The Nymph’s Reply.” Meade seemed immensely proud of having Ricketts on Atalanta’s roster, even promoting his work for other periodicals, as she did in the March 1891 “The Brown Owl” column:

This is assuredly the day of periodical literature and the beginning of this year has been signalized by several new and promising ventures. Foremost amongst these is Black and White, which has come into the world with much éclat; it has all the advantages that can arise from excellent printing and paper, and includes among its contributors some of the best known names in literature and art. It is a pleasure to see that Mr. Ricketts, whose beautiful pictorial ballads have so often delighted the readers of ATALANTA, is doing work for the new paper.\(^{517}\)

By pronouncing periodical art as worthy of admiration and study, Meade suggests that the type and content of the images published in her own magazine were not merely carefully selected, but that Atalanta was at least in part creating a pictorial model for readers to use as a measure against other illustrated texts. In recommending Ricketts’s work and the Black and White, Meade not only promoted a certain type of style to readers, but also encouraged girls to seek out other journals that appeared to value a similar aesthetic as Atalanta. In a similar way to Robinson’s article, Meade’s instructive column helped girl readers to distinguish between good and bad art in the periodical genre itself, as well as in the other aspects of Victorian visual and material culture.

This, of course, also applied to books, which Meade and other *Atalanta* editors discussed in the column “Notes on Books.” Even though *Atalanta* was intended for older girl readers, it still frequently included reviews of picture and toy books for younger children—presumably for the younger siblings of its target age group. Instead of the relatively uniform enthusiasm of the book recommendations in *St. Nicholas*, the praise and the criticism of picture books in *Atalanta* were often couched in more rigorous aesthetic terms. For example, *The Besom-Maker and other Country Folk Songs*, collected and illustrated by Heywood Sumner, was lauded as “a thoroughly artistic picture-book of the school of Walter Crane.”518 The reviewer then went on to explain exactly what made this style so praiseworthy, as well as how it fit into the larger picture of print culture:

This school puts as much pains and thought into a page of decoration as might have served an artist fifty years ago for a big picture. There is something in this now fashionable style of illustration that reminds one of the woodcuts in the dear old spelling and story-books of the beginning of the century. [...] What is new about them is the careful drawing, and the telling and graceful arrangement. Such flavour of an elder day is particularly in keeping with the text.519

While this review was complimentary towards Crane’s influence on beautiful book illustration, *Atalanta* certainly did not shy away from criticizing him, along with other popular children’s illustrators. The beloved children’s author Mrs. Molesworth often collaborated with Walter Crane on her picture books, and two of these were promoted by Meade in the January 1890 issue. After praising Mrs. Molesworth’s writing, Meade nonetheless bluntly asked, “On this occasion, however, are the illustrations as good as

518 “Notes on Books,” *Atalanta* 2.3 (December 1888): 228.

519 Ibid., 228-229.
usual? Little Biddy is unnecessarily ugly. Mrs. Molesworth has made a life-like little personage—there must be thousands of Biddies in the world—but has Mr. Crane done her justice?” Kate Greenaway did not escape censure either: Charlotte M. Yonge’s novel the *Heir of Redclyffe* was recommended with the caveat, “The illustrations, however, although by the popular pencil of Kate Greenaway, can scarcely be commended.” One could hardly imagine such criticisms appearing in a magazine such as *St. Nicholas*, whose reverence for the popular children’s illustrators was unwavering and untouched by the intensive art discussions that *Atalanta*’s readers received elsewhere in the magazine.

**Aestheticism and the Late-Victorian Girl**

Despite its commitment to providing readers with substantive reading, the magazine was not all serious. In the March 1889 issue, a humorous cartoon titled *Decorative Art* depicted a cat artist with a palette in its paw and a fez on its head sitting on a book titled “Theory of Color” and painting stripes onto a plain cat, while newly be-striped cats congratulated themselves on their beauty in the background. This cartoon at once poked fun at artists, color theorists, and *modistes* alike. And, in another way, it resembled the more childlike tone of a magazine for younger readers, such as *St. Nicholas*. The frontispieces of *Atalanta* displayed this dichotomy as well; almost all of them featured girls or young women, more often than not in Aesthetic or old-fashioned clothing. For example, Georgina Koberwein Terrell’s *Daffodils* (December 1888) depicted a classic Greenaway-type little girl, while F. Somerville

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Morgan’s *Old Songs* (October 1887), the frontispiece of the very first issue of *Atalanta*, showed an older girl in an Aesthetic parlor (Figures 23 and 24). These reproductions served the obvious purpose of illustrating that month’s lead story or poem or providing another full page for an art-article later in the issue, but always with the purpose of reinforcing “proper” aesthetic taste. They also served, however, as subtle, yet insistent reminders about the position in which *Atalanta*’s girl readers found themselves—halfway between childhood and full adulthood, and halfway between the “Greenaway girl” and the “Girton girl.”

Figure 23  Georgina Koberwein Terrell, *Daffodils*, frontispiece for *Atalanta* (December 1888), 128. HathiTrust.
Atalanta may have had a modest circulation compared to a magazine like St. Nicholas, but as with most nineteenth-century periodicals, it is difficult to determine with any certainty the full breadth of its readerships. However, the archive can sometimes reveal particular—and perhaps particularly surprising—readers, including Virginia Woolf and Aubrey Beardsley. Marion Dell claims that Atalanta was one of the magazines the Stephen family subscribed to or were given when Woolf was a child, and through the contributions of family friend Anne Thackeray Ritchie and others, “Atalanta showed Woolf that women could publish their work.”\(^5^2^2\) While

\(^5^2^2\) Marion Dell, *Virginia Woolf’s Influential Forebears: Julia Margaret Cameron, Anny Thackeray Ritchie and Julia Prinsep Stephen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 46-47.\(^5^2^3\) Daugherty, 31.
young Virginia Stephen was only one of many girls whose hands issues of *Atalanta* passed through, Daugherty notes that “It is tempting to surmise that Virginia Stephen read *Atalanta* because the magazine opens a window onto changing attitudes about girls and women in the late nineteenth century, attitudes she would not have learned about in her home education.”

Perhaps this was the case for many of its girl-readers, even those who did not go on to be among the early twentieth-century’s most influential writers.

*Atalanta* aimed to cultivate the next generation of artistic, educated, literary women, but its meticulous design, outstanding illustrations, and vast number of reproductions of fine and decorative art meant it also appealed to contemporary artists. In a letter to fellow artist George Frederick Scotson-Clark in the summer of 1891, Aubrey Beardsley wrote, “I advise you to get *Atalanta* for this month. It contains an article by Miss Zimern [sic] on ‘A Tapestry Gallery in Florence’; full of glorious designs. I enthuse somewhat over the same.” Here, Beardsley praised writer and translator Helen Zimmern’s work in the July 1891 issue of *Atalanta*, which was illustrated by some dozen photographic reproductions of the tapestries discussed in the article. The nonchalance with which Beardsley mentioned the name of the magazine implies that it was familiar to both himself and to Scotson-Clark, even if neither actually subscribed. Certainly, this seeming endorsement by one of the most iconic illustrators of the *fin de siècle*—who would himself in a few short years become the art editor of the infamous *Yellow Book* (1894-1897)—adds weight to *Atalanta’s*

523 Daugherty, 31.
recognized artistic merits and lengthens the shadow of its influence beyond the audience of girls for whom it was intended.

While *St. Nicholas* mostly disseminated versions of Aestheticism that had been judiciously selected and simplified for children’s understanding, *Atalanta* was intent on crafting the next generation of artists and art-lovers, while also establishing itself as a publication of high aesthetic merit to the adult *fin-de-siècle* artistic community. Both magazines, however, provide important insight into the ways in which Aestheticism was being (re)presented to children and young people in the publications designed for them. Often, the references to and discussions of Aestheticism in these venues occurred with greater frequency and with less condemnation than in popular periodicals for adults. Illustrations depicting Aesthetic subjects and elements of Aesthetic design also more readily populated the pages of juvenile magazines, ensuring that the style would become increasingly familiar and desirable to young readers. Girls in particular were appealed to in these discussions of Aesthetic art, taste, and fashion, and pictured in illustrations; this often seemed to occur with the purpose of not only reinforcing the movement’s picturesqueness but also encouraging visual reading. If girl readers could be trained by example to recognize and appreciate the finer elements of current art movements such as Aestheticism in their own day-to-day reading, then they would be able to apply their discernment in their futures and to larger-scale domestic and public spheres—and their lives would be the richer for it.
An October 1888 article in the popular British middle-class magazine *Girl’s Own Paper* titled “The Service of Beauty” imperiously proclaimed, “To avoid the strong-minded type of woman, for whom graces are frivolities, on the one hand, and the over-sentimentalism of those ‘aesthetes’ whose idol is blue china or a daffodil, on the other, is to strike the golden mean of that ideal womanhood which should be the aim of every right-minded girl.” Although somewhat hyperbolic, this anonymous pronouncement encapsulated many of the serious debates that raged in the pages of Victorian periodicals regarding gender, art, aesthetics, education, and taste, and which aesthetic critics attempted to address in their work. As girls had been seen as particularly susceptible to the influence of what they read, concerns about them and about their reading came to a head in the late nineteenth century, when both women and girls were torn between the competing ideals of the “strong-minded” New Woman and the “over-sentimentalism” of aesthetes. These anxieties often manifested themselves in discussions about the development of taste in girls, whose preferences were still assumed to be malleable, as well as women, who were often perceived as needing curatives for their supposed ignorance and poor taste. Consequently, the magazines that made up a large part of the average middle-class woman or girl’s

reading diet were increasingly seen as the best way to reach them. Here too, progressive women writers had the opportunity to push back against assumptions about female readers and instead present alternative approaches to aesthetics, education, and gendered knowledge. In the late 1870s through 1890s, periodicals such as the *Girls Own Paper*, *Woman’s World*, and *Atalanta* in Britain and *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* and *St. Nicholas Magazine* in America encapsulated both anti-aesthetic opinions like the one above, as well as the celebration and emulation of specifically Aesthetic values. Such duality shows the shifting attitudes towards Aestheticism and its role in educating female readers, and puts periodicals squarely at the center of the debate.

The relationship among popular magazine contributors, their treatments of Aestheticism, and the demands of readers was sometimes a vexed one. As this study has shown, not all those who took Aestheticism as their subject openly supported it, and even those whose ideas aligned quite closely with the movement’s tenets were often wary of declaring themselves proponents, because of the ways it had been misrepresented or distorted in popular culture. Nevertheless, the specific values and markers of Aestheticism and its relatively short period of influence make it a fruitful field in which to investigate the effect of an art movement on Victorian print and visual culture, and the ways in which readers absorbed such media. In particular, the increasing numbers of periodicals in the last quarter of the nineteenth century provided more opportunities for women writers and illustrators to be published, and the availability of such texts opened new avenues of female authorship and readership. During this period, women were not only composing a profusion of treatises on taste, guides to decoration, and fiction involving the artistic world, but they were also
contributing art criticism and illustration to magazines in greater numbers than heretofore. These texts were often designed by women specifically for female audiences and were intended both to entertain and to educate. Such monographs and periodical publications did not so much teach a creed of art as model an approach, and thus made the possibility of acquiring “good taste” more feasible to woman and girl readers. In certain circles, being considered “aesthetic” or “artistic,” especially as a woman, became a kind of shorthand for good taste and social cachet, but unlike many other forms of status (particularly in extremely-hierarchical British society), it was not an unattainable one. If nothing else, the sensational coverage of the more high-art and outlandish aspects of Aestheticism succeeded in bringing broader interest in art into the mainstream on both sides of the Atlantic; the resulting middlebrow, feminine-tinged Aestheticism therefore had less to do with privilege and wealth, and more with middle-class female readerships’ interest in and access to art and art-texts. Popular periodicals and mass-market books covering such topics were increasingly in-demand in the last decades of the nineteenth-century, and never before had they been as cheap to produce and to purchase. This made art topics of all kinds—including Aestheticism—more accessible to the average middle-class reader, and to middle-class women and girls in particular.

The aim of this study has largely been to explore these intersections among gender, taste, visual culture, and periodicals. In it, I have worked to restore to history the names of some now lesser-known women authors, artists, and journalists who contributed to Aesthetic discourse alongside those of their better-known contemporaries in order to show how they together constructed popular understandings of transatlantic Aestheticism for new readerships. Consequently, this
study has discussed landmark texts by important critics such as Mary Eliza Haweis, as well as the work of women such as Lucy Crane and Mabel F. Robinson who were often overshadowed by other members of their artistic families. It has examined the contributions of “hack” writers and artists such as Mary Rose Godfrey, Lucy C. Lillie, Charles Ricketts, and Jessie McDermott in popular magazines, and the selection processes of the editors of those magazines, such as Oscar Wilde, Mary Mapes Dodge, and L. T. Meade. By taking this multifaceted approach, I have been able to draw conclusions about the ways in which writers, artists, editors, and publishers of the popular press helped to mold the discriminating taste of their readers, and their taste in regards to Aestheticism in particular.

Recovering Florence I. Duncan: Writer, Art-Educator, Editor, Publisher

In this final chapter, I would like to present a case study that brings all the aforementioned factors together and points to further work to be done in these fields. Florence I. Duncan (1849-1906) was born Florence Donlevy in New York to an English mother and an Irish father. Her father was the inventor-engraver John Intaglio Donlevy, who patented several printing techniques, including a new form of intagliotype, from which he drew his self-assigned middle name; Florence seems to have likewise adopted it as part of her name as an adult.525 Besides her father, Florence’s family circle was steeped in art, art education, and journalism. After the

525 Gwendolyn Dunlevy Kelley, A Genealogical History of the Dunlevy Family (Columbus, OH: The Chaucer Press, 1901), 164-165. Florence Duncan contributed information about her own family to Kelley’s book, and likely also provided the portrait of herself that appears therein with the caption “Mrs. Arthur Grey, nee Florence Intaglia Donlevy” (p. 164-165). However, in other records, she maintains the same spelling for her middle name as her that of her father.
death of her mother when Florence was still a child, her father married Harriet Farley, an author and the former editor of the *Lowell Offering*; this 1840s women’s magazine had famously consisted of writings by “female textile workers from the mills of Lowell, Massachusetts,” and one must wonder if Farley’s career had any impact on her stepdaughters’ future endeavors.\[^{526}\] Florence’s older sister, Alice Heighes Donlevy, was a child art prodigy and “one of nine professional women artists who founded the Ladies’ Art Association of New York” in 1867; she would go on to become an important advocate for women’s and children’s technical training in art, a lifelong passion which the sisters shared.\[^{527}\] Alice wrote and illustrated a book titled *Practical Hints on the Art of Illumination*, published in 1867, and worked as a journalist for various magazines and as the art editor for *Demorest’s Magazine* throughout the late nineteenth century.\[^{528}\]

Meanwhile, Florence married Thomas Wellington Duncan in 1868, who was then working as a book agent and printer in New York.\[^{529}\] The couple had three daughters in the next few years and eventually moved to Ontario, Canada, where


\[^{527}\] *American Women: Fifteen Hundred Biographies with Over 1,400 Portraits, Volume 1*, eds. Frances E. Willard and Mary Livermore (New York: Mast, Crowell & Kirkpatrick, 1897), 250-252.

\[^{528}\] Ibid., 252.


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Thomas was from. During this time, Florence also began writing under the name Florence I. Duncan, working as a newspaper correspondent in Ottawa as well as publishing book-length works with J. B. Lippincott & Co.. The first was Wax Flowers: A Course of Lessons in Modelling Wax Flowers (1877), which was “Designed especially for Beginners” and had won the “First Prize Provincial Exhibition, Ottawa, 1875”; it was followed by the society novel My Intimate Friend, published by Lippincott in 1878. In April 1879, a text by Duncan titled Ever so Humble; or, Home and its Decoration was advertised in Demorest’s Monthly Magazine as “a very interesting and practical work […] for wives and daughters ‘who strive to make ends meet.’ There is no touch of affectation or dilettantism in it. The art is real, whether ‘high’ or merely ‘decorative,’ and there is no groaning because a piano cannot be shaped like an amphora.” This text, seemingly a guide to décor for the lower and middle classes, shows Duncan’s commitment to providing clear instruction to actual people on “real” art that they could employ in their everyday lives.

By 1880, Duncan was living in Philadelphia, either separated from her husband or widowed. It was there that perhaps her greatest endeavor began: the publishing firm of Duncan & Hall. From its inception to its operation to its end, the histories of Duncan & Hall and its co-founders are murky. It can be stated with some certainty that it was founded in 1880 in Philadelphia by Duncan and Mary R. Heygate-Hall, but, as


John Tebbel notes, “no record has been found of how long the house lasted, but apparently it did not survive the century.” Likewise, only small snippets of information can be gathered about Duncan and Hall themselves during this time, and even these are sparsely sprinkled throughout periodicals, monographs, and archival records. The “Business Notes” column of Publishers’ Weekly for 11 December 1880 ran the following announcement that provided some of this vital information:

Duncan & Hall is the firm name of a new publishing house in Philadelphia, composed of Florence I. Duncan and Mary R. Heygate Hall. Mrs. Duncan is well-known in the East as a writer, and Miss Hall has been for a number of years identified with the book trade of Philadelphia. The specialty of the new firm will be art-educational works, and their office has been fitted up in accordance with the line to be followed, numerous works of art embellishing the walls, and the whole air of the place being artistic. They start out with a pleasant series, the Monogram, which they propose to make a decided success.

This announcement emphasized not only the knowledge of both women in regards to publishing and the book trade, but also identified them as specifically committed to the production of “art-educational works,” and to feminine artistic culture in general. In topic, the books that Duncan and Hall would go on to publish certainly reinforce the artistic bent of their offices. And the first of these—noted as “No. 1 of THE MONOGRAM SERIES” in another Publisher’s Weekly issue—was Duncan’s own

aesthetic satire, *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners: Being Ye Faithful Drama of Ye Artists’ Vendetta* (1881).\(^{535}\)

### A Loving Satire of Aestheticism

*Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* seems to have been Duncan’s as well as Duncan & Hall’s most popular book; *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* asserted that “five editions in the short time it has been before the public, is proof sufficient that this little drama has proved a hit.”\(^{536}\) It was originally attributed only to “F. I. D.” in the monogram on the title page, but its authorship was quickly found out by readers and reviewers, in part because of the dedication to Lord Dufferin, a friend of the Duncans’ in Ottawa. An early review in the Philadelphia newspaper the *North American* generally represents most of the other initial reactions to *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners*:

> This is the pregnant title of an odd little bit of literary work in the shape of a play which is a graceful, witty, and interesting satire on the decorative art rage, which seems to have languished a little of late. The monogram on the title page betrays the authorship as due to Mrs. Florence I. Duncan, a well-known writer who has produced more than one work of the kind. There is a great deal of fun and humor in the little comedietta, which, though above the place of the dramatic stage, ought to furnish a great deal of amusement if performed by amateurs to an audience capable of appreciating the hits of the piece. It is an admirable

\(^{535}\) “Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners,” *Publisher’s Weekly* 19.472 (29 January 1881): 133. In some reviews, *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* is also called “Ye Barn Beautiful” or “Ye Artists’ Vendetta,” which are the title of the second act and the subtitle, respectively, but it is also possible it may have been published in different editions with different titles.

\(^{536}\) “Our Book Table,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* 103.615 (September 1881): 284.
piece of typography and does credit to the printer as well as the publishers.537

The reviewer’s reference here to Duncan having “produced more than one work of the kind” reinforces her history of covering artistic topics, and likely refers to Wax Flowers, Ever so Humble, and other shorter periodical texts such as those she contributed to Demorest’s Monthly Magazine in the late 1870s. The rest of the review went on to note the timeliness of the satire, and suggests that it did indeed have its finger firmly on the pulse of Aestheticism in America. The title was ostensibly taken from an image caption in Clarence Cook’s famous book, The House Beautiful (1878), which grew out of a series of essays titled “Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks” that he had published in Scribner’s Monthly Magazine in 1875-1876 (Figure 25).538

Catherine Hoover Voorsanger remarks that “Cook’s book “was extremely popular in America, second only to Charles Eastlake’s 1868 Hints on Household Taste” and “subsequent printings of The House Beautiful appeared in 1879, 1881, and 1895.”539

Duncan’s play therefore, at least in part, poked fun at this contemporary authority, making “now and then a happy turn or hit, borrowed and parodied from the lofty ‘C. C.’,” as one review put it.540


As far as I can tell, the phrase the “last sweet thing” was not Cook’s own, but was used to indicate the finishing flourish, in this case, of a room

539 Ibid., 413.

Yet, for all its teasing, *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* may be just as much a loving tribute to the realm of Aestheticism, which Duncan seems to have known quite well. Each name and conversation in the play is packed with artistic references and in-jokes—ideal, as the *North American* notes, for an “audience capable of appreciating the hits of the piece.” Duncan’s heroes, a struggling painter by the name of Raphael Gamboge, and his equally struggling sculptor friend, Il Bacio Moddle, are very clearly meant to be characters in the vein of George du Maurier’s aesthetes and those of *Patience* and the *Colonel*: the painter’s name combines a reference to the painter
Raphael (and the Pre-Raphaelites) with the name of a particular deep yellow pigment (perhaps of the “greenery-yallery” type), while the sculptor’s first name invokes artworks such as Francesco Hayez’s celebrated 1859 painting, *Il Bacio*, and combines it with a last name that puns on both his profession as a modeler of clay and du Maurier’s famous *Punch* character, Maudle, who was based on Oscar Wilde and first appeared earlier in 1880. Other ridiculous character names such as those of the art critic Barouche Brown and his daughters Alfresco Dado, Maud Cashmere Bouquet, and Consuela Renaissance reinforce further this link to the *Punch* aesthetes and *Patience*. Not only does Duncan thereby show her knowledge of Aestheticism’s characteristics and principles, but she also proves herself to be fully aware of the farcical transatlantic interpretations of the movement.

The play’s plot revolves around the plight of Gamboge and Moddle, their struggles to have their art properly appreciated and to earn a living, and their feud with the art critic Brown, who writes unflattering and ignorant reviews of their work for a fictional paper called the *Fog Whistle*, which may or may not be a play on J. M. Whistler and his work. In the first act, Gamboge is plagued not only by Brown’s criticisms, but also by a series of irritating visitors invading his studio, all while he is simply trying to figure out a way to afford dinner; he is eventually able to do so not by selling his art but by agreeing to paint a local oyster-seller’s sign. The second act takes place in Brown’s’ home, which is an old barn that he and his artistic daughters have remodeled in true Cookian style into “Ye Barn Beautiful.”

Despite their vendetta against Brown, Gamboge and Moddle are impressed by the beauty and goodness of

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his elder daughters, Alfresco and Maud, and resolve to “cure” them of their Aesthetic fervor. What follows is a scheme involving Gamboge disguising himself as the great collector Dr. Bric-a-brac and Moddle as an authority on old china, Mr. Kaolin. In these guises, the artists trick the Browns into receiving them—and their fake curios—into their home, then enact their plan to “trump-up a charge against Brown for receiving stolen goods, and two mock policemen shall arrest the whole family.” At the last minute, Gamboge and Moddle reappear as themselves and step in to “save” the Browns from their impending arrest and incarceration, thereby also being able to continue their burgeoning relationships with the two Brown daughters. The third act finds the two couples worrying about how they can afford to marry without money, eventually aided by the girls’ sensible younger sister Consuela and their uncle, Mr. Bobbin, who actually saves the day by employing Gamboge and Moddle as designers of advertisements for his soap business.

While the artists, the critic Brown, and his rather naïve aesthetic daughters are the primary “types” being explored and lampooned in the play, the more minor characters embody numerous relations to art and variations of Aestheticism. In the first act, Gamboge suffers “in succession the calls of alleged connoisseurs, actual know-nothings, and more curiosity seekers—all ready with impertinent suggestions and gratuitous advice,” but of these, there are several female figures who are particularly interesting.542 Along with characters like the stereotypical, picturesquely swooning Aesthetic Maiden and the fashionable Young Bride, there is also a Woman Reporter and a (female) Child. The Young Bride complains, “Mr. Gamboge—I don’t

see anything I like here. Can’t you tell me where I can get a really good painting about ten by fifteen inches, to fit a space on my wall?,” while the Child declares that “the face of the girl in the hammock needs a little cadmium yellow, and I don’t think the drapery of her polonaise is true to nature” and when rebuked by Gamboge, she huffs, “I am in pursuit of Art culture. I read the criticisms and I came to see if you were a true artist or a servile imitator—Were you a true artist you would encourage me in my thirst for Art.”

Meanwhile, the Woman Reporter murmurs, “I’ll stay till these people go, because I want you to give me some items for my Art article,” and the Aesthetic Maiden sweetly asks “won’t you tell me some pretty little anecdote about the Old Masters, if you are not too busy now, I want to put it in my diary.”

Each of these characters demands something different of the artist’s craft and knowledge, and a different approach to valuing and evaluating art, whether it is focusing excessively on the commercial or poetic aspects, or directly critiquing his technique. Yet, the very inclusion of this many different “artistic” female characters in Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners shows a greater range of women’s participation in conversations around Aestheticism than most other texts of the time. Duncan certainly does skewer most of these characters, but does not present all of them as hopelessly silly or misguided either—only perhaps as less knowledgeable or temperate in their approaches to art than they should be.

In light of Duncan’s own background, the conversation the Woman Reporter has with Gamboge seems particularly self-referential (and self-deprecatory). After all

Duncan, Ye Last Sweet Thing, 14-15.

Ibid., 14.
his other guests have left, the Reporter tells him how she came to art-writing in what may be an approximation of many such writers’ paths, including Duncan’s own:

Before I jumped into this thing of writing on Art, I tried everything—wax flowers, whole art in one lesson, patent process; then I beaded parasols and did spatter-work and decalcomanie for a notion house; then I canvassed Picturesque America and Duplex Elliptic corsets […] I met a young fellow, foreman in [the] printing office of the Fog Whistle, and says he to me, he says—why don’t you write on Art, that’s the latest dodge? O land, I says, I can’t tell a chromeo from an Old Master. Yes, he says. Go to a second-hand shop and get a lot of old art catalogues by Ruskin and those fellows and read em up; so it reads well, that’s all the papers care. And so I did, and [...] I move now in tip-top society, and here I am.545

Like the Child, the Woman Reporter has educated herself in matters of art by seeking out criticism, “old art catalogues,” and artists themselves. Such knowledgeable amateurs represented many participants in the mainstream versions of Aestheticism, particularly in America, and while Duncan pokes fun at the opportunism displayed by such people as the Woman Reporter, she is more obviously disdainful towards critics like Brown, who made his “profession of making fools of others as he has been doing with his paper on art (Poor Art!),” as well as other less-than-knowledgable writers and consumers.546 It seems possible her opinion on the matter is encapsulated in Gamboge’s tirade near the end of the play:

To come down to the stern facts, what with the twaddle in the newspapers and the twaddle out of the newspapers, an American artist can’t sell a picture unless he goes to Europe to do it, for rich people who are weak enough to be led by everything they see in print, had rather refuse to buy what their own innate good taste would lead them

545 Duncan, Ye Last Sweet Thing, 18.

546 Duncan, Ye Last Sweet Thing, 49.
to purchase, than not put child-like faith in flimsy newspaper articles on Art, and so the ‘tolerably well to do’ people buy chromos, and the artists starve.\textsuperscript{547}

This passage points to some of the same issues that Haweis and other critics had identified: that to be truly “artistic,” consumers needed to defer to their own educated taste rather than try to follow the arbitrary trends and uneducated opinions of others, and they must support native art in order to have a truly robust culture. Duncan’s play did show ambivalence toward the high-minded ideals and fanciful notions of the most extreme aesthetes, but it also inherently celebrated art and its proper appreciation. At the same time, \textit{Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners} acknowledged that in the current age, few could make their livings by art alone—after all, Duncan’s heroes were two artists, whose work might be considered aesthetic, but who eventually ended up striking a compromise between art and commerce, perhaps like Duncan & Hall itself.

In a review in the magazine \textit{Builder and Woodworker}, the author wrote somewhat circuitously about what quality of “art” the \textit{Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners} possessed:

This is a work of art. No, no; not exactly that. It is a work written on art—no, not that either. It is a burlesque on art. Well, no, it is not quite that. In fact, we give up; we don’t know what it is. If you read it you may laugh, but the laugh will be a hollow mockery. […] It is astonishing how art is advancing in this country. We were not aware of the rapid strides it was making until we read this book. This is a great country. We are a great people; and ‘Ye Barn Beautiful’ is a great book.\textsuperscript{548}

\textsuperscript{547} Duncan, \textit{Ye Last Sweet Thing}, 54.

\textsuperscript{548} “New Publications,” \textit{Builder and Woodworker} 17.162 (March 1881): 58.
While the tone of this review sounds more sarcastic than not, it also emphasizes the purposeful suffusion of art that is integral to the message and medium of Duncan’s text. *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* was not illustrated, but Duncan & Hall’s “artistic” bent clearly carried over into the production of the book’s several editions, and the binding, design, and printing quality were often remarked on in contemporaneous reviews in North America and in Britain. In a tongue-in-cheek, yet still positive review of the first edition in the Toronto-based magazine *Grip* (a kind of Canadian version of *Punch*), the author rhapsodized, “The binding of our copy is a Reverie in Brown, and the typography is at once Supreme and Utter. We will endeavor to live up to it.”549 Such language invoked well-known keywords of Aestheticism and how it was commonly mocked in the popular press, yet the review also seemed genuinely to valorize these decorative features. Other magazines followed suit as subsequent editions were released: in August 1881, the American magazine *Puck* noted that “Another edition has been issued, printed on softly-tinted paper, and with the old familiar brown paper covers. A previous edition was richly bound in cloth,” while a September 1881 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* said that for the fifth edition, “The Publishers pride themselves on the typography and color of this edition, which they allege ‘presents a grateful surface to the eye’.”550 By early 1882, the London *Athenaeum* agreed that the latter “ought to be a literary curiosity well worth keeping, because it is nicely printed on dark turquoise paper, and it is a spirited but exaggerated satire on several aesthetical and educational crazes of this day.”551 So,  

549 “Literature and Art,” 2.


even as *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* may rightly be said to parody the “crazes of this day,” it is also a kind of love-letter to the Aesthetic movement and an embodiment of its typographic and design principles.

While *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* seems to have been fairly widely-read and reviewed, the rest of the *Monogram* series remains tantalizingly elusive. *Publisher’s Weekly* ran advertisements for Duncan & Hall throughout 1881, but in the 1 January 1881 issue, it also identified several other texts in the series: a text called *Mrs. Polyglot’s “At Home”* was noted as being “nearly ready,” and another by Florence’s sister, Alice Donlevy, titled *Take Care! Because* – was puffed as “An attractive and unique little volume of rules for the care of Art-Objects” then “In Press.”552 While Duncan & Hall’s books appeared to have been published in small batches, *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners* is the only text they printed in any great quantity; the other two mentioned above are the only other Duncan & Hall books that I have even been able to identify by title; however I have not been able to track down either in a library catalogue, so it is unclear if they were ever actually printed, or at least in any significant number. Even so, the plan for these books was still clearly in line with the firm’s theme of “art educational books”—mixed with a healthy dose of humor and common sense.

**Spreading the Aesthetic Gospel through the Periodical Press**

Besides their book publications, Duncan & Hall’s other achievement was in the realm of magazines; from ca. 1880-1884, they published a society magazine called

Quiz: A Weekly Journal for the Family.\textsuperscript{553} Like the publisher’s books, issues of Quiz are hard to track down, with the second volume (1 April 1881-29 March 1882) seeming to be the most readily available in library collections. Quiz is described in Geo. P. Rowell and Co.’s American Newspaper Directory for 1882 as “semi-monthly; sixteen pages; size of page 9x13; subscription $1.25; established 1880; Duncan & Hall, publishers; Mary R. Heygate-Hall, manager.”\textsuperscript{554} Duncan acted as editor for the magazine’s run, and wrote quite a bit of its content, including articles, poems, a serialized novel titled Sir Lancelot, and (presumably) the editorial for each issue.\textsuperscript{555} Grip once again praised her work: “Florence I. Duncan is making a brilliant success of Quiz, the Philadelphia society paper. The journal is now published weekly and is one of the best and most interesting of our exchanges.”\textsuperscript{556} In line with Duncan & Hall’s mission to publish art texts, the magazine not only included the gossip that led each issue, but also prose, verse, and correspondence that commented on contemporary art and art culture.

\textsuperscript{553} In some issues, the magazine’s masthead reads Quiz: A Fortnightly Society Journal of Literature, Fashion, and Art, and in some others, Quiz: A Weekly Journal of Society, Literature, and Art. It is unclear what prompted these changes or discrepancies (besides the change from bi-weekly to weekly), but the magazine arguably covered all of the aforementioned topics fairly consistently.


\textsuperscript{555} For some portion of the magazine’s run until mid-1881, John B. Lane co-edited with Duncan, but it is not always noted which issues he was actually involved with.

\textsuperscript{556} “We and our neighbors,” Grip 19.11 (29 July 1882): 2.
Naturally, then, discussion of Aestheticism and aesthetic themes and people occurred quite frequently throughout the magazine’s issues and in Duncan’s own contributions. Besides updates about aesthetic touchstones such as George du Maurier, Oscar Wilde, and *Patience*, *Quiz* also provided reviews of books germane to the topic, including Josephine Pollard’s *Decorative Sisters*, and advertised related wares, such as art stationary. One of *Quiz*’s recurring features was the “London Letter” of the correspondent “V. B.,” who reported on up-to-the-moment events in London society, such as seeing an early performance of *Patience* or attending a fancy-dress ball and admiring the “aesthetic costumes” of some of the ladies there. Notably, there was extensive coverage of Wilde in the 1881-1882 issues, including numerous bon-mots and personal tit-bits in the “Quizzings” and “Blushes” columns that one can imagine him dispensing to the papers himself before and upon his arrival in the United States; a three-page, less-than-complimentary review (15 September 1881) of his 1881 volume *Poems*; an article on “The Great Topic of Knee Breeches” (29 March 1882), a style which some American young men had taken up in imitation of Wilde; and “A Chat with Oscar Wilde” (25 January 1882) in which Duncan herself met with the by-then infamous aesthete during his first lecture circuit sojourn in Philadelphia. In this interview, she declared herself quite delighted by him in person, and defended him against his detractors in the press: “To be sure, what Mr. Wilde says on the lecture platform is familiar to those of us who have read the elders of his school, but that the majority of journalists are not familiar with the Ruskin-Morris-Rossetti thought, is proved by their crass ignorance in their criticisms of Mr. Wilde.”

She went on to

praise his “Ruskin-like descriptive power; he more than describes—he shows.”

Elaborating on her conversation with Wilde in a column titled “Some More” in the following issue, Duncan credited him as not the first to discuss these ideas, but “simply the popularizer of beauty.” She asserted that “If Mr. Wilde only sets a few of the people thinking, will he not have done something?”

Arguably, Duncan herself was also engaged in this work of setting people thinking in her previous writing on art, as well as in the writing she did for Quiz. A series of articles titled “Household Hints” appeared in the magazine starting in late 1881; some were written by I. E. Walraven, but the others by “Intaglio” may be tentatively attributed to Duncan. Each installment of this series addressed a different aspect of the home, but with a distinctly practical rather than a high-art approach. Duncan also wrote an article series called “Educational – Books of Reference,” in which she reviewed and recommended a variety of monographs, articles, and handbooks that covered art topics from engraving to pottery to house decoration. In the 8 March 1882 installment, Duncan talked more broadly about the influence of the most prominent teachers on art. She picked up an earlier discussion on Charles Eastlake, and specifically addressed why Hints on Household Taste had not done

558 [Duncan], “A Chat,” 4.


560 Ibid., 4.
“such good service” in America as in England, identifying one major factor as American women.\footnote{Florence I. Duncan, “Books of Reference – Educational,” \textit{Quiz} 2.35 (8 March 1882): 8. The title of this column is flipped in this issue alone, but is listed as usual “Educational – Books of Reference” in the issue’s table of contents.}

The reason American women who are in search of a guide in taste are disappointed in Eastlake as a reformer, is this:— Although we speak the same language, read the same books, and unfortunately, are influences by some of the same prejudices,—our sun is brighter, our skies clearer, our foliage is more brilliant, our intercourse with different nationalities more varied than in England; our women dress with better taste than English women; as a nation we are more accessible to ideas than the British, partly because we are composite people, and therefore, predisposed to more than one set of ideas; therefore, Eastlake does not apply with sufficient force in American families to warrant ‘Eastlake’ becoming a household word.\footnote{Ibid., 8-9.}

Duncan asserts that British reformers and theorists like Eastlake did not resonate as strongly as they could with American audiences because of inherent differences in national character and perspective. Rather, she seems to advocate for American art experts to teach Americans, particularly women.

Duncan also takes a dig at Clarence Cook, who arguably would have been Eastlake’s most famous American counterpart.

Let the author of ‘The House Beautiful’ keep to his profession of amusing men, and make no further attempt to teach the women of this country, until he can not only furnish reliable information, but be himself more thoroughly aware of what has been done by women, and what has been done by artists, in this country. There is no floating faith ready for the writer on art and taste applied to a house beautiful, who dares sneer at Science, and who knows no rules.\footnote{Ibid., 9.}
In the case of Cook, Duncan accused him of not being rigorous enough in his approach, and, of implicitly addressing his teaching too much towards men. Even then, his teaching was too much in the vein of “amusing” his audience rather than actually giving them “reliable information.” Instead of relying on “household words” like Eastlake and Cook, Duncan seemed to advocate instead that women eager for art education listen to knowledgeable female teachers. She even dispensed some of her own instruction in the column, which was aimed specifically at students and women.

So much that is said about the ‘naturalistic’ treatment, ‘pre-Raphaelitism,’ ‘true to nature,’ bewilders the beginner, puzzles the student, and prevents the house-wife from completing any work of real Art-industrial value. Use your personal taste as a guide in determining, where to begin. […] If you wish to have your observation of Nature guided by having your attention drawn to particular features, read Ruskin. […] Beauty alone is the aim of High Art; but in Decorative Art, utility precedes beauty, and science must be studied; arranged knowledge must be possessed by the decorative artist. Any book which sneers at science is not worth buying as authority or reference for a woman.\textsuperscript{564}

Her advice sounds a good deal like the assertions made by Haweis in \textit{The Art of Beauty}, but it also invoked the idea of the “golden mean” between beauty and utility, and between individual taste and the “arranged knowledge” of a science. She also acknowledged the limitations in terms of time and access to resources that her (female) readers might have, and so gives them quite direct guidelines to follow in order to get the most out of a cursory study.

In a later installment of “Educational – Books of Reference,” Duncan further addressed issues of access to the recommended texts and proposed the establishment

\textsuperscript{564} Ibid., 9.
of cooperative Book Clubs as a possible solution: “As the question of expense presents itself very quickly as an obstacle to buying all the books recommended as useful or necessary, and as small cities and villages are not apt to have ‘Pugin’ or ‘Owen Jones’ in the town library, Book Clubs might be formed with the special function of buying works on Art, Industry, Decoration, and Manufacturers.”\textsuperscript{565} In addition to suggesting strategies for obtaining the types of books she had already recommended earlier in the article series, Duncan particularly urged such Book Clubs to induce “young ladies to join by having the German and French Fashion journals at once,” and to “Bring in boys of sixteen by having the English \textit{Punch}, the German \textit{Fliegende Blatter}, and the French \textit{Charivari}.”\textsuperscript{566} Duncan was somewhat critical of the made-to-order quality of some American jokes and caricatures, and so instead endorsed their British and Continental European counterparts. Ultimately, her point was not merely that art education ought to be a public service, but that well-illustrated magazines were a gateway to getting younger readers interested in and better attuned to good design. Though \textit{Quiz} was an American magazine, it was clear she envisioned it as one such magazine that would aid in educating girls and women and developing their tastes.

Duncan’s work in Philadelphia tapered off sometime in the mid 1880s, likely coinciding with her second marriage to Arthur Grey in 1884. Her second husband was “a penniless British aristocrat estranged from his family,” with whom she moved to


\textsuperscript{566} Ibid., 9.
England in 1885 and there had two boys.\textsuperscript{567} However, the marriage does not seem to have lasted much beyond the birth of the youngest in 1887.\textsuperscript{568} Duncan thereafter continued to write, at this point mostly for British and American papers as a means of sustaining herself and her children. It is likely she published under several pseudonyms, including the initials “F. I. D.” she had used to attribute *Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners*, as well as various versions of her maiden and married names, including F. Donlevy, Mrs. Arthur Grey, and Florence Grey.\textsuperscript{569} In Gwendolyyn Dunlevy Kelley’s *A Genealogical History of the Dunlevy Family* (1901), Duncan’s activities in the 1870s-1890s are described:

\begin{quote}
Since 1873 Mrs. (Arthur) Grey, born Donlevy, has written professionally, almost uninterruptedly, fiction and essay, and since 1882 on Belles Lettres and Technical Education; generally under a pseudonym. She took the first prize for modeling at the Dominion Exposition at Ottawa and is active or honorary member of nine associations devoted to educational work in Europe and the United States.\textsuperscript{570}
\end{quote}

As Duncan herself contributed to the content of Kelley’s book, it is likely this description was written by her, and it reveals a bit about how she was framing herself and her work at the turn of the century. By the early 1890s, it seems she was living in

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\textsuperscript{568} Kelley, 165; Florence I. Duncan Papers.
\textsuperscript{569} Not all pieces signed by these names can be definitely attributed to the author known as Florence I. Duncan, but most of those I found do match up with her apparent interests and locations at the given time.
\textsuperscript{570} Kelley, 165.
\end{flushright}
Paris, and it was announced she would edit “a woman’s paper to be called The Light of Paris […] established in the gay French capital.”\textsuperscript{571} As an American expatriate, she proposed “to give the people, and especially Americans, a more correct idea of Parisian life and thought than can be obtained from what is generally published on the subject.”\textsuperscript{572} Again, it is unclear whether this magazine ever came to fruition, or whether it is merely exceedingly hard to track down.

During the late 1870s through 1890s, Duncan was contributing articles on arts and culture to a number of lesser-known or short-lived British and American magazines including \textit{Demorest’s Monthly Magazine}, the \textit{National View}, \textit{Dorcas: A Magazine of Woman’s Handiwork}, \textit{St. Stephen’s Review}, the \textit{Home-Maker}, and \textit{Woman’s Cycle}. In the early 1890s, Duncan (now Grey) also contributed to at least one French magazine, \textit{L’Amaranthe}, described in W. T. Stead’s \textit{Index to the Periodical Literature of the World} for 1891 as a “high-class literary magazine for girls,” which contained “articles on subjects connected with literature, art, and music; poems, stories, etc.; but it has for its mission the spread of the French language by the institution of education by correspondence and by means of prize competitions in France and abroad.”\textsuperscript{573} These competitions were open to “all girls between the ages of 14 and 22,” and along with the other contents of the magazine, were explicitly

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\textsuperscript{572} Ibid., 346.  
\end{flushleft}
modeled on similar periodicals in England, perhaps including *Atalanta*. By 1892, according to Stead’s *Index for Periodical Literature* for that year, *L’Amaranthe* had also “become the organ of the Ladies’ Art Association.” Whether or not this applied to the original New York chapter or to a French offshoot is unclear, but an article titled “The National Ladies’ Art Association at New York” attributed to Florence Grey did appear in the May 1893 issue of *L’Amaranthe*. Duncan (listed as Mrs. Arthur Grey in the administrative roll of the organization) was in fact the foreign correspondent for the Art Association at the time, which had been organized—in part by Duncan’s sister, Alice Heighes Donlevy—in 1867 “to promote the interests of women artists, especially teachers, by raising the standard of art education, by securing such women employment at home, and by endeavoring to secure free classes for all talented boys and girls.” Duncan’s involvement in this and various other art associations confirm her continued interest in art by and for women, and her contributions to women’s, girls’, and family magazines indicate that she was still as invested as ever in educating female audiences. Not only that, but her reach was transcontinental, as she brought the Art Association founded by her sister in her hometown to her new home in Europe, and likewise traveled back to the United States several times in her later years to share European perspectives with her American peers.

574 Ibid., 59.


Recovery and Reevaluation

_Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners_ is included in the online catalog The Dobkin Family Collection of Feminism, which is “A research collection documenting the struggles and achievements of women, primarily American and British, throughout history, with an emphasis on original 19th- and 20th-century material […] offering works by well-known women with compelling contextualization, and rescuing the unknown from anonymity.”578 In the brief description that accompanies the listing for Duncan’s book, the unidentified writer speculates that “The author’s choice of anonymity and her obscure background are practically begging for exposure by a student of 19th-century American women’s literature, who can perhaps unearth more clues to this drama within a drama.”579 Indeed, such a story could very easily be relegated to the “ash heap of history,” and in many ways, it has been. The name of the Florence I. Duncan is practically forgotten now; yet she was clearly well-known at the time and set out to accomplish something extraordinary with her work. I myself would probably never discovered her, had I not stumbled on one of the digitized versions of _Ye Last Sweet Thing in Corners_ and noticed that the publisher shared the name of the author, and I would not have been able to find out all that I have about her without the assistance of digital archives. Duncan represents a truly transatlantic _fin de siècle_ woman writer, residing and writing, as she did in, America, Canada, England, and France over the course of her thirty-year career. In this, she also embodies the type of


figure that spurs an important ongoing mission of nineteenth-century American and Victorian studies: the recovery of minority writers, including women, who shaped the ways in which nineteenth-century readers saw and understood their cultural landscape.

This study has aimed to make inroads into the vast territory of periodicals that middle-class women and girls might have contributed to and read, and to pinpoint how these periodicals catered to these readers’ significant interest in art and aesthetics in the 1870s-1890s. In the process of recovering and reevaluating lesser-known late-Victorian women writers—and their editors and illustrators—who participated in the propagation of Aestheticism, we may begin to more firmly locate their work within the larger cultural conversations that were taking place in the space of middlebrow magazines. As some of the most popular sources of information and entertainment for female audiences, the importance of such periodicals in shaping and being shaped by the interests of their readers should not be underestimated. To take seriously the contributions of writers and artists who were widely-read and published in their day, is also to acknowledge the scope of media that Victorian readers encountered, rather than the limited “canon” and the artificial national boundaries that are too often maintained in some contemporary scholarship. Famous figures of the fin de siècle such as Oscar Wilde, George du Maurier, and William Morris have rightly been credited for many of the ways in which Aestheticism, and art and design in general, were treated in the popular press—and they have benefitted from extensive examination in existing research. However, not only by revisiting some of these figures’ lesser-known works, but also by putting them in context with the women they worked with and were published alongside in middle-class magazines, may we begin to highlight the complexity of these intertextual, transatlantic collaborations and relationships. By
recognizing these women’s achievements, we may also begin to cede back some of their previously unrecognized authority, which often undergirded or inspired the work of their more notable (male) peers, as much, if not more so, than the reverse. In tracing artistic and aesthetic topics throughout periodical texts, we may observe which facets of Aestheticism were considered avant-garde or acceptable at any given time, and which served as the inspiration for so many periodical contributions by and for women that have until now remained largely overlooked.

Coverage of art movements including Aestheticism naturally found space in late-nineteenth century magazines, especially with the expanding number and variety of audiences eager to consume media about this topic. Publications that featured articles, literature, and images exemplifying Aestheticism and its approaches did more than simply reproduce a trend, however; these magazines—sometimes explicitly—exerted an influence not just on what their audiences read, but how. In the case of upwardly-mobile middle-class women and girl readers, popular magazines provided opportunities to cultivate the cultural capital associated with art knowledge and taste. Many illustrated periodicals modeled the kind of deeper reading that Aestheticism espoused, and which Aesthetic images often required. In particular, those publications intended for women and girl readers with artistic leanings went out of their way to teach the language and visual codes of Aestheticism as well as the skill of visual literacy more broadly, often drawing on genres that women readers would have already been familiar with, such as manuals of taste. What resulted was a greater transatlantic cultural acceptance of Aestheticism due in large part to its “domestication” in the hands of women writers, artists, and readers. Their engagement with the movement did not just make Aestheticism more familiar, but more
ubiquitous. Magazines not only offered multiple new iterations and interpretations of
taste and aesthetics, but also highlighted the feminization of Aestheticism as a key
factory in its popularization.
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Appendix

PERMISSIONS